



“Interest in the service of that which is disinterested.” Józef Tischner’s anthropologico-ethical project of work

Jarosław Jagiełło¹

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Abstract

This paper focuses on one of Tischner’s last and little-known essays on the issues concerning work in the era of free market and the hegemony of the laws of economic calculation. In a discussion with Dominique Méda and André Gorz, Tischner diagnoses various threats to contemporary forms of work. Tischner criticizes above all the one-sided—that is, only objective—conception of today’s work. Referring to his own and original anthropologico-ethical project of work, the Polish scholar draws the reader’s attention to the need to promote the subjective model of work to be construed as interhuman dialogue. In work, thus construed, Tischner discerns a guarantee of the moral order of contemporary societies. His anthropological-ethical concept of work successfully inscribes itself in some of the models of work of the future, which are very much promoted today.

Keywords Józef Tischner · Human work · Philosophical anthropology · Solidarity · Dialogue

Introduction

The world of philosophy in the East and West had not yet heard of Józef Tischner (1931–2000) when he courageously proclaimed “The Decline of Thomist Christianity” (see: Tischner 2000) or when in the 1970s he introduced Poles to hermeneutic phenomenology, which was flourishing in the West.¹ The world of philosophy and politics heard of him first at the time when he became an adviser to the Independent Self-governing Labour Union “Solidarity” and wrote *Etyka Solidarności* (Tischner

¹ In subsequent years he especially gave voice to it in his original philosophy of man, presented first in Tischner (1990), and later continued, developed, and elaborated in Tischner (1998). These two most important philosophical works of Tischner have already been translated into several languages.

✉ Jarosław Jagiełło
jaroslaw.jagiello@upjp2.edu.pl

¹ Pontifical University of John Paul II in Cracow, ul. Kanoniczna 9/203, 31-002 Kraków, Poland

2005). This relatively short work, which has been translated into several languages,² is a collection of thematically organized philosophico-religious essays focused on the ethics and anthropology of work as based on the foundation of the word “solidarity.” While primarily explaining the ethical sense of “solidarity” (these issues are thoroughly addressed in Stawrowski 2010), it was with the aid of this word that Tischner strongly connected work issues with the sphere of man’s vital needs—the need for freedom, justice, respect for human dignity, and peaceful arrangement of the socio-political life of millions of people. Pointing to the ethos of the new social and trade-union movement in Poland, which was increasingly recognizable worldwide (see: Ndabiseruye 2009, pp. 154–159), he presented solidarity as an important principle governing man’s everyday life, many human communities, and in particular the lives of working people.

Work anthropology and ethical sketches, contained in both *Etyka Solidarności* and Tischner’s other works, in the heyday of real socialism, served as the philosopher’s reaction to the severe work crisis that masses of his compatriots had to contend with. Today (as suggested in Vogt et al. 2009, pp. 11–19) they are an important point of reference in devising ways to resolve various socio-cultural crises. Undoubtedly, they also substantially contribute to the contemporary discussion about the nature of work and the working man’s ethical awareness, which at the end of the 20th century was given a boost by such well-known French philosophers and sociologists of work as André Gorz (see Gorz 1988) and Dominique Méda (see Méda 1995). Józef Tischner wanted to participate in that discussion, and did, at the end of his life, when he was terminally ill (see: Tischner 2005; cf. Jagiełło 2014).

In the present paper, I focus on Tischner’s last dispute over the original conception of work. Let me therefore omit the painstakingly elaborated (Legięć 2012; Sperfeld 2012), multiyear polemics in which Tischner engaged the Hegelian, and in particular Marxist, concept of work, and in which the Polish philosopher put forward the notion of work construed as dialogue already during the communist era. I am rather interested in the issue of the philosophical legitimacy of the anthropologico-ethical project of work in the context of the free market economy, and consequently issues bearing on the usefulness of the Tischnerian philosophy of work amidst the political and economic changes taking place at the end of the 20th century.

Critique of the objective approach to work

As he undertook a review of Gorz’s and Méda’s views on modern concepts of work, aware of the qualitative character of the political transformation in Poland, Tischner—while engaging in 1999 in his last dispute over the conception of work—hedged his bets to some degree. He wrote:

² The first translations coincided with the establishment of the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna (*Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen*) by Józef Tischner, Krzysztof Michalski, and Hans-Georg Gadamer in 1982.

I have not addressed the subject of philosophy of work since the collapse of communism. It seemed to me that I had run out of my competence in this regard. In the communist era philosophy of work was writ large by life itself.... The free market conditions are completely different. Now the time has come for specialists in economics.... I am not a specialist. My knowledge of the main movements in contemporary economic thought is very superficial. (Tischner 2005, p. 272).

Still, Tischner takes up a discussion with the French scholars, emphasizing that in his opinion the most original insight into the issues concerned with work does not primarily belong to economics, but above all to the anthropologico-ethical sphere.

The most striking thing following from Tischner's reference to the modern world of work, in which—as mentioned before—he examines the work of Gorz and Méda, is his refusal to go into raptures over—as it might seem—the unusually attractive image of work in the era of “robotization” and digital revolution. Tischner is quick to point to the creeping menace lurking in the spectacular technological advancement over the last two centuries, as he diagnosed it: “The purpose of technology was to free man from burdens imposed on him by work. At first, it was about increasing the strength of human muscles. With this end in view, mills, windmills, and horse-drawn carts were invented. Later developments included the steam engine and the combustion engine. Europe entered the age of steam and electricity. The 20th century went farther. Man was exempted from many operation-related functions. The computer took his place. The age of programming and IT dawned. This meant further liberation. But each time a new “machine” stepped between man and the world, factories would make masses of workers redundant. At such moments, the role of technology proved to be double-edged. Called into existence in order to lighten man's load, it turned out to be a source of new vexations for him” (Tischner 1997, p. 91). Capitalism, the outlines of which are delineated by technological advancement, paradoxically leads to disappearance of work.

The French writers' characterization of changes in contemporary reality, especially of the significant changes in economic thought, brought Tischner to the conclusion that Hegel and Marx are virtually absent in the current conception of the structure of work. The view coming from Hegel, for whom work is heroic sacrifice of one's life for someone else, an act of service to interhuman relationships, is in Tischner's opinion completely alien to the modern conception of work. Similarly, Marx, with his philosophy of work as power, struggle, and control, has been relegated to the background. Actually, Tischner did not find that to be surprising at all. After all, it was Marx—as the Polish philosopher emphasizes—who read the essence of man out of the entirety of social relations, and therefore primarily out of work itself, and who developed a mythology of “the emancipation of labour” based on the destruction of private ownership, giving rise to a dangerous utopia. It was this mythology that came to underlie totalitarian communism. It was this mythology that “undercut the foundation for the development of work,” (Tischner 2005, p. 283) causing it to be placed in outright opposition to the factual demands of the contemporary economic thought (Tischner 1991a, pp. 31n.).

As Tischner (2005, p. 27) observed, it is also difficult to discern the influence of Christian thought on the development of the awareness of the value of work in the contemporary world. The conception according to which work “emulates God’s creative act,” its “starting point being the artist’s creativity,” is in large measure alien to the contemporary man. However, Tischner took note of the utilitarian understanding of work, the first outline of which—as Tischner observed following Dominique Méda—came from Adam Smith, one of the fathers of the modern model of market economy (Smith 1954). Enchanted by work as a combination of the mathematical science of nature, technology, and economics in control of processes taking place in the world, Smith managed to discern in it the source of the wealth of nations, thus opening “the gate to the modern value of work” (Tischner 2005, p. 278).

Like André Gorz, Tischner not only referred to the decline of work in the contemporary world, but also emphasized the changes in the very understanding of work in the era of robotics, bureaucratization, and information technology, true as well in post-communist Poland. Today, it is no longer just “hard work in a factory,” (Tischner 2005, p. 279) but actually “any activity producing practical values, for which someone is willing to pay in the free market” that can function as work (Tischner 2005, p. 275). This definition of work is remarkable. According to Tischner, human work has been reduced to the status of a commodity. It is also important to emphasize the significance of the free market in the contemporary approach to work. There is no doubt that the free market has an equivocal significance. The indisputable profits that it yields arise from the fact that its mechanisms—as we read in one of the foremost documents of Catholic social teaching—“help to utilize resources better; they promote the exchange of products; above all they give central place to the person’s desires and preferences, which, in a contract, meet the desires and preferences of another person” (Jan Paweł II 2006a, 429). However, there are manifold threats lurking in the same free market. Human activity can be associated with the production of such goods as upbringing, education, all manner of service-oriented activities which, in their essence, defy the rules of trade. All kinds of services which due to their specificity cannot be subject to the criteria of buying and selling—they are commodities, not an “object of calculable accounts.” (Tischner 2005, p. 275) However, it is exactly these accounts that constitute one of the key tools by which the free market subordinates a broad *spectrum* of human work, productive as well as unproductive, to the rules of trade exchange. Therefore, the free market itself—based on competition and demand—is bipolar. It can create favourable conditions for the development of many forms of work, but it may also contribute considerably to their destruction. Tischner concluded: “The nature of work is decided by the market. The market gives birth to work and the market kills it” (Tischner 2005, p. 275)

At the same time, Tischner discreetly sensitizes the reader to the axiological turn that has taken place in the understanding of work under the conditions of the free market. As he reminisced about his “work on work”³ in the 1970s and 1980s, the

³ During the 1st National Convention of the Independent Self-governing Labour Union “Solidarity”, Tischner said: “I want to understand Polish work, define it, capture its essence so that on this path new work can be undertaken—the first work in the history of Poland—work on work,” (Tischner 2005, p. 124). It was Tischner’s work on work that John Paul II referred to in his remarkable words in 1987, during his speech in Gdańsk, the city where “Solidarity” was founded: “For it is in this city, as well as all

philosopher emphasized that at one point in the communist era the history of Polish work turned into a history of struggles for the right to absolute values in social life. Therefore, the rise in awareness of the value of work correlated with the rise in awareness of the need for freedom, truth, good, beauty, and *sacrum*. However, "following the era of the struggle for absolute values the time for utilitarian values has come" (Tischner 2005, p. 276). Their usefulness is decided by the free market. Tischner was quick to respond to this state of affairs, as he noted that the utilitarian conception of work operating in the free market inevitably entails two crucial dangers. First, "striving for profit, which is enforced by the free market, can lead to exploitation" (Tischner 2005, p. 277). Secondly, the menace of blind consumption is great: "profit" turns into the bliss of "relishing" for the sake of relishing; there is no question about the purpose, we are enjoying the means to an end" (Tischner 2005, p. 277).⁴

With regard to Dominique Méda's sketches on modern work, Tischner (2005, p. 281) stated that modern work cannot be viewed, as Hegel and Marx believed, as the source of social relations and the expression of man's essence. Instead, it should be understood as an individual form of man's employment. It is paid work and constitutes a condition for man's access to wealth and a sense of security within the structure of today's social life. Many modern states aspire to make employment almost universal. However, according to Tischner, such aspirations and the resultant policy of universal employment have nothing to do with the Marxist principle of the universal right to work. "What is the reason for such a policy"—asks Tischner. Certainly, it is not the Marxist thesis that work (employment) is part of the essence of man. It is more about ensuring social order and the straightforward circumstance that a better way of distributing goods than "employment" has yet to be devised (see: Tischner 2005, p. 282).

Tischner (2005, p. 280) also noted that, according to the French philosopher, the ideas of the free market and employment remain correlated with a highly crucial factor determining the emergence of the modern concept of work. She means economism—the principle advanced by the English political economists who discerned a foundation for social cohesion in the idea of a contract. In the contemporary landscape of socio-economic life, the idea of a contract plays a leading role. A contract undertaken by an individual highlights that person's subjectivity, her freedom of choice and responsibility for the choice. Like Méda, Tischner (2005, p. 282) concluded that, in modern society, justice based on contract constitutes the highest value determining the character of interhuman relationships. But this circumstance

Footnote 3 (continued)

over the Baltic Coast and in other work environments in Poland that great effort has been expended to restore the entire personal and social dimension to human work. In the history of „work on work,” this effort constitutes—as the contemporary Polish thinker put it—a significant stage. Not only from the Polish point of view" (Jan Paweł II 1991, pp. 657 n.).

⁴ Using a computer, a cell phone or the Internet may be invoked here as a trivial example which yet illustrates the problem quite well. While these devices and the Internet serve a great many practical and important purposes, not infrequently using them becomes an activity for its own sake, the sense of the activity remaining undefined. Satisfaction derived from such usage may quickly turn into addiction.

made Tischner uneasy. He wondered critically whether a society dominated by the idea of a contract can still be receptive to the idea of “some higher common good.” However, there are no experiences to substantiate the thesis that, in the absence of sensitivity to the idea of common good, development of a socio-political community is possible. As Tischner (2005, p. 283) explained, the danger of the pre-eminence of the idea of a contract results from the fact that “economic relations become a model for all other social relations, including family ones. Marriage becomes a “contract,” just like raising children and looking after the elderly. Economism triumphs.” In other words, economism controls the life of society—interest tries to absorb that which by nature is disinterested.

As he examined the metamorphoses of work in the contemporary world and Poland, Tischner did not devise a new conception of work. He simply described the form it appears to take today. It is the activity of a man employed in some capacity, entangled in a plexus of economic criteria, and informed by the utilitarian thinking of the market hegemony. In providing such a description, Tischner—referring to Gorz and Méda—focused on the objective sense of work. Still, it would have been out of character for Tischner to stop at the objective sense of work only, completely disregarding its subjective sense, at the heart of which stands man. The conclusion of the essay on the metamorphoses of work indisputably proves that whereas earlier Tischner had criticised the Marxist system of work for sanctioning mainly the moral exploitation and enslavement of man, he began to criticise, discreetly but still emphatically, the contemporary model of work, “enslaved” by the criterion of demand and the power of competition. Distancing himself from the concept of work as a commodity, he insisted, just as he did in communist Poland, that “work should have its real value restored to it” (Tischner 2005, p. 283).⁵ It is easy to guess that the background to such a demand is not constituted by issues concerned with the very structure of work, or its objective sense, but above all the axiological horizon within which creators and consumers of work operate. By reference to the social significance of this horizon, Tischner by no means questioned the human need for utilitarian values, which are inextricably linked with the phenomenon of work. However, Tischner wondered critically whether these values are today becoming “the only values worthy of human endeavour” (Tischner 2005, p. 284). One can detect here a criticism of extreme utilitarianism. One can also detect a warning against the danger that has today sneaked into the contemporary axiology of work. And since Tischner had always worked on the reconstruction of the “ethical substance of man’s self-awareness,” (see Tischner 2003, p. 99) in the conclusion of his essay he did not content himself with mere criticism and warning, nor did he lapse into pessimism, but instead pointed to the way out of the impasse:

We cannot blame a man who sells flowers at the corner of the street. In general, people do not buy flowers because of the related ‘profits.’ There is a point at which the ‘interest’ begins to serve that which is ‘disinterested.’ Is the contemporary world aware of that point? (Tischner 2005, p. 284)

⁵ An important discussion of the enslavement of contemporary work issue and, by extension, of question of man in the era of ruthless competition is provided by Pyka (2009).

The Polish philosopher found it regrettable that Dominique Méda omitted this issue in her analysis of the image of contemporary work. Arguably, that is the reason why she did not manage to pave the way to liberating the contemporary model of work from a variety of tensions threatening man, arising as a result of economics encountering ruthless laws of the market. In brief, the elaboration of the subjective sense of work is missing from her book. However, it is exactly this sense that Tischner finds to be most essential in thinking about contemporary work. This is because it serves as an effective key to resolving tensions and contradictions that have taken root in the contemporary conception of human work. It also serves as a key to overcoming extreme individualism that is destructive towards interhuman bonds. This subjective sense appears to be hiding in the background of Tischner's last essay on human work. But in fact, it is present, even if subtly hidden, throughout all of Tischner's analyses. Criticizing its absence in Dominique Méda's views, Tischner explicitly invokes the necessity to think, speak, and write about the subjective, anthropo-logical-ethical sense of contemporary work, lest it turns into man's enemy.

The subjective sense of human work

In Tischner's view, the ethical dimension is the most important in any attempt at original thinking about work. He did not avoid such subjects as the question of fair pay, increase in profits, technological advancement, man's practical needs, laws of economics and the market, etc. However, in his thinking about work, these are not the most important subjects. According to Tischner, reducing the question of work to these has not in the past brought any effective solution to the problems concerned with the socialization of work; nor is such a reduction effective today in overcoming difficulties involved in the economisation of work (Tischner 2005, p. 283). Early in the 1970s, Tischner asked, in a manner characteristic of his own philosophy of work:

"Does a doctor have a right to kill a patient, because he is underpaid? Does a writer have a right to write bad books if his fee is... too low? Does a pharmacist have a right to bungle medicines if they are sold below "prime costs"?... The relation between pay and work is an important but not a decisive matter" (Tischner 1994, p. 71).

The decisive thing about thinking about work is the value that it first and foremost has and thanks to which man can discern what the original truth about work is. However, such a discovery is not possible without understanding the anthropo-logical-ethical profile of work. And this understanding is founded on a circumstance dear to every man: taking up work always happens on account of man. In this context, let us note some of Tischner's findings:

"Since the recipient of work is man, the science of work... should remain closely related to the science of man, and, in particular, to philosophical anthropology and ethics. A new and seminal issue opens: to what degree does the manner in which specific work is done contribute to the development of

humanity in man? To what degree do specific products of work favour this development?" (Tischner 1994, pp. 81n.). "Ethical awareness of work is of utmost and overriding importance in understanding the nature of work" (Tischner 1985, p. 16). "It is not only wishful thinking of noble hearts, but the very inner logic of work developing throughout history that requires radical subordination of work to the ethical ideal. It is only then that economic, technical and political ideals can follow" (Tischner 1985, p. 20).

Let us dwell on the need for a bond between anthropology and ethics that these quotations underscore. This need is extremely important. Fulfilling it conditions the attainment of a lofty goal, which is the development of humanity in man.

Today, it is common knowledge, and not only among the Polish experts on Józef Tischner's philosophical work but also among international scholars (cf. Grathoff 1989, pp. 9–20), that he owes his significant place in contemporary anthropological thought especially to his original concept of man as a dramatic being: "Man's manner of living consists in taking part in drama—he is a dramatic being" (Tischner 1990, p. 10). The reality of human drama reveals itself both in time and in two openings: one intentional, the other dialogical. Tischner set forth this triple act of man's self-revelation as a dramatic being in *Filozofia dramatu* (Tischner 1990) and in *Spór o istnienie człowieka* (Tischner 1998). However, earlier it took on a particular meaning in his attempt at an original exploration of the essence of human work. It was "early" Tischner who wrote about time without which it is impossible for a man to become rooted in the tradition of human work and from which shines forth the ethical dimension of an individual human life—man's co-responsibility for working together with others (cf. Tischner 1994, pp. 79n.; Tischner 2005, pp. 26n., 84, 123n.). The intentional opening plays a vital role in the search for the original truth about man's work. The intentional opening encompasses man's relation to the scene of the drama in which working man is embroiled. A product of work as man's materialized work, in the production chain, is an element in the scene in which a man reappears in an ethical character of his existence: "... there is some radical moral obligation, [...] an obligation of moral "loyalty" towards work materialized in a tool, and more profoundly—towards the man who has created the tool" (Tischner 2005, p. 84). Without dwelling on all the semantic aspects of Tischner's analysis, let us note what Tischner did not explicitly speak about. Above all, it is the belief that both the temporal and intentional character of the existence of the working man presuppose a conception of work as a form of interhuman communication and a path to a community of understanding. This approach to work can be discerned in all of Tischner's writings, and in his opinion it applies necessarily to all kinds of human work (Tischner 2005, p. 75). But the main point in substantiating this approach is the dialogical opening of man as a dramatic being: One might say—writes the author—that "dialogue" means as much as "logic between two.... Can there be any understanding between them? Yes, there can, on the condition that something in common appears—something that links them despite their differences. The linking factor is a word—*logos*, an "idea," a "concept." Shared

logos manifests itself in a conversation, i.e. in dialogue (see Tischner 1991a, p. 14). According to Tischner (1991b, pp. 101–111), dialogue concerns the matter of settling in the world. In its most profound dimension, Tischner describes work exactly as a conversation serving mutual understanding and communication. Work is “active thinking” (Tischner 2005, p. 207) (which is a reference to words of Cyprian Kamil Norwid, a pre-eminent Polish poet), a “form of service to man,” (Tischner 2005, p. 33) “a plane of communication between man and man” (Tischner 1985, p. 70). While working, thus construed, anyone can be his true self and make himself at home. That is Tischner’s concept of work, applicable as well in late modernity. “What literally is “communication”? Communication is a kind of conversation the basis of which is understanding. Human work presupposes and develops communication. As such, it exposes profound analogies with language that people use to talk (Tischner 1994, pp. 74, 82, 121). “Human work is dialogue. People who are working are talking” (Tischner 1985, p. 82). “Man’s work is language spoken to another man; it is a language that either destroys or develops him” (Tischner 1994, p. 82). Having accepted Tischner’s viewpoint, one needs to say that man’s destruction is the effect of mendacious work mutilated by economic exploitation (e.g. violation of the principles of fair pay for work—which is something that the employee does not always realise). Let us remember that this kind of destruction takes place particularly in a situation of moral exploitation. At its core lies the “awareness that one is being exploited. This happens wherever work is detached from ethical goals, which by essence and on the basis of an explicit intention it should serve” (Tischner 1994, p. 86. See also pp. 87–89; Tischner 1985, pp. 55–63; Von Hildebrand et al. 1994, pp. 122–124; Tischner 2002, pp. 62–68; Tischner 2005, pp. 32–34; cf. Jagiełło 2001, pp. 48–62). Even though the question of exploitation constitutes an important part of Tischner’s philosophy of work, he sought to awake in man, to repeat, the ethical awareness of work, that is, the awareness of what work in the ethical dimension really is, regardless of its economic and historical determinants. According to Tischner, awaking this awareness is the most effective way of fighting all manner of pathology in the work process.

If work is defined as “understanding and communication,” (Tischner 1985, p. 170) then its basic purpose is to build community. Work itself is a foundation and source of community” (Tischner 2005, pp. 133, 135) Tischner emphasized that “moral solidarity of working men arises” at the level of community (Tischner 1994, p. 84). Tischner first used the term ‘solidarity’ in an early essay from 1972; later, it became the central word in his “work on work.” Like John Paul II (2006b, pp. 113–115, 123–124, 131–133, 133–135), Tischner (1985, pp. 19n., 24) emphasized that community engendered out of the needs of work is not only a guarantor securing workers’ rights, it also constitutes a crucial factor of social harmony and, by extension, of interhuman solidarity.

Tischner’s studies of human work converge on the central theme encapsulated in a thesis about the community-formative character of work. The Cracow-based philosopher often pointed out that a breakdown of the work community signals a serious disease—being devoid of sense (see: Tischner 2005, pp. 125, 134; 1991b, p. 15; Tischner 1985, pp. 41, 51, 55, 58, 61, 63, 72, 75n.). However,

when reading Tischner's philosophy of work it is important to keep in mind that that the list of threats to work drawn up by Tischner in a number of his works by no means obfuscates this basic function of work: creation of human community. In Tischner's philosophy of work one can find three kinds of community founded on work: a community of product creation, a community of the product, and a community of consumption. Each reveals some special feature of work-founded interhuman mutuality and the resulting ethical implications. As for the community of creation, Tischner ties it to responsibility and fidelity, since these virtues also have the other man as the goal.

A human community participating in creation is a community of shared responsibility. I am not responsible for the whole, because I have not made the whole. But I am not completely exempt from responsibility for the whole either. My contribution may distort the whole.... my work must be faithful to already materialized work. What is more: I know that the processing I perform will be a half-disrupted task too. Fidelity is oriented towards the future... so that he who takes the material from my hands does not need to improve my work. (Tischner 1994, pp. 83n.).

Similarly, in the community of the product a specific moral obligation is found as well. As he writes about the need to respect human work as materialized in the product of work, Tischner highlights the radical moral commitment to the product creator, the immoral application of whose product ought to raise strong objections. "He who uses Zyklon B to kill people is guilty not only of people's death, but also of the abuse of the good faith of those who had good intentions while producing Zyklon B" (Tischner 1994, p. 84). Tischner's characterization of the community of consumption subtly exposes the ethical rules which should be applied to satisfy a variety of human needs:

Bread satisfies hunger, but it should not cause gluttony. The radio should not disturb those who live next door.... When all is said and done, we deliver on the confidence that the creator of these objects put in us, entrusting us with them as "our property." (Tischner 1994, p. 85).

In the description of these three model types of community of work, Tischner depicts creative work and man the creator. As a working man and as a work user, every one of us has a chance for personal development. "One is the way that one's own and another man's work create him" (Tischner 1994, p. 85). In these communities, man appears as the subject and fruit of dialogue. Through his reactions and responses to someone's work, man expresses his own creativity as well as freedom. A working man's freedom does not manifest itself in his being oriented to himself only, to his own needs and profits, but rather it presents itself in the ways people are for one another. The community of work, that is, a community of the rising awareness of work associated with such ethical goals as responsibility, fidelity, truth, and confidence, delineates a space for the promotion of man as well as work itself. That is why Tischner makes a point of warning against all manifestations of destruction of the community of work—mainly economic, in particular moral, exploitation.

Both kinds of exploitation wreck the harmony of the relation between employers and employees, between employees themselves, as well as between the two groups and the end users of the products of their work. Any moral disintegration of the community of work—as we read in the conclusion of Tischner's essay—"gives rise to resentment, inhibitions, opportunism, as well as prevents the truly creative joy of work. The effects appear on many planes, e.g. on the economic plane. The plane of a working man's awareness begins to feature states of lost authenticity while at work and in the mode of being as defined by work. Man "is and is not" himself while working. Pay for work becomes his only motivation for undertaking it" (Tischner 1994, p. 90).

Conclusion, or a critical word

As presented above, the concept of work in Józef Tischner's thought entitles one to state that despite manifold changes which the conception of work underwent, and is undergoing, as a subject at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, the postulate expressed by the Cracow-based philosopher still holds: "work should have its real, and not lesser or greater, value restored to it" (Tischner 2005, p. 283). The postulate expresses Tischner's firm belief in the primacy of his anthropologico-ethical project of work over the concepts of work he dealt with in his lifetime. In his estimation, this primacy is also valid when contrasted with concepts of work developed on the grounds of extreme utilitarianism and aggressive economism. In brief, Tischner takes the stance that his project is superior to any historically conditioned concept of work, and that this is the case irrespective of any possible changes to its scope. His two-fold—anthropological and ethical—insight into the reality of human work brings to light the subjective understanding of work. It is there that its profoundly personalist character manifests itself. Viewed from this perspective, the insight determines the direction of thinking not only about the past history of work, but also about its future. In the light of Tischner's analyses, a one-sided, i.e. solely objective approach to the question of work will inevitably lead to ever new and even unforeseeable crises affecting work, and by extension severe crises in all social life. And it is not just a matter of economic and moral crises in all manner of contemporary forms to which Tischner pointed to many years before his death, referring not so much to Hegel and Marx as to Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, and Shalamov. When work ceases to be a way to build a community in which man can be his true self and make himself at home, it also ceases to be the way to man's development and becomes the space for his fall, a fact of profoundly ethical significance. Tischner wrote:

"work—wrote Tischner—is no longer in the service of settling in, but gets carried away by other powers. One of those powers is the "will to power." Work is becoming more and more a mere means to achieve control over the world, man, sometimes even God, with whom it wants to compete. What does this lead to? It leads to the tragic fracture at the heart of work, which comes to be expressed in wealth as well as one man's bliss and another man's ordeal. Another power is that of the narcotic. A narcotic is needed by those who are

approaching an ordeal, or who have already stepped right into the middle of one. Man works to forget about destroyed homes, empty churches, and forlorn graveyards. Work completely fills time, deludes man into believing that it does not tire him in vain. More often than not, the will to power and the narcotic go hand in hand, as will too can be a narcotic” (Tischner 1991b, p. 110)

The anthropological and ethical ideal of work “tailored” by Tischner not only for Polish needs,⁶ but also—as John Paul II observed (Jan Paweł II 1991, p. 658)—for the needs of many, culturally varied regions of the contemporary economy, is the ideal that—as Charles Taylor once wrote—constitutes a vital contribution to the construction of the “modern moral order” in today’s world (Taylor 2000, p. 30). This ideal can be rejected as a manifestation of utopian thinking. It can also be accepted as an extremely important point of reference in reflection on the project of work in the future. Still, one cannot remain indifferent to it, which would be a display of ill will. Awareness of work as the space in which to build community, foster responsibility, fidelity and interhuman trust is undoubtedly the kind of awareness which always serves as motivation for shared effort aimed at preventing a variety of pathologies afflicting socio-economic life, also in a democratic state under the rule of law.

Accusations levelled against Tischner, that towards the end of his life, at the close of the 20th century, he promoted utopian views on work, do not withstand criticism when contrasted with the latest trends in conceiving the meaning of enterprise and projects for the operation of modern corporate work systems. The delineation of community-formative goals of work poses a special challenge described these days by prominent economists and sociologists of work, and which the greatest originators of the economy of the future gladly take on.⁷ And so the Tischnerian philosophy of work is not a mere episode in the history of the theory of work. His “work on work,” at the heart of which stands man, still lives and acts as a premise and a necessary correction of contemporary forms of work development under the conditions of free market economy.⁸

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Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest The author declares that they have no conflict of interest.

⁶ I mean both numerous translations of *Etyka Solidarności* and monographs on the Tischnerian philosophy of work. Cf. for instance Sperfeld (2012).

⁷ Tischner’s depiction of work as building communities, in which the interests of all participating entities are equally regarded, fits squarely into the much-promoted concept of the job market and its environment called “Flexicurity.” Thanks to the robust morals of working people, proper regulations, close collaboration, good will of the parties as well as mutual trust shown by entrepreneurs, employees and the state, the biggest possible group of people can have their needs satisfied. Cf. on this subject Pyrka (2012).

⁸ Cf. Baron and Markman (2003), Coleman (1988). These research papers can undoubtedly serve as a major point of reference while substantiating the significant role played by Tischner’s philosophy of work in the understanding of the contemporary forms of human work.

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