

Introduction to Part One of the Symposium on *The Thought of Work*

Victor G. Devinatz

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In this issue's Perspectives section, I am most pleased to present the first part of the symposium on the recently-published book, *The Thought of Work*, authored by Dr. John Budd, the Industrial Relations Land Grant Chair in the Department of Work and Organizations at the University of Minnesota. In this landmark volume, Budd examines work from ten perspectives – work as a curse, work as freedom, work as a commodity, work as occupational citizenship, work as disutility, work as personal fulfillment, work as a social relation, work as caring for others, work as identity and work as service. Besides explicating the meaning of work from these various viewpoints, Budd argues that how work is conceptualized is not merely a scholarly exercise for academics but matters deeply in such things as policy development and implementation in the real world.

This symposium consists of three essays written by three outstanding scholars in different disciplines. In the first article entitled, “Work, Free Will and Law”, Professor Marion Crain, the Wiley B. Rutledge Professor of Law at the Washington University School of Law, contends that Budd's conceptualization of work is critical to considerations for understanding how law regulates, or should regulate, work in the United States. In the second piece entitled, “Imagining the Thought of Work,” Dr. Tim Strangleman, Professor of Sociology at the University of Kent (United Kingdom), argues that Budd's volume helps us to understand the paradox of labor and the workplace through the use of oral history and non-academic writing as revealed by workers themselves. In the third essay entitled, “*The Thought of Work: A Review*,” Dr. Charles Whalen, principal analyst in the Macroeconomic Analysis Division of the Congressional Budget Office, contends that Budd's book indicates the complex and textured nature of work and how the work experience is crucial for analyzing the human experience. While pointing out that Budd does not present an integrative model in his volume, Whalen proposes that *The Thought of Work* can be integrated with John Commons' *Industrial Goodwill* (1919) to provide such a framework. The second part of this symposium, to be published in the March 2013 issue, will contain an article by John Budd in which he offers additional reflections on his ideas presented in *The Thought of Work*.

V. G. Devinatz (✉)
Department of Management & Quantitative Methods, Illinois State University, Normal, IL 61790-5580, USA
e-mail: vgdevin@ilstu.edu

If any of the readers of this symposium are interested in commenting on these three essays in the journal's pages, please do not hesitate to contact me. Other symposiums on important employment relations topics are planned for future issues of the *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*. If any of the journal's readers have suggestions for symposiums on specific topics, please do not hesitate to contact me. I hope that you enjoy this symposium and find it most illuminating.

Work, Free Will and Law

Marion Crain

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Abstract American law conceptualizes work as an exercise of free will, as a choice rather than as a right. Work law is dominated by a freedom of contract analysis in which occupations, jobs, union representation, working conditions, and exit are seen as freely chosen. New Deal-era regulatory regimes are undermined by the pervasive influence of the work-as-free-will framework. Vast spheres of worker activity that benefit employers yet occur within the coercive context of an employment regime in which jobs are a choice and a privilege rather than a right are left unregulated. Worker agency is reduced as workers conform their aspirations, expectations and demands for workplace justice to the confines of the job as defined by the employer. Few question the prevailing meaning of work as freedom because it is consonant with our cultural commitment to the American Dream—but we should.

Key words Labor law · Workplace justice · Consumerism

In *The Thought of Work*, Professor John Budd offers an illuminating analysis of the philosophical and theoretical meanings of work. He explores ten powerful themes: work as burden, curse and obligation; work as freedom—the route to self-sufficiency and independence; work as an economic commodity traded in the marketplace; work as occupational citizenship and a vehicle for voice; work as disutility, the yin to the yang of consumption and leisure; work as personal fulfillment through alignment with the goals of the employing entity; work as social relation shaped by the context in which it occurs, particularly differential power relations; work as caring for others; work as a source of identity; and work as service or calling. Beyond cataloguing these themes and exposing their premises,

M. Crain (✉)

Center for the Interdisciplinary Study of Work & Social Capital, Washington University School of Law,
One Brookings Drive, Campus Box 1120, St. Louis, MO 63130, USA
e-mail: mgcrain@wustl.edu

M. Crain
Washington University in St. Louis, St. Louis, MO, USA

his point is that how we think about work matters: it shapes scholarly analysis, influences policy proposals, and structures real-world outcomes.

Budd's project is important to law. Understanding the values that guide our thinking is critical to choosing among the competing proposals for how we ought to regulate work (if at all), and which ends we seek to achieve.¹ In this short essay, I draw on Budd's analysis to explain law's struggle to reconcile the often competing meanings of work in America and to critique its narrow frame.

The Common Law: Work as Freedom, Work as Commodity

The dominant image of work in American law is as an exercise of free will (in Budd's terms, work as freedom). Viewed through this lens, work is not a right, an obligation or a privilege; it is a choice.

In paid employment, as Budd notes, this framing of work translates into a commitment to freedom of contract. Employment is envisioned as a contractual relation between equals (Baker 2011; Epstein 1984). In this model, workers are free to choose a job, to negotiate the terms of the employment contract, to choose whether or not a union will represent them in the workplace, and to quit/exit when more attractive work, expanded family responsibilities, retirement, or the allure of leisure beckon.

Fundamental to this model is the at-will employment regime. Employers may dismiss or discipline employees at will, "for good cause, for no cause or even for cause morally wrong, without being thereby guilty of legal wrong" (*Payne v. W & Atl. R.R. Co.*, 81 Tenn. 507, 519–20 (1884)). In its strictest legal incarnation, "[t]he at-will contract lasts only from moment to moment, at every moment completed and at every moment renewed" (Stone 2009: 1). Though the model has suffered common law incursions in many states, it remains the default rule in all jurisdictions save one. Its justification is the contractual principle of mutuality: both worker and employer are equally free to quit at any time in order to maximize their gains in the labor market (Crain *et al.* 2010; Epstein 1984). Its continuing influence on all of work law is pervasive.

Employment at will doctrine reflects a view of labor as an economic commodity. Workers are fungible, and so are jobs. For progressives concerned about the employment relation, this is a strikingly narrow portrayal of work. Embracing a right to terminate the employment relationship without warning, justification, or compensation ignores the human and business realities of the interdependence of workers and firms and the mutual investments they make in one another (Crain 2011, 2010a, b). It also overlooks the imbalance of power between individual workers and the firm, and workers' consequent vulnerability to abusive discharge (Blades 1967). It overestimates the ability of individual workers to negotiate armed with imperfect information and inescapably human (and thus, inaccurate) assessments of the personal risk of job loss (Kim 1997). And it leaves the public to pick up the costs of supporting workers who are "free" to agree to work at jobs regardless of how dangerous, low-paying or onerous the working conditions may be.

Regulatory overlays designed to address the underlying imbalance of power and to protect the public interests at stake have multiplied since the Industrial Revolution. These statutory regimes advance other visions of work, treating employment less as a matter of contract than as a question of status. I examine below two of the most significant

¹ In many ways Budd's inquiry is reminiscent of legal scholar Jim Atleson's influential book, *Values and Assumptions in American Labor Law* (1983).

interventions, and undertake to illustrate how law's single-minded commitment to an ethos of free will at work has limited law's efficacy in furthering other social functions of work.

The National Labor Relations Act: Work as a Social Relation, Work as Occupational Citizenship

The National Labor Relations Act (NLRA 29 U.S.C. §§151–169) is fundamentally concerned with balancing power in the workplace – in Budd's terms, with work as a social relation, a struggle for power and control. Section 1 of the Act explains that its purpose is to address the imbalance of power between individual workers and employers organized in the corporate form (NLRA § 1). The NLRA protects the right to organize, to collectively bargain, and to engage in other concerted activities for mutual aid or protection (NLRA § 7). The Act assumes that workers and employers possess an inherent conflict of interest likely to lead to the interruption of commerce (which at the time of its enactment was the historical reality), and seeks to channel labor strife into therapeutic dialogue and harmonious relationships, otherwise known as collective bargaining (*H.K. Porter Co. v. NLRB*, 397 U.S. 99 (1970)). Individual contracts that detract from collective bargaining are not enforceable, nor are “yellow dog” contracts that condition employment on not joining or supporting a union (*J.I. Case Co. v. NLRB*, 321 U.S. 332 (1944); Norris-LaGuardia Act of 1932 § 101).

The NLRA is also the clearest codification in the law of the idea of work as occupational citizenship. Workers are seen as whole human beings, not fungible commodities. Just-cause-for-discharge terms in collective bargaining agreements afford legal protection against arbitrary discharge that resemble a property right in continued employment, giving rise to a body of arbitral law that amounts to “industrial due process.” Importantly, due process is a collective right—affording workers access to a union representative ensures that its requirements will be enforced (Estlund 1995). The NLRA also furthers voice. The Act's drafter, Senator Wagner, believed that affording workers the everyday experience of voice would enhance the larger political democracy (Wagner 1937).

The NLRA's concern with the differential power between employers and individual employees sounds an anachronistic note in the modern era, where vast numbers of non-union workers routinely agree as a condition of employment to predispute arbitration agreements waiving statutory rights to proceed in court with employment-related claims. The Supreme Court has unequivocally rejected arguments that inequality of bargaining power in the employment contest should render such agreements void. Said the Court: “[M]ere inequality in bargaining power . . . is not a sufficient reason to hold that arbitration agreements are never enforceable in the employment context” (*Gilmer v. Interstate/Johnson Lane Corp.*, 500 U.S. 20 (1991)). Several courts have proved unreceptive to recent efforts by the National Labor Relations Board to extend the NLRA's philosophy beyond the union context by reining in individual arbitration agreements that block class or collective claims (*D.R. Horton, Inc.*, 357 N.L.R.B. No. 184 (2012); *Iskanian v. CLS Transportation Los Angeles, LLC*, 206 Cal. App. 4th 949 (2012); *Jasso v. Money Mart Express, Inc.*, 2012 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 52538 (N.D. Cal.); *LaVoice v. UBS Financial Services, Inc.*, 2012 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 5277).

The law's commitment to work as occupational citizenship has proved similarly fragile. The NLRA itself has ossified, employer resistance to its values has intensified, union representation is in dramatic decline, and the Act's administering agency is under severe attack (Estlund 2002; Fisk 2012; Logan 2002; Weiler 1983, 1991). Moreover, the Act never guaranteed union representation to every employee; it only guaranteed the right to *choose* a

union, invoking an opt-in system rather than an opt-out system. Nor was choosing a union as feasible for most workers as it was, for example, in Canada, where card-check legislation was in place (Weiler 1991). Choosing a union in the U.S. means overcoming employer resistance, including threats, coercion and bribes aimed at remaining union-free; persuading a majority of one's fellow workers to vote in favor of the union in an election; and fending off expensive and time-consuming employer-initiated legal challenges to the bargaining unit sought, the conduct of the election, and eligibility of individual employees to vote while the momentum of the organizing drive slips away. And once the union is selected, obtaining a contract that guarantees the union's stability for a period of years and secures significant gains in wages, benefits, job security, and due process at work means pressuring the employer to bargain – without the aid of the most effective and least risky forms of pressure from workers' perspectives (secondary boycotts) (Weiler 1991).

Appeals to the idea of work as reflecting individual freedom and choice have played a powerful role in efforts to undermine the labor law as well as in measures designed to rejuvenate it. The National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation has mounted numerous legal challenges to labor unionism and the laws supporting it, arguing that “compulsory unionism” is a violation of workers' civil and human rights, particularly the freedom to work (National Right to Work Organization, www.nrtw.org). Yet for unions operating in so-called “right to work” states where union security clauses are banned and individual workers may opt out of union dues obligations, a labor contract does not even mean union stability. Even with the aid of savvy rhetoric invoking the choice rubric, the best efforts of the American labor movement, a Democratic President, and initial majorities in both houses of Congress could not accomplish the goal of enacting the Employee Free Choice Act, which would have guaranteed card-check recognition as a route to union selection and ensured first contracts for workers who did unionize (Sachs 2010).

The Fair Labor Standards Act: Work as Burden and Disutility

The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA 29 U.S.C. §§ 201–219) is perhaps the richest source in law for judicial interpretations of what counts as “work” for purposes of compensation. Enacted as part of the New Deal legislation, the FLSA was designed to redress the poverty and rampant unemployment that characterized the Depression era. The FLSA guarantees minimum wages for covered employees and requires overtime pay for those who work more than 40 h per week (Fair Labor Standards Act §§ 206, 207). The overtime premium was designed to spread work across the laboring class by creating an incentive for employers to hire more workers for fewer hours (Crain *et al.* 2010).

The FLSA is founded upon an understanding of work as burden and disutility. “Work” in the employment context means “physical or mental exertion . . . controlled or required by the employer and pursued necessarily and primarily for the benefit of the employer and his business” (*Tennessee Coal, Iron & Railroad Co. v. Muscoda Local No. 123*, 321 U.S. 590, 598 (1944)). FLSA doctrine focuses on distinguishing work from leisure, asking whether the activity is commanded and controlled by the employer (work) or chosen by the employee (leisure), and which of them reaps the primary benefit from the activity.

This frame has proved wholly inadequate to the task of defining “work” because of the ubiquitous influence of the idea of individual free will. Importantly, the FLSA's doctrinal frame largely ignores the imbalance of power between employers and individual employees and the coercive influence of the underlying at-will rule. One might ask how any activity performed by the worker that also benefits the business can be said to be freely chosen in a

relationship characterized by differential power and the constant threat of discharge. Indeed, the FLSA bans private contracts purporting to waive FLSA rights, in partial recognition of the weakness of individuals to resist the coercive power of the firm (*Barrentine v. Arkansas-Best Freight System, Inc.*, 450 U.S. 728 (1981)). Nevertheless, courts struggling to determine compensability often reason that the FLSA does not protect employees against the “onerous or confining conditions of employment” that they choose (*Bright v. Houston Northwest Medical Center Survivors, Inc.*, 934F.2d 671, 678 (5th Cir. 1991)(*en banc*); *Dinges v. Sacred Heart St. Mary’s Hospitals, Inc.*, 164F.3d 1056 (7th Cir. 1999)).

So-called “off-the-clock” work epitomizes the dilemma. Suppose that the employer’s high-pressure productivity standards necessitate taking work home or working outside regular hours to meet them (and so, avoid discharge). Such work is compensable only where the employer has “suffer[ed] or permit[ted] the employee to work” under the FLSA. Must the employer actually order the work, or will a pattern or practice of acquiescence combined with unreasonably high productivity standards suffice to establish coercion, or at least constructive notice? (*Davis v. Food Lion*, 792F.2d 1274 (4th Cir. 1986)) If the employer has not ordered the work but its standards are nonetheless met, should we conclude that the work did not occur? If the government requires canine enforcement officers employed by the Department of Homeland Security, Customs, and Border Protection to come to work equipped with clean towels for the purpose of nosework training for drug detector dogs, for example, can it deny them pay for time spent off-the-clock laundering the towels? After all, as one court pointed out, “[t]he towels did not launder themselves” (*Bull v. United States*, 68 Fed. Cl. 212, 241 (2005), *affirmed*, 479F.3d 1365 (Fed. Cir. 2007)).

The influence of free will is also clear in legal determinations regarding the compensability of commuting time. The Portal-to-Portal Act excludes commuting time from compensable work time (Portal-to-Portal Act of 1947, 29 U.S.C. § 254(a); C.F.R. § 785.35.) Should it matter that the employer pays so little that the employee cannot afford to live closer to work, or that housing is not available at all inside the security screening area (as for airport workers)? What if the employer assigns an unusually broad territory or enlarges the worker’s assigned territory during the course of employment, resulting in a lengthy or onerous commute? In *Kavanagh v. Grand Union*, 192F.3d 269 (2d Cir. 1999), a supermarket refrigerator repairman’s territory included Connecticut, New Jersey and New York, resulting in an average commute from his home on Long Island of 7 to 8 hours per day—none of it compensable work time. The court reasoned that employees choose their homes, and the commuting time did not benefit the employer.

Training time raises particularly challenging questions. Training surely benefits the employer, but it may also benefit the employee, particularly if her job tenure is short and the training confers marketable skills that are transferrable to other contexts. The Department of Labor has developed standards that bear on the question (29 C.F.R. § 785.27), but issues regularly arise because a key question under these standards is whether the training time was “voluntary.” For example, if an employer informs applicants that uncompensated safety training will be required, and the applicants accept the job anyhow, is their attendance at training sessions not compensable because it is “voluntary”? (*Chao v. Tradesmen Int’l, Inc.*, 310F.3d 904 (9th Cir. 2002))

Turning Work into Something Else: Work as Personal Fulfillment, Identity, or Service

In response to the law’s narrow conceptualization of work, savvy employers have developed strategies that redefine and reorganize work in ways that remove it from work law’s

regulatory sweep altogether—often by manipulating the choice construct. Suppose, for example, that employers blur the traditional line between work and consumption, making productive activity less recognizable as work to employees. Mass market retail clothing stores like the Gap, Abercrombie & Fitch, Chico’s, and Banana Republic recruit their workforces off the sales floor, from their target consumer base (Rovenpor 2008). Because these firms rely on aesthetic labor—“look and feel” marketing—to sell their products, workers are required as a condition of their at-will employment to wear brand-appropriate clothing and to conform to “look policies” (Pettinger 2005; Williams and Connell 2010). Employees receive substantial discounts on branded clothing, frequently reducing their pay below the minimum wage (Cutler 2003; Merrick 2003). They thus perform triple duty as sales clerks and models in the store during working hours, and as walking billboards during off-work time as they model the clothing on the street while the employer acquires a captive market for its products (Warhurst and Nickson 2007). The worker—drawn by the allure of the brand—freely consents. The workplace culture may be such that some even see their jobs as part of a mission, akin to public service—albeit a mission directed by the firm’s brand, as at Apple (Segal 2012).

These strategies are particularly effective with youth because they evoke the thought of work as personal fulfillment and identity, luring those who see their labor as part of their quest for identity, status, and belonging. Models at Abercrombie & Fitch and Victoria’s Secret, waitresses at Hooters, and sales representatives at Apple reap the intangible rewards of the brand image with which they are affiliated but little more—sometimes not even minimum wage, after deductions for clothing, products or personal grooming to conform to the brand image (Cutler 2003; Segal 2012). Yet because of its connection with consumption, no one sees the time spent selecting, purchasing, learning how to use or modeling the branded products inside and outside the store as work. And even if it were viewed as work, it would not be compensable: in American culture, consumption epitomizes the exercise of free will over the market. As an activity chosen by the worker and engaged in off-the-clock for the worker’s benefit, these efforts would not be seen as work at law.

A number of firms have also mastered the art of turning consumers into workers. Fast food restaurants, gas stations and grocery stores have reorganized their service (salad bars and drink machines) and substituted self-serve technologies (U-scan machines, self-service gas pumps) to induce consumers to do the work once done by workers. This “work transfer” is invisible because consumers consent. Nevertheless, it has important labor market effects: it reduces the firm’s labor costs directly, and undermines the value of the labor done by the remaining workers, who suffer by association (Glazer 1993). But this is consumption, not work, and hence beyond the work law’s regulatory reach.

Finally, firms have enthusiastically exploited the current recessionary labor market by creating a market in which the would-be workers consume the jobs themselves. In the growing intern economy, it has become the norm for college and college-bound students to perform multiple internships prior to and subsequent to graduation, often for few or no wages (Perlin 2011; Greenhouse 2010, 2012). Choice and consent, added to the matrix of personal development benefits including enhanced networking, skill acquisition, and experience, negate the traditional indices of work. And so, not surprisingly, law hesitates. Are student interns workers, or are they something else? Volunteers, performing a service? Trainees? Or simply consumers of the jobs? The Department of Labor has issued guidelines, but the area remains murky. Definitive cases have not yet emerged from the courts.

The Thought of Work Matters

How we think about work *does* matter, both for policy and for law. Not all productive activity is work for legal purposes, of course. But law's narrow understanding of work as a burden commanded by the employer with no benefits to the worker beyond the economic bargain should give us pause, because law reflects society's core values. If we define work so narrowly that we don't see an activity as work at all—because it is chosen or even enjoyed—then we won't conceive of regulation as possible.

Employers gain significantly and workers and the public are at risk as a result of this gap in conceptualization. By re-casting workers as consumers or jobs as internships, for example, employers influence which applicants can obtain jobs in particular sectors and which are excluded; reduce the possibility that the workers will develop the oppositional consciousness necessary to identify as workers and make common cause, thus avoiding workplace litigation and union organizing; and reduce the jobs available to paid workers, undermining the tax base and maintaining high unemployment (Williams and Connell 2010; Fantasia 1989). Moreover, workers' aspirations are not stable. Workers develop psychological frames that preserve individual self-determination within the constraints imposed by employer practices, which in turn are responsive to law (Schultz 1990; Carbado and Gulati 2000). If workers respond by defining some forms of work as not “real” jobs and thus conform their expectations, those workers will not demand a living wage, supportive benefits, and dignified working conditions (Williams and Connell 2010; Tannock 2001).

In law, “the most perfect coercion will appear as choice” (Greenfield 2011). The thought of work as a choice is so powerful because it fits comfortably with our cultural commitment to the American Dream: if we work hard, we will be rewarded with economic prosperity, security, and the opportunity to advance our economic stations in life. At a minimum, we (and our families) will be self-sufficient (Crain 2006). Fully realized, the Dream connotes wealth—the Horatio Alger story of advancing from rags to riches.

Few are inclined to question the prevailing meaning of work as freedom, given its deep roots in the American Dream with its promise of hope and economic security for any and all. But we should, and Budd offers us the tools to do so by showing us what else work can and does mean in a society willing to embrace a more holistic vision.

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Imagining The Thought of Work

Tim Strangleman

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Abstract This article develops the idea of the interrelated complexity of work attested to in John Budd's (2011) *The Thought of Work*. Drawing on material from oral history and other non-academic writing about work I argue that we need to be alive to the complex paradox of labor and the workplace. We have to be attuned to and more attentive of the realities of employment. This way of understanding work has a rich tradition and is exemplified in the writing of people like Studs Terkel or Humphrey Jennings.

Key words Industrial labor · Oral history · Imaginative history

John Budd's (2011) *The Thought of Work* is a great example of a book which can provoke new ideas and reflection on numerous levels across academic disciplines. In this piece I want to explore a long established tradition in academic and non-academic writing which attempts to capture the patterns and paradoxes of work. It is my argument here that through *The Thought of Work* we can see the way this complexity has confronted humans across time and space. As each chapter breaks down and discovers a particular aspect of labor we become more aware of the essential interconnectedness of these differing characteristics. I am a sociologist of work interested in work meaning and identity. In my writing and research I make extensive use of oral history as well as biographical writing in order to capture the experience of work. I am, therefore, approaching Budd's volume in this spirit, drawing on historical and sociological accounts to compare and contrast with *The Thought of Work*.

In a period of just under 4 years in the 1960s, the *New Left Review* published a series of accounts of work by non-academics in the pages of its journal. These were later released in book form as *Work* and *Work 2* and were edited and given a foreword by Ronald Fraser (1968, 1969). The accounts ranged from blue to white collar employees, male and female, in a variety of occupations and professions. What was valuable then, and now, is the way these autobiographical pieces tell us something profound about the everyday experience of

T. Strangleman (✉)
School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research,
University of Kent, Canterbury, Kent CT2 7NF, UK
e-mail: t.strangleman@kent.ac.uk

‘ordinary’ people given a platform to think, reflect and write about their working lives. One of the more philosophical engagements with the question of work can be seen in Jock Keenan’s (1968) chapter in the initial *Work* collection. Here he portrays his feelings about being *without* work:

Most men can learn to live with most forms of adversity. But what scarcely any man can bear with any degree of equanimity is to be undermined in his natural pride; to be stripped of his native dignity; to be left naked and defenceless, beaten and broken, a fit object for little more than charity. That is when the cold winds blow (Keenan 1968: 272).

In a later passage, he mulls over the contradictions of being on welfare:

Frankly, I hate work. Of course I could also say with equal truth that I love work; that is it is a supremely interesting activity; that it is often fascinating; that I wish I didn’t have to do it; that I wish I had a job at which I could earn a decent wage. That makes six subjective statements about work and all of them are true for me (Keenan 1968: 273).

Keenan captures what many of us who study economic life struggle with in trying to animate an aspect of existence that is so fluid. Keenan is rare in being able to articulate that tension so succinctly. Another, more famous collection of oral histories on work of course can be found in Studs Terkel’s *Working*. The subtitle to Terkel’s book, which is rarely seen in text due to its length, is *People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do*. Hidden in this simple sentence is Terkel grappling with the multifarious nature of work and the complexity of meaning and identities it engenders. Reflecting on his method Terkel notes:

I realised quite early in this adventure that interviews, conventionally conducted, were meaningless. Conditioned clichés were certain to come. The question-and-answer techniques may be of some value in determining favoured detergents, toothpaste and deodorants, but not in the discovery of men and women. There were questions, of course. But they were causal in nature - at the beginning: the kind you would ask while having a drink with someone; the kind he would ask you. The talk was idiomatic rather than academic. In short, it was conversation. In time, the sluice gates of dammed up hurts and dreams were opened (Terkel (1972) *Working*, xxv).

Earlier in the introduction to *Working* he says:

... is about a search, too, for daily meaning as well as daily bread, for recognition as well as cash, for astonishment rather than torpor; in short, for a sort of life rather than a Monday through Friday sort of dying. Perhaps immortality, too, is part of the quest. To be remembered was the wish, spoken and unspoken, of the heroes and heroines of this book (Terkel 1972, xiii).

Terkel’s introduction lays bare what is at stake here. It is namely the idea that superficially societies and cultures often portray work in a one-dimensional sense; when asked why one works the answer is liable to be simply about money. In digging just a little deeper a much richer vein is tapped, one where economic necessity rubs shoulder with other emotions, orientations and attachments. The trick we must learn in trying to uncover this deeper level of meaning is to recognize how and where to look, or in this context knowing how and where to listen. As the voices in both Fraser’s and Terkel’s collections attest most people when given the time and space to think, talk and write about aspects of their work are aware and can communicate this inherent complexity very well.

The event of starting work usually makes a big impression on workers, and one that sticks in the memory in a way that subsequent events may not. Here is the account of toolmaker Jack Pomlet, published in the *New Left Review* collection mentioned above and is worth quoting at length:

I was instructed to report to the foreman of a small workshop which produced components out of which electrical instruments were constructed. My future place of work lay on the far side of the plant, in that part which dated back to the firm's origins in the late nineteenth century. To reach it I had to pass through sights as alien to my past boyhood experiences as the moon's landscape will appear to the first men to tread it. On every piece of open ground lay metal shapes; some mere bars and sheets straight from the steelworks; others gigantic welded constructs covered in a deep brown rust. Besides these objects in the open spaces of the plant were small huts reminiscent of building site 'cabins'. Then I entered the great main workshops. Each chamber, or 'aisle' as they were called, was about one hundred and fifty feet across and anything between five hundred and seven hundred yards long. Several of these great Vulcan halls lay parallel to each other. Within them the huge steam turbines which drove the equally massive electrical generators were built. Overhead rolled the girdered cranes capable of carrying weights of more than two hundred tons. As I made my bewildered way through this strange place one passed over my head. At once I understood the instinct which makes small creatures freeze as the birds of prey encircles overhead. My startled attitude to the crane's passage amused the men at work upon the turbine shells. One glance revealed my newness and a series of catcalls followed my passage down the 'aisle'. Mostly the shouts were good-natured advice to get out of the plant while I had the youth to do so. Such advice never even penetrated my outer consciousness, for how could anybody abhor this great masculine domain with its endless overtones of power and violence? During my short journey through that place of steel and power my memories of school and all it stood for were largely erased. It must have been an experience similar to that of young country boys recruited from the old English shires, and then thrust into the trenches of the Somme (Pomlet, in Fraser 1969: 22–23).

It is obvious that this is a stunning piece of writing about work. What makes it especially valuable is the way it captures the dual nature of work, the shock and awe coupled with attraction to the majesty of work and workplace. Pomlet's quote displays the profound sense of desire and excitement about work. It speaks to the sense of being different from, but aspiring to be like, the established workers in the plant. In that space a transformation is occurring wherein the boy becomes a man through the work performed or the anticipation of it. We can see here identity in its raw form being created or at least aspired to if not achieved instantaneously.

In *The Thought of Work* Budd divides work in to ten discrete but interrelated aspects. Through this quote from Pomlet we see the way these ten aspects are co-present even on the first day of someone's career. Work here is a *curse* born out of economic necessity for both Pomlet and his new colleagues. Work is *freedom*, his new workplace a terrain on which he can make his mark. His productive labor is soon to become a *commodity* to be exchanged on markets. Even at the initial point the young Pomlet is becoming an *occupational citizen*. Work here is a *disutility*, whilst enabling life it equally consumes a life. We can see aspects of *personal fulfilment* emerging from this shocked and awed account. *Social relations* at work are clearly manifest on the shop floor whether these are in the good natured catcalls from older workers which speak of a rich occupational culture, or in the author's own personal reflection on his relationship to the workplace. Those same mature voices could be taken for the

work of *caring* for others. They represent the breaking down of one *identity* and the gradual building up of another. We see the way the identity of a school boy is sloughed off as an occupational and craft identity is tried on for size. Finally, work as *service* can be read in various aspects of the passage, the illusion to the Great War is one, the wider sense that labor is a service to Pomlet's community and country is another. In his short passage across a machine shop Pomlet traverses and negotiates this complex terrain of work. It must be recognized that Pomlet is reflecting back on his younger self from later life. His observations and analysis was the product of a life spent in this type of employment. Nonetheless we get a sense of the power of work to make strong impressions from the beginnings of a working life. It is perhaps only in later life that we are able to tease out the complexity of what we initially took for granted.

It is worth pausing to think about the tension inherent in various analytical approaches to complexity. There is obviously power and great utility in the ability to break down problems in to smaller or constituent parts. At the same time being able to bear witness to the interconnectedness of ideas like work is equally important. The danger of the former is that we erect arbitrary barriers between aspects of the phenomena we study, imposing structure and order where in reality there is fluidity and leakage. For example in the Pomlet passage above we can see the ways in which identity and social relations cannot be easily disentangled. The opposite is equally apparent when we try to see concepts in overview we often miss important detail. So is there a way to square this circle? If we look back before both the Terkel and the Fraser collections there is another example of writing about work and economic life that might offer one model, namely in the work of Humphrey Jennings.

Humphrey Jennings (1907–1950) was an artist, filmmaker, historian, surrealist and one of the original founders of the proto-sociological Mass Observation movement (Jackson 2004). During his relatively brief life he created a large number of documentary films including those for wartime propaganda purposes and has been described as the only 'true poet of British cinema'. He is slightly less well known for his book *Pandaemonium* (Jennings 1985). In *Pandaemonium* Jennings sought to collect together hundreds of fragments of writing – reportage, diary entry and creative – by people who had lived through and witnessed the industrial revolution in Britain between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. He described these passages as 'images' and his intention was to create what he called an *imaginative history*. Perhaps more than any other aspect of Jennings' career *Pandaemonium* allows us to make claims about the centrality and complexity of work. Posthumously published 35 years after his death *Pandaemonium* contains 372 excerpts, or images to use Jennings own phrase, which reflect the coming of the machine age during a little over two centuries from 1660 to 1886. The images are arranged chronologically from John Milton's 'The Building of Pandaemonium' of 1660 through to William Morris' 'The Day of the Earth' of 1886. These are arranged in to four parts: 'Part One: 1660–1729: Observations and Reports', 'Part Two: 1730–1790: Exploitation'; 'Part Three: 1791–1850: Revolution'; and finally 'Part Four: 1851–1886: Confusion'. In addition the published work also provides the reader with a 'theme sequence' through the material.

Pandaemonium is important in both form and content. The collection and structuring of the material makes manifest Jennings' surrealist sensibility – the juxtaposition of differing images that allow us to look anew upon the process and events of industrialization. While interested in differing views of industrial change his collection seeks to capture a poetic sensibility for that change. Writing in the introduction to *Pandaemonium* Jennings (1985) describes his project as trying to present what he calls an 'imaginative history' of the period and goes on to write:

I do not claim that they represent the truth – they are too varied, even contradictory, for that. But they represent human experience. They are the record of mental events.

Events of the heart. They are facts (the historian's kind of facts) which have been passed through the feelings and the mind of an individual and have forced him to write. And what he wrote is a picture – a coloured picture of them. His personality has coloured them and selected and altered and pruned and enlarged and minimised and exaggerated. Admitted. But he himself is part, was part of the period, even part of the event itself – he was an actor, a spectator in it (Jennings 1985: xxxv).

How then is this related to John Budd's *The Thought of Work*? Well it seems to me that what the volume offers, albeit in a very different format to Jennings' *Pandaemonium*, is a set of juxtaposition, of ways of thinking about work. Each of Budd's chapters takes a different slice into the problem of work and as a consequence a new set of understandings are revealed. The power of Budd's volume, as it was with that of Jennings' methodology, is the way each part is important in its own right but the juxtaposition of ideas allows and provokes new ways of seeing and thus thinking about the subject.

I spoke at a conference a while ago where I was trying to get across a nuanced account of work – precisely this idea of the hardships and positive aspects of especially working class labor. I was trying to develop the idea that if there are 'hidden injuries of class' (Sennett and Cobb 1972) then we need to be attentive to the possibilities of the hidden rewards of class too, and that work is an aspect and a space where these rewards have historically been apparent. I used a quote from Italian oral historian Alessandro Portelli. In his essay 'This Mill won't run no more' Portelli relates the story a steel worker told of his father who going back to his village told his folks:

'You won't believe this, but where I work iron flows like water!' (Portelli 2005, 56).

As I was about to develop the analysis a senior academic shut down the debate by suggesting that this was romantic nostalgia and that steel work was hard, boring and dangerous. The point I wanted to make was that while work in general can be all these things, it can also be more. Seeing positive and valuable characteristics in work does not undermine a critique of work, nor diminish the idea that there may not be a better way to organize economic life. Budd's book then is an important contribution to a richer, more rounded and developed analysis of work. No one who takes the volume seriously can fail to think more fully about what work does to people and what people do to work. Ultimately the power of *The Thought of Work* is that it opens up a new space to think about work.

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The Thought of Work: A Review

Charles J. Whalen

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Abstract *The Thought of Work* makes a vital contribution to industrial relations by offering a fresh examination of the many meanings of work and by clearly illustrating how those different meanings shape our thoughts and actions. The book also shows that work is fundamental to the human experience and highlights work’s complex and textured nature. The volume stops short of tying the different meanings together by means of an integrative framework. But even without such a framework, which can be constructed by integrating *The Thought of Work* with John R. Commons’s *Industrial Goodwill*, Budd makes it clear that work is a fully human activity—not merely an *economic, psychological, or social* endeavor. Accordingly, *The Thought of Work* deserves a wide audience.

Key words Industrial relations · John R. Commons · Labor problems

In the early 20th Century, John R. Commons made the University of Wisconsin the center of industrial relations scholarship in the United States. Today, the Midwest is again at the forefront of such scholarship, only now the spotlight is on the University of Minnesota because of the outstanding contributions of John W. Budd. *The Thought of Work* (Budd 2011) solidifies Budd’s position as one of the nation’s preeminent scholars of industrial relations.¹

A century ago, the field of industrial relations focused on what were then called “labor problems.” Commons argued that such problems—unemployment, labor-management strife, and lack of worker loyalty, for example—could not be studied adequately or resolved effectively without looking through a variety of lenses. In particular, his *Industrial Goodwill*

¹For Budd’s earlier works, see, for example, Budd (2004) and Befort and Budd (2009).

The author is principal analyst, Macroeconomic Analysis Division, Congressional Budget Office. The views expressed in this article are those of the author and should not be interpreted as those of the Congressional Budget Office.

C. J. Whalen (✉)

Congressional Budget Office, Ford House Office Building, 4th Floor, Second and D Streets, SW,
Washington, DC 20515-6925, USA
e-mail: Charles.Whalen@cbo.gov

(Commons 1919) described labor alternatively as a commodity, machine, reciprocal relationship, national resource, cornerstone of democracy, and source of solidarity.² Commons stressed that such lenses shape business personnel practices, union strategies, labor-market policies, and all other aspects of the employment relationship.

Now, *The Thought of Work* makes a vital contribution to industrial relations by offering a fresh examination of the many meanings of work and by clearly illustrating how those different meanings shape our thoughts and actions. The book also shows that work is fundamental to the human experience and—eschewing construction of a grand synthesis of perspectives—highlights work’s complex and textured nature. The volume stops short of tying the different meanings together by means of an integrative framework. But even without such a framework, which can be constructed by drawing on *Industrial Goodwill*, Budd makes it clear that work is a fully human activity—not merely an *economic, psychological, or social* endeavor. Accordingly, *The Thought of Work* deserves a wide audience.³

Excitement, Frustration and the Conceptions of Work

In his Preface, Budd (p. ix) explains that *The Thought of Work* was motivated by a combination of excitement and frustration. He was excited to discover that work is studied by scholars from “an impressive breadth of disciplines” and that their research reveals work is not only complex but also deeply important. Yet he was also frustrated to observe that the importance of work is often overlooked in public discourse and that scholars often “fail to appreciate the richness of the research on work that is located outside their own disciplines.”

His finished product is a multidisciplinary discussion of work that features ten conceptions and their implications. The discussion begins with two opposing conceptions: work as a burden on humankind and work as a source of human freedom.⁴ Then it continues by examining work, in turn, as: a commodity, an activity done by members of a community, an unpleasant activity (“disutility”), a means of personal fulfillment, a social relation, a means of caring for others, a source of identity, and a form of service.⁵

Conceptions Matter and Work is Important

To be sure, Budd is not the first to survey work since Commons. However, *The Thought of Work* makes its mark by ambitiously drawing on the full range of human history and academic research (over 800 sources!) to show that conceptions of work really do matter. Those conceptions structure our understandings and experiences. They provide frames of reference, norms, and values. And they give rise to attitudes that individuals and organizations translate into specific practices. Budd concludes, “Researchers study particular aspects of work, workers expect certain things out of their work, business leaders implement

² According to Commons (1919, 37–61), labor can be seen through the lens of multiple interpretations of democracy and solidarity. He also acknowledges there may be other conceptions of labor (Commons 1919, 62).

³ Budd (p. 2) defines work as “purposeful human activity involving physical or mental exertion that is not undertaken solely for pleasure and that has economic or symbolic value.” As such, work can be paid or unpaid and can be done within or outside the home.

⁴ This is how Budd defines work as freedom: work is “a way to achieve independence from nature or other human beings and to express human creativity” (p. 14).

⁵ As with Commons, Budd recognizes there is often room for multiple interpretations of a given conception of work.

particular employment practices, workers' rights advocates push for specific protections, policymakers enact employment regulations of a certain kind, judges interpret employment and labor laws in particular ways, and social approval and economic resources accrue to some individuals but not others—all because of how people think about work" (pp. 184–185).

The Thought of Work also drives home the message that work is fundamental to the human experience. We spend much of our adulthood working. Work affects our conception of time; shapes our daily lives; confers income and status; and molds how societies are organized.⁶ In fact, social institutions evolve not only with the *types* of work that people do, but also with *where* they work—a society in which most people work in offices and factories is bound to be considerably different than one in which they work in the home, for instance. Even debates over capitalism, socialism, and communism are rooted in struggles over work, Budd writes (p. 11).

Room for Synthesis or Integration?

Budd argues that work is too complex and dynamic to be captured by a single conception. Instead of trying to synthesize conceptions, he stresses that they collectively provide the basis for critical examination and appreciation of the richness of work: "We need to analyze the ways in which the various conceptualizations are complementary, and from this multidisciplinary approach create richer understandings of work that reflect its true breadth and deep importance" (p. 186). To that end, *The Thought of Work* succinctly offers multiple perspectives on a variety of matters involving work and employment—including jobs, wages, working conditions, human-resource management, employment discrimination, workplace change, and the meaning of work in the present age of global capitalism.

Budd also argues that different conceptions of work intersect with broader social concerns. To illustrate his point—and to underscore the complex and textured nature of work—the discussion of work as a commodity is accompanied by a discussion of alienation; the chapter on work done by members of a community ("work as occupational citizenship") gives attention to human rights; and the examination of work as caring explores gender relations. In addition, his multidisciplinary approach paves the way for exploring how each perspective on work offers unique insight into how societies define human nature.⁷

The Thought of Work stops short of presenting an integrative framework to show how its various conceptions of work are complementary, but the earlier *Industrial Goodwill* hints at such a framework. Like *The Thought of Work*, Commons's book stresses that each perspective on work is part of a larger whole; therefore, any single conception, standing by itself, is incomplete. Yet, *Industrial Goodwill* contains an additional element: it presents its various conceptions in an order that underscores how different views combine to generate a richer understanding of labor problems. In particular, Commons's volume begins with conceptions that strip labor of its human and social content (labor as a commodity or machine) and then

⁶ Regarding the observation that work shapes our lives, Budd notes that work influences meal and sleep patterns, the timing of recreation, and even the size and composition of households (p. 11).

⁷ According to Budd, "To see work as freedom is to define humans as compelled to master nature and create things. To embrace work as disutility is to specify human nature as rational, self-interested, atomistic, and largely materialistic. Emphasizing the personal fulfillment element of work casts humans as seeking inner satisfaction, while a perspective that recognizes work as service shifts our deepest intentions outward toward others and perhaps toward a higher spiritual purpose. And to see work as a social relation is to characterize human nature as fundamentally concerned with how we relate to others, and perhaps as driven to dominate others" (p. 181).

moves to conceptions that introduce social relations, first at the level of the enterprise (industrial goodwill) and later at the level of society as a whole (labor as a national resource, for instance). A similar framework could be used to organize Budd's many conceptions.

A Fully Human Activity

Even without an integrative framework, *The Thought of Work* demonstrates that work has many dimensions. An economist's conception of work—as a commodity or as disutility—is not enough. A psychologist's conception (work as personal fulfillment or identity) or even a sociologist's conception (work as a social relation) is also incomplete. In other words, work is not only “a central feature of human existence” (p. 18), but also a *fully human* activity (p. 186).

Because of its clear and insightful examination of such an important subject, *The Thought of Work* deserves the widest possible audience of students, scholars, workers, managers, and policymakers. It also deserves a wide audience because not all dimensions of work are regularly represented in public discourse, which means we run the risk of having an impaired understanding of this vital aspect of our lives.⁸

Of course, industrial relations is the only scholarly discipline that can insist upon a multidisciplinary study of work and ensure attention to the full spectrum of conceptions of work. So, in the end, Budd's book is implicitly a case for revitalizing industrial relations as an academic enterprise.⁹ John R. Commons would be pleased.

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⁸ Budd argues that the notion of work as occupational citizenship is especially overlooked these days (despite having important religious and legal underpinnings). For that reason, the chapter on this conception may be the most important of his survey. According to Budd, when work is conceptualized as occupational citizenship, it is “not a commodity but an activity pursued by human members of a community with inherent equal worth who are entitled to certain rights and standards of dignity and self-determination” (p. 59).

⁹ For a related examination of that subject, see Whalen (2008), which includes a chapter by Budd.

Introduction to Part Two of the Symposium on *The Thought of Work*

Victor G. Devinatz

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I am most pleased to present the second part of the symposium on the *The Thought of Work* in this issue's Perspectives section. The first part of this symposium was published in the December 2012 issue of the journal. It included three essays written by Professor Marion Crain, the Wiley B. Rutledge Professor of Law at the Washington University School of Law; Dr. Tim Strangleman, Professor of Sociology at the University of Kent (United Kingdom); and Dr. Charles Whalen, principal analyst in the Macroeconomic Analysis Division of the Congressional Budget Office in response to Dr. John W. Budd's recently-published volume, *The Thought of Work*. In this issue, Dr. Budd, the Industrial Relations Land Grant Chair in the Department of Work and Organizations at the University of Minnesota, responds to these three essays while further reflecting and elaborating on a number of ideas first presented in his ground-breaking book.

If any of the readers of this symposium are interested in commenting on this symposium in the journal's pages, please do not hesitate to contact me. Other symposiums on important employment relations topics are planned for future issues of the *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*. If any of the journal's readers have suggestions for symposiums on specific topics, please do not hesitate to contact me. I hope that you enjoy the second part of this symposium and find it most illuminating.

V. G. Devinatz (✉)
Department of Management & Quantitative Methods, Illinois State University,
Normal, IL 61790-5580, USA
e-mail: vgdevin@ilstu.edu

The Thought of Work in Employment Relations

John W. Budd

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The December 2012 issue of this journal included three essays by Marion Crain, Tim Strangleman, and Charles Whalen commenting on my 2011 book *The Thought of Work* (Budd 2011). I am grateful to Victor Devinatz for commissioning these essays and I am deeply honored that these distinguished individuals devoted some of their scarce work time to engage with my work. The three essays contain precisely the type of reflections on work and analyses of work-related institutions that I hoped my book would stimulate. In particular, *The Thought of Work* seeks to bring together diverse perspectives on work to promote a fuller multidisciplinary understanding of this essential part of the human experience, and aims to demonstrate the importance of how we think about work for how work is experienced.

Tim Strangleman's essay engagingly reveals the deep complexities of work. Workers' oral histories are a vivid reminder that we experience work in many different ways; indeed, work is so richly layered that these experiences are frequently contradictory. As captured by one of the oral histories, it is easy to both love and hate your work at the same time, and to find it enriching while also wishing you didn't have to do it. Marian Crain's essay insightfully demonstrates that how we think about work matters for how work-related institutions are structured, in this case, labor and employment law. And again, the complexities and tensions inherent within work are evident in that the National Labor Relations Act's embrace of work as what I call occupational citizenship rests uneasily in a broader legal system underpinned by the employment-at-will doctrine's embrace of work not as occupational citizenship but as a commodity.¹

Charles Whalen's essay importantly reminds us of the enduring nature of our struggles with conceptualizing work while also questioning whether *The Thought of Work* could have further developed an integrative framework. The framework developed in *The Thought of Work* consists of ten fundamental conceptualizations of work—work as a curse, freedom, a commodity, occupational citizenship, disutility, personal fulfillment, a social relation, caring

¹Also see Befort and Budd (2009) for a discussion of the contradictory intellectual foundations of U.S. labor and employment law.

J. W. Budd (✉)

Center for Human Resources and Labor Studies Carlson School of Management,
University of Minnesota, 321 19th Avenue South, #3-300, Minneapolis, MN 55455-0438, USA
e-mail: jbudd@umn.edu

for others, identity, and service. Each of these conceptualizations affects how work is understood, experienced, and analyzed. Individually, the conceptualizations fundamentally shape who and what is valued in society, perceptions of freedom and social integration, identity construction, evaluations of worker well-being, the legitimacy and design of human resource management practices, support for labor unions and labor standards, and how one serves God. When taken together, the ten conceptualizations can replace the usual fragmentary approaches to understanding work with a comprehensive approach that not only promotes a deep understanding of work, but that also establishes the fundamental importance of work for the human experience.

The essays have richly and explicitly demonstrated the usefulness of this framework, but have also implicitly illustrated the difficulty of finding one integrative framework. Specifically, I believe that the best way to integrate these conceptualizations depends on the application. For example, the set of complementarities and contrasts of the conceptualizations that helps us best understand employment and labor law is not necessarily the set of complementarities and contrasts that helps us best understand how individuals experience work. Rather, my intent with the framework of ten conceptualizations developed in *The Thought of Work* is to provide the building blocks for more integrated approaches tailored to various applications.

A scholarly embrace of the complexity of work not only requires greater multidisciplinary approaches to work, but also being more explicit in recognizing the conceptualizations of work that we employ in our analyses. Such explicitness would help interdisciplinary collaboration and make it easier to recognize the aspects of work that we commonly overlook in our own discipline-focused analyses. This includes a need for greater explicitness in conceptualizing work within the academic domain represented by this journal—namely, employment relations.

Karl Marx (1867: 195) famously challenged the classical economists' reduction of the employment relationship to an exchange of commodities in the labor market because this relegated the actual nature of work to a "hidden abode of production" and prevented an accurate understanding of the employment relationship. Many scholars of the employment relationship have successfully taken up part of this challenge—the rejection of labor as a commodity has long been a hallmark of the theory and practice of human resources and industrial relations, and such scholarship emphasizes the importance of human resource management policies as well as micro and macro-level institutions, not just labor markets, for understanding the employment relationship. But in much work on the employment relationship, work itself continues to be, at best, narrowly modeled or, at worst, largely overlooked.

Pluralist and critical industrial relations scholarship on the employment relationship has focused more on the institutions that govern work than on the nature of work itself.² This scholarship may have entered the hidden abode of production, but it has not yet fully discovered the theories of work that provide a foundation for a deep understanding of the employment relationship. Unitarist scholarship in human resource management more closely looks at the nature of work and jobs, but tends to have fairly narrow views of work as personal fulfillment and perhaps identity.

Employment relations scholarship can and needs to do better. Other disciplines in the social and behavioral sciences have identified various theories of work that are more concrete in nature than the industrial relations' conceptualization of work as occupational

² For a description of the unitarist, pluralist, and critical approaches to employment relations scholarship, see Budd and Bhawe (2008, 2010).

citizenship and that go beyond the fulfillment-oriented conceptualization favored in human resource management. This theorizing on the nature of work should be explicitly integrated into employment relations scholarship to foster a richer understanding of work and the employment relationship.

But the complexity of work means that this integration into employment relations scholarship requires a multidisciplinary approach. With a sharp academic division of labor, conceptualizations of work are typically used individually or in small subsets—such as commodity and disutility by economists, a social relation and sometimes identity by sociologists, a social relation, identity, and caring for others by feminist scholars, or personal fulfillment by psychologists and human resource management scholars. Consequently, the various disciplinary literatures tend to universalize work—for example, from an economics perspective, work is always painful; from a psychological perspective, workers always desire intrinsic rewards. In constructing a multidisciplinary approach to work within employment relations, it should not be a question of which conceptualization is correct, but of what can we learn about work from incorporating all of them.

As an application, consider the question of conflict and consent in the employment relationship. Labor process theory is grounded in the social relation aspect of work and thus emphasizes socially-constructed power relations and norms in analyzing the tensions between and determinants of conflict and consent. A multidisciplinary conceptualization of work can further add to our understanding of the employment relationship by broadening the theorizing on the sources and nature of conflict and consent in the employment relationship (see Table 1). In other words, a multifaceted approach to work provides broader insights regarding two key questions: 1) why do employees not deterministically fully convert their potential work effort (“labor power”) into actual effort (“labor”), and 2) how can employers obtain higher levels of actual effort?

Conceptualizing work as disutility highlights the aspects of work that are burdensome such that employer-employee conflict in the employment relationship stems from an employee’s preference for leisure. When work is disutility then, employees will consent to high effort levels because of the need or preference for money. Managers who think of work in this way therefore emphasize the use of human resources policies that provide strong financial incentives, such as pay-for-performance plans, and employees in such organizations will experience work in ways in which monetary rewards are paramount. When work is conceptualized as personal fulfillment, in contrast, conflict is seen as resulting from unsatisfactory and unfulfilling working conditions. Human resources professionals who embrace this conceptualization therefore seek to increase employee performance by implementing practices that satisfy workers’ psychological needs through fair treatment, a variety of intrinsic rewards, and placement into appropriate jobs. Workers in such organizations will experience work differently than those in extrinsically-focused organizations because of different underlying ideas about work.

If work is seen as a social relation characterized by antagonistic employee-employer interests, then conflict in the employment relationship stems from conflicts of interests and power imbalances. Moreover, when work is a social relation, then norms are powerful determinants of behavior. As such, employees can be guided and consent achieved through a combination of normative and structural control devices. Jobs can be deskilled to shift the balance of power in the workplace from skilled workers to managers, assembly lines and employee scripts can constrain employees to behave in specific ways, mentoring programs can be used to shape and discipline the attitudes of junior employees, and self-managed work teams can be used to create performance norms based on peer pressure.

Table 1 Multidisciplinary conceptualizations of work and work motivation

Work as...	Source of conflict / barriers to full work effort	Implications for work motivation
A curse	Work is painful, monotonous, etc.	Preach acceptance
Disutility	Work is painful; leisure is preferable	Provide source of income and financial incentives
Personal fulfillment	Work is stressful and unfulfilling	Structure work to be intrinsically rewarding
Freedom	Work is regimented, constrained, and scripted	Allow for creativity
Occupational citizenship	Work lacks minimum standards and voice	Guarantee minimum standards and voice
A social relation	Work is structured to serve the interests of the powerful	Structure work to force compliance; create norms that disguise inequalities and that obligate effort
Caring for others	Work is structured in ways that devalue caring for others and that serve the interests of men	Structure work to reduce discrimination and conflicts with other spheres of human life
Identity	Work creates a negative or contradictory sense of self	Structure work to create a desirable sense of self
Service	Work is viewed in ways that devalue serving others rather than commodity production	Structure work to value and provide opportunities for serving others

When work is conceptualized as caring for others, conflict and poor employee performance result from work being structured in ways that devalue caring for others and that serve the interests of men. Managers who embrace this perspective emphasize the construction of anti-discrimination policies and family-friendly policies. For those who conceptualize work as identity, employment relationship conflict is seen as resulting from threats to self-identity, and consequently employee consent can be crafted through work that promotes positive self-identity. Therefore, various approaches to managing employees and the accompanying human resources practices are rooted in alternative ideas about work.

Note carefully that entries in Table 1 are intended to be read as complements, not substitutes. Table 1 is not meant to suggest that conflict stems from work being painful and less desirable than leisure, *or* that employment relationship conflicts arise when work is not fulfilling. This is exactly the monolithic approach found within various disciplines. Rather, the employment relations approach to work should seek to combine the insights that come from seeing some forms of work as painful, other forms of work as personally fulfilling, and the like. Moreover, employment relations scholars and professionals would do well to remember that not only might individuals vary in their views of work, but also that each individual might have multiple views of work. This significantly complicates how to think about work motivation, employee engagement, reward systems, and other key topics in human resources.

Opening up the conceptualization of work to allow for diverse ways in which work is experienced also provides the needed basis for understanding gender in employment relations. A true understanding of gender will not result from adding “women’s issues” to the list of employment relations concerns without allowing work itself to have a gendered component (Wajcman 2000). A monolithic approach to work also fosters an exogenous view that work must necessarily be a certain way (e.g., painful) and obscures more penetrating

analyses that see work as endogenously determined by social institutions (Spencer 2009). A richer approach to conceptualizing work therefore opens up space for questioning the determinants of the nature of the employment relationship, and for considering various alternatives. It is my hope that *The Thought of Work* lays a foundation for this and other types of multidisciplinary approaches to work that can promote a richer understanding of the employment relationship than is possible with a monolithic or unidimensional approach to work.

In sum, the *thought* of work is richly textured. In their daily lives, workers might experience necessity, dread, fulfillment, or a range of other emotions when thinking about work. As scholars, we might identify financial, psychic, or social rewards and controls. In all cases, work is too important to take for granted, but too dynamic to be universalized in monolithic terms, and too complex to be reduced a single conceptualization. Rather, we need to analyze the ways in which diverse conceptualizations of work are complementary, and from this multidisciplinary approach, create richer understandings of work that reflect its true breadth and deep importance.

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