

Does Work Make Us Free?

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Abstract

The origins of Man are in Magic Thought. The evolution of Human Beings over six million years is in fact the history of the rationalization of Magic Thought. The goal was the political control of masses through the fundamental mechanism of the feeling of guilt. Here we can find the roots and the basis of capitalism. The division of labour and the protestant spirit. The name “Unreason” was applied to Magic Thought as a part of this process. In the past, Reason gave psychiatry the mandate of rationalizing Unreason. Each of us is a Russian doll, in which each internal self represents all of our previous ages. Our society keeps magic thought confined to infancy. But reason is like a thin film which surrounds all the magmatic internal area of Unreason and the original Magic Thought. This film gets torn frequently and easily. Thus some people hear the voices of both living and inanimate beings, coming out of the wind or of streams in forests. And then Reason says that this is an illness – mental illness. Psychiatry acts as carrier of the “social mandate of control”. This is the mandate on behalf of Reason for Unreason to be rationalized. The truth is simply that what the collective mind, psychiatrists and justice call Unreason or Madness is actually other people’s Reason. From Immanuel Kant onwards, we know that the world is constructed by the self. We don’t know reality, which, by extraordinary intuition, he called “the thing in itself”. In fact, he was the first to understand psychosis. However, as the Ey rightly says, in this world of Reason the individual subject builds his own world through collaboration and in tune with others. But building the world also means building the self. Work is a form of slavery and a form of dependence. An addictive activity which hurts us and at the same time makes us happy. Work is simply a need for everybody. A need but also a right.

This is one of the roles of States, which they delegate to the so-called free private initiative. In capitalism, which does not guarantee work for everybody, the state and society as a whole have simply given up on one of their responsibilities.

Work makes us free to the extent to which it brings about integration. At the end of the day integration is the only true therapeutic practice. Psychiatry derives from the tradition of the total institution, which was invented with a single goal in mind: to exclude and repress subjectivity and diversity. From this point of view, particular damage has

been caused by the distinction, made at managerial level, between the Health and Social sectors. The truth is that the real cure for mental illness, just as for any other disability, is integration. And there is no better integration than that which involves constructing the world together.

As is known the phrase “work makes free” still has a sinister ring related to recent history, displayed as it still is over the entry to the Auschwitz concentration camp: “Arbeit macht frei”. This phrase, which is certainly not devoid of internal logic, was used to attempt to legitimize the horror of the camps. In fact, this logic had simply been adopted from the philosophy and practice of total psychiatric institutions. In accordance with what has been said so far, work as a therapeutic measure has no place outside a free contract with an employer, by making the most of the creative or technical abilities of each individual, which is underlined by the fact that each person is paid for what he actually produces.

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Reason and Unreason

The origins of Man are in Magic Thought. By that I mean that polytheism devoid of any hierarchy in which the complex feedback of Nature comes together in a representation of the Universal Spirit. But every creature and every object in this world, both living and inanimate, has an existing and speaking spirit within. The evolution of Human Beings over six million years is in fact the history of the rationalization of Magic Thought. Attributing all divine qualities to a single spirit is but the endpoint of this process. Man created God in his own image, thus creating a single entity and endowing it with his superior spiritual qualities. All of this was at the basis of individualism and of the fear of death. The goal was the political control of masses through the fundamental mechanism of the feeling of guilt. Let us remember John Lennon’s utopia: “and no religion too”. Here too we can find the roots and the basis of capitalism. The division of labour and the protestant spirit. The protestant spirit and the capitalist ethics. The name “Unreason” was applied to Magic Thought as a part of this process. The latter lives on in all of us. In the past, Reason gave psychiatry the mandate, through the work of Philippe Pinel, of rationalizing Unreason. Each of us is a Russian doll, in which each internal self represents all of our previous ages. The nucleus is us as babies. Our society keeps magic thought confined to infancy. The supernatural becomes present through so-called reality. But reason is like a thin film which surrounds all the magmatic internal area of Unreason and the original Magic Thought. We

actually trespass this film or boundary in sleep and in dreams. That is when all of us hear voices and see things which don't exist. However, these do not exist in so-called Reality dominated by Reason. This film gets torn frequently and easily. Thus some people hear the voices of both live and inanimate beings, coming out of the wind or of streams in forests. And then Reason says that this is an illness – mental illness. Saint Francis heard the voice of the wolf and of birds. He was made a saint. Today he would be a psychiatric patient.

The main and original transgression consists in claiming mental capacity for ourselves. That is how Man elevated himself to the role of self-proclaimed rational deity. The first and most significant sin consists in emphasizing the self through divinity. Hence the need to feel guilty. Thus we have a double identity, just as centaurs in European classical culture, and as Quezalcoatl, the feathered serpent of the Aztec tradition. Part of us feels guilty for the other part which self-proclaimed itself free, in other words divine.

Franco Basaglia, the great reformer of Italian psychiatry, spoke of psychiatry as carrier of the “social mandate of control”. This was the mandate on behalf of Reason for Unreason to be rationalized. Hence clinical practice and the mandate to treat even when going against an individual's will and irrespective of him consenting or not.

Other people's reason

The truth is simply that what the collective mind, psychiatrists and justice call Unreason or Madness is actually other people's Reason. Everybody has his own, and it is culturally determined. Our individual identities are determined by at least the three generations before ours. And each person's individual reason is based on this personal identity.

Official psychiatry makes a reference to magic thought only in a single case. That is in the description and analysis of obsessive neurosis. The neurotic person, held hostage by himself and his own rituals, constantly refers to a being which transcends the world, without necessarily calling it “god”. It is not surprising that, according to psychiatry, obsessive neurosis is midway along the road to psychosis.

The organic issue

All of this does not deny, except perhaps in appearance, the organic nature of mental illness. The apparent conflict between social-psychological theories and organic explanations of mental illness is simply a false problem. My speaking is organic, but this is totally unrelated to what I say. Psychiatry is like modern

physics: there is no contradiction between quantum theory and the wave theory of light. They are both true together. There is contradiction only in appearance.

Building the world together with others

From Immanuel Kant onwards, we know that the world is constructed by the self. We don't know reality, which, by extraordinary intuition, he called "the thing in itself". In fact, he was the first to understand psychosis. However, as the EY rightly says, in this world of Reason the individual subject builds his own world through collaboration and in tune with others. But building the world also means building the self. Thus the child, as from when he begins to play, constructs himself together with others. Especially through playing with other children. This is the construction of the self within the construction of the world together with others. However, work, for adults, is simply the continuation of childhood play: this irresistible need to communicate through hands and objects.

Work as slavery

Work is a form of slavery and a form of dependence. An addictive activity which hurts us and at the same time makes us happy. It is part of that Reality which is never unilateral, but is different for each person and differently interpreted. In sum, work is simply a need for everybody. A need but also a right.

This is one of the roles of States, which they delegate to so-called free private initiative. In capitalism, which does not guarantee work for everybody, the state and society as a whole have simply given up on one of their responsibilities.

Freedom from work: integration

Work clearly makes us free to the extent to which it brings about integration. At the end of the day integration is the only true therapeutic practice. The strength of psychotropic drugs is linked to the huge power of multinational pharmaceutical companies. Just as oil and banking multinational corporations, through their enormous influence they impose an ideological vision of mental illness upon psychiatrists, and through them upon public opinion as a whole. The practice of electric shock therapy also derives from this vision. This practice is still common in countries with very advanced capitalist economies or high levels of technological development. This is a highly ideological practice, in that it adheres to the principle of the suppression of the illness and its symptoms. We believe that the role of psychiatry, or rather of Mental Health Services, is to negotiate with the wholly human symptoms and expressions of illness, rather than repress them. But

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psychiatry derives from the tradition of the total institution, which was invented with a single goal in mind. To exclude and repress subjectivity and diversity.

From this point of view, particular damage has been caused by the distinction, made at managerial level, between the Health and Social sectors. This distinction rapidly spread all over the world, and was introduced in Italy by the socialist Craxi in 1985. In psychiatry, this approach is false and indicates a fundamental error. Investing in integration can bring about savings in expenditures for treatment. The truth is that the real cure for mental illness, just as for any other disability, is integration. And there is no better integration than that which involves constructing the world together.

The wolf society and the bear society

Given that “αντροπος πολιτικον ζοον”, man is a social animal, we are by nature more similar to wolves than to bears. The former live in packs, the latter are known to be solitary. For us humans, the cure for mental illness is primarily to bring the individual back to the dimension of social interaction.

Work makes free and Nazism

As is known the phrase “work makes free” still has a sinister ring related to recent history, displayed as it still is over the entry to the Auschwitz concentration camp: “Arbeit macht frei”. This phrase, which is certainly not devoid of internal logic, was used to attempt to legitimize the horror of the camps. In fact, this logic had simply been adopted from the philosophy and practice of total psychiatric institutions. A brilliant example is that of the Psychiatric Hospital in Guetersloh, in Westphalia, where the founder and director, Dr. Hermann Simon, had developed the whole institution on the basis of work therapy as from 1914. All patients, well before psychotropic drugs were invented, participated in the management of the asylum, divided into ten teams of workers. Each team was led by a nurse and the medical director “prescribed” the type of work most suited to the individual patient.

A society of free contracts and production together

In accordance with what has been said so far, work as a therapeutic measure has no place outside a free contract with an employer, by making the most of the creative or technical abilities of each individual, which is underlined by the fact that each person is paid for what he actually produces. In 1973 in Trieste the first social cooperative in history was founded, transforming pre-existing institutional

ergotherapy (of Simon) into a huge cooperative for work integration. The flowers in the park of San Giovanni, Trieste's asylum, were no longer tended to by locked-up madmen, but by free workers who were cared for and integrated, and who, importantly, were paid for their work.

Timeliness of Moses. Ethics and finance

We live in a time to which the biblical myth of Moses has become relevant again. He came back down from the mountain clutching Ethics (the commandments carved in stone slabs) and found that his people had begun to worship the golden veal. Today, politics is dominated by the logic of profit-hungry and speculation-prone multinationals, in particular financial institutions. Faced with this common practice of favouring and adoring the golden veal, it is now time to express all our anger in a constructive way, and recover the values of universal ethics.

Legislation on work

As I already proposed during the last CEFEC-Social Firms congress in Meran in October 2011, I would like to take advantage of this yearly European-level event, and of this constructive international meeting, to re-launch a comparison between different national legal frameworks on work integration, with the aim of developing a draft of European legislation on this issue. Italian legislation, specifically Law 381 of 1991, appears to be the most advanced and complete in this respect. It states that, in exchange for tax exemptions on social and pension contributions, which are paid by the Regions, social cooperatives must adhere to their role of employing workers at risk of social exclusion, who should constitute at least one third of their staff. Thus the cooperatives are not protected workshops, where the production of marketable goods is limited or non-existent, but neither are they completely "normal" firms. In Italy, public authorities may also assign certain public works (e.g. the upkeep of parks) to these social cooperatives through direct agreement, without having to issue a call for tenders.

Conclusion

When a psychically disabled person works as if he had no disabilities, together with people without disabilities, his magical world, which we normally call "symptoms", and which is normally referred to as "Unreason" or "madness" by the world of Reason, is respected, and it maintains its compatibility with the world considered to be of Reason. Thus it is possible to appreciate the value of

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individual subjectivity, setting a positive trend in relation to the role of the mentally ill patient, as opposed to the negative or stigmatising role of marginal person who often takes the blame. In other words, this is what we normally mean by “cure”.