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COMMENTARY

Not all work is paid work, and perhaps eventually none of it will be

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Mumby (2019) uses the word "work" 113 times without providing an explicit definition of that word, but seems to be referring to activity for which the toiling individual is remunerated by some other party—their employer, or the entity initiating their gig contract, or their Uber fare, or the like.[1] The (implicit) choice of this definition is not inevitable; indeed, the 2015 UN Human Development Report "takes a broad view of work, going beyond jobs and taking into account such activities as unpaid care work, voluntary work and creative work" (UNDP, 2015, p. iii) and goes on to report that, by this definition, 41% of work completed worldwide is not for pay.

If one adopts this broader UNDP viewpoint and considers Mumby's (2019) arguments, one quickly sees that the logic presented and paraphrased in that work is not as widely applicable as the author may have indicated—it is unreasonable to think that church or soup-kitchen volunteers and those caring for the elderly or young "are encouraged to view themselves as engaged in a permanent process of enterprise as the means to increasing the value of their human capital" (Mumby, 2019 p. 437), as is evidently the case under Foucault's perspective of governmentality. It is relatedly unreasonable to think that we, when engaged in these volunteer and caregiving pursuits, have in our minds that "we each possess a set of skills, knowledge, and abilities that we are responsible for maintaining and improving so that we accumulate more capital (and hence accrue more market value)" (Mumby, 2019, p. 436), as a neoliberal view would have it. In short, regardless of how valid these claims are as they pertain to the modern neoliberal work-for-pay context, they cannot be said to be valid for those engaged in unpaid work—more than 2 billion people today (UNDP, 2015).

The concerns that Mumby (2019) raises are still, by that same logic, aimed at some 3 billion members of the global workforce who *do* toil under the dubious auspices of a for-pay arrangement. But just as Mumby (2019) points out that work has not always been a universal for our ancestors, perhaps it is on its way out for our descendants as well. Many paths of varying desirability—from the proliferation of automation to the development of strong AI to global economic collapse to political upheaval—could lead us to outcomes that fall anywhere between war and chaos to an idyllic post-scarcity world (or, as some would have it, worlds).

Collectively or individually, forces that are already in play may have game-changing impacts on the human experience. That these are difficult (or perhaps foolish) to specifically model moving forward does not mean that it is impossible (or necessarily foolish) to plan for various eventualities. Automation of jobs by even weak AI is already underway; if taken to its logical conclusion, the need or even value of humans in the workplace may disappear. Humanity's role in a post-strong-AI world may mirror the role of a dog in a pre-strong-AI world. A popular

[1]This is complicated by a brief reference to "slaves, serfs, cloistered monks, [and] prisoners" (p. 429), but I think that the author would agree with my assessment.

demand for universal basic income (or its variants) may shift the global economic focus from profit generation to funding the support of the global citizenry, with the associated need to manufacture and grow goods without the willing involvement of humans (and so we loop back to the automation pathway).

What all of these have in common is that they will have no place for organized for-pay work, regardless of whether the collars are white, blue, pink, or absent entirely. If and when this transpires, then many of the concerns that Mumby (2019) raises will be obviated—employers' accessing labor, grudgingly, by "going through the person and body of the worker" (p. 433), laborers "exploiting capital's dependency on wage labor as the primary source of surplus value" (p. 433), workers needing to "switch off their brains to get through the monotony of the work day" (p. 433), the ills associated with emotional labor and with the heightened demands associated with strong organizational culture for overwork, and on and on.

This, again, is not to say that these concerns are not presently warranted for the majority of all working people today. With a nod to the fact that those billions of people who engage in unpaid work may face a different and less researched/discussed set of challenges, my point here is that there may come a time—whether we have prepared for it or not—at which the concerns that Mumby (2019) raises simply cease to pertain. With the end (or diminishment) of paid employment may come a problematic cessation of the benefits of paid work—from those associated with personal identity and a sense of belonging, as mentioned by Mumby (2019), to those associated with the fulfillment of a need for a sense of competence (Deci & Ryan, 1985) or of meaningfulness (Hackman & Oldham, 1975) and so on. Simply put, if we lose paid employment, we lose both its drawbacks and its advantages. Will opportunities for—and motivation to engage in—unpaid work be able to pick up the slack? Are humans, on average, prepared for a life of leisure, or at least free from the obligation to work?

If we are presently eating uncooked capitalism, perhaps the question is not how to cook capitalism but rather whether whatever we choose to eat after capitalism can be eaten raw or requires cooking. If Mayo and colleagues' task was "to reposition the manager in a more therapeutic role, enabling workers to better negotiate the psychological and emotional stress of work under capitalism" (Mumby, 2019, p. 434), then perhaps the next (or the next following that, etc.) generation of industrial and organizational (I-O) psychologists will need to enable humanity to better negotiate the psychological, emotional, and social stress of living in an world that does not offer paid work and that may have limited opportunities for unpaid work—to help people find purpose and need fulfillment in a world where we are all—and thus none of us are—requisitely aristocrats.

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