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Occupational rôle: religious, economic and social

[Florian Znaniecki Poznan Archive]

Concept of "calling" (Beruf, vocation) in Max Weber's Die protestanti- sche Ethik u. d. Geist d. Kapitalismus.

Luther's view: Die mönchische Lebensführung (...) gilt ihm auch als Produkt egoistischer, den Weltpflichten sich entziehenden Lieblosigkeit. Im Kontrast dem erscheint die weltliche Berufsarbeit als äusseres Ausdruck der Nächstenliebe und dies wird in allerdings höchst weltfremder Art und im einem fast grotesken Gegensatz zu Adam Smiths bekannten Sätzen (1)

(1) Nicht vom Wohlwollen des Fleischers, Bäckers oder Bauers erwarten wir unser Mittagessens, sondern von ihren Rücksicht auf ihren eigenen Vorteil; wir wenden uns nicht an ihre Nächstenliebe, sondern an ihre Selbstsucht, und sprechen ihnen nie von unseren Bedürfnissen, sondern stets nur von ihren Vorteil" (W. of N. I, 2)

insbesondere durch den Hinweis darauf begründet, dass die Arbeitsteilung jeden einzelnen zwinge, für andere zu arbeiten. Indessen diese, wie man sieht, wesentlich scholastische Begründung verschwindet bald wieder und es bleibt, mit steigenden Nachdruck betont, der Hinweis darauf, dass die Erfüllung der innerweltlichen Pflichten unter allen Umständen der einzige Weg sei, Gott wohlgefallen, dass sie und nur sie Gottes Wille sei und deshalb jeder erlaubte Beruf vor Gott schlechterdings gleich viel gelte. (71)

[Thus, an essentially individualistic view of vocation triumphs, more fully in calvinism - and Weber individuating Luther's idea seems to follow this conception]

What is worth the classical economic view of the occupational rôle? Is the occupational function not a moral duty toward others, only a way of making a living for one's self, entirely subordinate to self-interest? Is the whole economic order an order of egoistic compromises?

That such is the tendency among the "toilers", no doubt. Weber's work important for the rationalistic religious justification of the tendecy. No doubt also that such is the legal point of view. But are not these points of view only external, superfacial static cross-cuts of situations the real significance of which appears only when taken in the whole dynamic system from which they are isolated?

In each particular situation appeal is made to self-interest: "if you do this for me, I shall do that for you", "I shall do this for you under the condition that you will do that for me". But the personal rôle is not the mere sum of such situations. The latter could not exist and regularly repeat themselves outside of a dynamic system.

The situation of a butcher, baker, peasant exchanging goods for money only possible in a social order. And this is not a legal order of explicit or tacit contracts. A contract is a conventional relation between objective services. Its realization is conditional: if service A, then service B; service A has been performed, therefore service B must be prerformed. Whereas within social rôle as a dynamic system all the elements are unconditionally determined, though each in relation to the others. They are objectively determined for every person who participates in the system as a whole, whoever has subjective reason for participating and whether he has or not made a contract for any possible exchange.

The baker is a person who is defined as a social being who has come into a social circle or community with certain personal characteristics which make him capable and willing to act a baker's rôle: a sound body framed in baker's skill, a normal mind with the necessary practical knowledge, a durable disposition to fill the position and perform the function of a baker, a sufficiently honest and pleasant character, a necessary minimum of capital. This is the primary element of the system without which no personal rôle can be realized of course: no ghost can be a baker, nor a soulless body, nor anybody whose body is incapable or invalid, devoid of necessary knowledge and disposition.

Next comes the position - not the function as it would seem, though one can obtain the position by beginning to act. The person who wants to be a baker must have his right to be a baker recognized before any actions are demanded of him as his duties. An individual may offer bread for sale which he baked and others may buy it; but he is not yet a baker. He is an agent and object of interconnected actions of egoistic compromise.