Work and the person in the pandemic: towards a generative evolution.

Abstract

According to the results of *The European Workforce Survey 2020*, workers have adapted remarkably readily to the new and exceptional circumstances created by the pandemic and the corresponding containment measures, and shown themselves to be "a resilient workforce" able to draw upon personal ethical qualities such as self-organization, flexibility, responsibility, cooperation, and solidarity to face with individual and subjective resources the general disruption of the external, consolidated organizational system. How will it be possible to capitalize on this passage, so unexpected but at the same time so fundamental for restoring the full relationship between the personal dimension and work activity, and re-establish work in its true anthropological and cosmic value and sustainability? In this paper we will try to answer this question with the help of Max Scheler's phenomenology of work. The hypothesis to be verified is that the evolution of the current form of work, initiated in response to the pandemic, can generate substantial anthropological improvements, if we stop settling ourselves into organizational automatisms and return to activating processes of ethical subjectivation even in the sphere of work.

1. *Work during the Covid-19 pandemic*

  The European Workforce Survey 2020, conducted by Will Gosling, Michela Coppola and Kate McCarthy for Deloitte, begins with the observation that many structural transformations of work were already underway before the Covid-19 emergency, and that the pandemic and associated events have only accelerated and amplified the changes in the who, how and where of work, which were already linked to the proliferation of new digital technologies, demographic evolution, growing social concern about increased inequality, and problems regarding the environment[1]. In effect, as early as the 1980s such astute scholars as Ralph Dahrendorf, Jeremy Rifkin, André Gorz, Ulrick Beck and, in Italy, Francesco Totaro contributed in different ways to the debate on the future of the society of work[2] which in the early 1900s had been described thoroughly on the levels of phenomenology and the sociology of knowledge in Max Scheler's trilogy on work[3].

  However, as the world of work entered into crisis, there were only vague ideas about how to emerge and resume the positive exercise of work in the human and cosmic context. Instead, with the

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[1] W. Gosling, M. Coppola, K. McCarthy, *May the workforce be with you. The voice of the European workforce 2020*, https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/insights/us/articles/emea83757_may-the-workforce-be-with-you/DI_May-the-workforce-be-with-you.pdf .Last access: February 7, 2021.

[2] Cf.: R. Dahrendorf, "Im Entschwinden der Arbeitsgesellschaft: Wandlungen der sozialen Konstruktion des menschlichen Lebens", in «Merkur», 1980, XXXIV, p. 749-760; A. Gorz, *Métamorphoses du travail. Quéte du sens. Critique de la raison économique,* Édition Galilée, Paris 1988; J. Rifkin, *The End of Work: The Decline of the Global Labor Force and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era*, Putnam Publishing Group, New York 1995; U. Beck, *Schöne neue Arbeitswelt. Vision: Weltbürgergesellschaft*, Campus Verlag, Frankfurt a.M. 1999. F. Totaro, *Non di solo lavoro. Ontologia della persona ed etica del lavoro nel passaggio di civiltà*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 1998.

[3] We refer here to the following works of Max Scheler: *Arbeit und Ethik* (1899), in M. Frings und M. Scheler (eds.), *Gesammelte Werke* (from now on GW), 1, "Frühe Schriften", Francke Verlag, Bern und München 1971, pp. 161-195; *Arbeit und Weltanschauung*, GW 6, "Schriften zur Soziologie und Weltanschauungslehre", 1963, pp. 217-239; *Erkenntnis und Arbeit. Eine Studie über Wert und Grenzen des pragmatischen Motivs in der Erkenntnis der Welt*, GW 8, "Die Wissensformen und die Gesellschaft", 1960, pp. 191-382.

Covid-19 pandemic and related measures to limit contagion, paths have been identified and advances have been generated that in the previous condition had been sought in vain.

The Deloitte study, based on questionnaires compiled by 10,000 workers in 7 European nations, delineated the main aspects of how employees have seen their working lives change in recent months.

First of all, many workers held that they have experienced not merely off-site work, but a transition to a more autonomous way of working that 2 out of 3 workers expect to remain in effect even after the pandemic emergency. They deemed that trust, time, a network of colleagues and human factors in general were much more supportive than technological factors. Adaptability has been rediscovered as a "vital skill" for prospering even in the post-Covid market. In addition, the study authors observed that workers experienced and reacted to the pandemic in a broad range of ways, not as a monolithic block, or even according to traditional demographic indices[4].

For example, the data collected by the Center of Studies and Research on the Family of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, through questionnaires administered throughout Italy in March and July 2020, indicate that women and men experienced a substantial worsening of their psychological well-being at home, due to the massive introduction of remote working that was not experienced as "smart working" at all. The stress levels in the family did not decrease, but instead remained high for women; there was a significant worsening of the capacity to deal with the healthcare emergency in a positive way, and an increase in problems related to the balance between private life and work, above all for women, as uncertainty about the resumption of services dedicated to children has meant that families have borne the burden of childcare[5]. One can certainly agree with the Deloitte study affirmation that

«by exposing the vulnerabilities of various segments of the workforce and underlining inequalities, Covid-19 has brought ethical issues around employment to the fore and further raised the standards which companies are expected to attain»[6].

This situation calls us to move past the economic and organizational level problems of work that have emerged during the pandemic, and to enter into the personal dimension, in order to return to the roots that the "modern invention" of work has hidden[7], bringing about, on the contrary, under the pressure of growing needs for specialization and functional integration of the various socio-economic systems, a progressive loss of the anthropological capacity for subjectification of the

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[4] Gosling, Coppola, McCarthy, *May the workforce be with you*, cit., p. 3.
[5] Cf.: https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/lavoro-agile-la-pandemia-sfida-le-famiglie-italiane-ADpDLJy (last access: February 8, 2021).
[6] Gosling, Coppola, McCarthy, *May the workforce be with you*, cit., p. 2.
[7] Gorz, *Métamorphoses du travail*, cit.

processes of production and realization[8], to the point of transforming work, from the human point of view, into a conduct that is rationally adapted to a goal, independently of any intention of the agent to pursue that goal, which in practice he does not even know[9]. In fact, the goal of his socially productive action comes to him from outside himself, from the organization, which engulfs him and prescribes for him predetermined behavior in function of the objective system in which he works[10].

The data from Deloitte's *European Workforce Survey* supports us in this exploration of the ethics of work. In fact, it is taken as a given that «the work environment has changed substantially in recent months and is unlikely to return to what it was before Covid-19». In the Covid-persistence and post-Covid phases, very probably there is and will be «a hybrid arrangement combining remote and on-site work», making it necessary for businesses, offices, services and workers of all kinds to «rethink the role of the workplace» with the goal, among others, of «creating and nourishing social capital» in workplaces, lacking the physical proximity that, in the past, enormously and inadvertently facilitated interactions, transmission of knowledge and sharing of experiences and visions[11].

And yet, according to the results of the survey, in Europe «workers have adapted remarkably readily to new and exceptional circumstances», such as those introduced by the pandemic and the correlated containment measures, and shown themselves to be "a resilient workforce"[12] able to draw upon personal ethical qualities such as self-organization, flexibility, responsibility, cooperation, and solidarity to face with individual and subjective resources the general disruption of the external, consolidated organizational system.

In this way, we see once again how work is so intrinsic to human life, as did the cultural anthropologists[13] and philosophers of the early 1900s who, on the basis of the Herderian suggestion of man as "deficient being" (*Mängelwesen*) in terms of organic endowment[14], agreed with Saint

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[8] N. Cantatore, *Presentazione. Ritorno al lavoro*, «Pólemos» V, 2-3(2010), pp. 1-3.
http://www.rivistapolemos.it/presentazione-ritorno-al-lavoro/?lang=it (last access: March 10, 2021)
[9] Gorz, *Métamorphoses du travail*, cit.
[10] A. Gorz, *Adieux au prolétariat . Au-delà du socialisme*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 1981.
[11] Gosling, Coppola, McCarthy, *May the workforce be with you*, cit., p. 10.
[12] *Ibidem*.
[13] The cultural anthropologists discovered with wonder that the languages of primitive peoples lacked a term for work Cf.: F. Boas, *The mind of primitive man*, Forgotten Books, London 2012. They explained the paradox with the consideration that in these subsistence communities work was synonymous with life, to the point that there was no need for a specific word to name it. Cf.: M. Kranzberg - J. Gies, *By the Sweat of Thy Brow: Work in the Western World,* G. P. Putnam's Sons/Capricorn Books, New York 1975.
[14] Arnold Gehlen was the one who considered the term "deficient being" (*Mängelwesen*) as succinctly expressive of the anthropological model present in J.G. Herder, "Treatise on the Origin of Language", in M.N. Forster (ed.), *Philosophical Writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge UK 2002. Cf. A. Gehlen, *Man, His Nature and Place in the World*, C. McMillan, K.A. Pillemer (trans.), Columbia University Press, New York 1988.

Thomas[15] and Kant[16] that man exhibits unique biological incompetence and overcomes this lack only through his capacity to work and his talent for action, that is, thanks to his hands and his intelligence[17]!

It is surprising to see how much, in the condition of remote work and of the various forms of work stoppage, caused by the pandemic, ethical personal attitudes have been activated which, effectively, ignore the critical attention, developed after the season of emphasis on work, on both, the alienation-by-work and alienation-in-work[18]. In the situation imposed by Covid-19, workers have made a virtue out of necessity, more or less somehow, so to speak, hosting in their own homes the executive materiality of their work, orphaned by the organization, and embracing the technical and objective goals of work in their own personal project of life. How will it be possible to capitalize on this passage, so unexpected but at the same time so fundamental for restoring the full relationship between the personal dimension and work activity, and re-establish work in its true anthropological and cosmic value and sustainability?

2. *The phenomenology of work*

The phenomenology of work done by Max Scheler in his 1899 essay *Arbeit und Ethik* – before Husserl's phenomenology was launched in 1900-1901 with the publication of the first two volumes of *Logical Investigations* – enables us to enter constructively into the new outlook on work and the person that has opened in a sudden and certainly not desirable way with the spread of the Covid19 pandemic.

What emerges surprisingly from Scheler's essay is that the *eidos* of work is identified with the "division of labor" (*Arbeitsteilung*): all "work" already presupposes the so-called division of labor, notwithstanding the opposite and deceptive linguistic impression[19].

This is documented in the phenomenological description of the most elementary case of work, in which a single man works on a single product. In fact, not even Richard Sennett's artisan, who has personally determined the purpose/goal of his work and personally carried it out from start to finish[20], can avoid the basic division of work, that is the passage from the mental plan of the project to the practical plan of the material execution, from thinking to doing.

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[15] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, 76, 5.

[16] I. Kant, "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim", in R. Louden and G. Zöller (eds.), *Anthropology, History, and Education*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge UK 2007, pp. 107-120.

[17] Gehlen, *Man, His Nature and Place in the World,* cit.

[18] F. Totaro, "Lavoro ed equilibrio antropologico", in Id. (ed.), *Il lavoro come questione di senso*, Eum, Macerata 2009, pp. 308-310. Inoltre, Id., "Il lavoro nel pensiero occidentale", in A. Sala (ed.), *Emergenza-Lavoro. Solidarietà contro disoccupazione*, Piemme, Casale Monferrato 1996, pp. 75-92. Of particular interest is the section entitled "Alienation in work and alienation by work: two critiques of contemporary thought", *Ibi*, pp.83-89. The translation of the Italian texts into English, where not otherwise indicated, is ours.

[19] Scheler, *Arbeit und Ethik*, cit., p. 179. The translation of the German text into English, where not otherwise indicated, is ours.

[20] R. Sennett, *The Craftsman*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 2008.

Scheler specifies that during the actual "work", not even this individual, who works on a single product, can have in his spirit a complete state of attention to the ultimate goal in his mind; rather, he focuses on each proximate goal in turn, «otherwise he will put each subsequent step before the previous one». Thus, even if the purpose or goal in its entirety still belongs to his conscience as a knowledge, such knowledge is not, however, the predominant one during the work[21].

In conclusion, according to Scheler, the *eidos* of work consists in the intrinsic division-of-work into a «practically axiomatic purpose» and into an «intermediate seeking in accordance with it»; the latter is in turn parceled into micro-phases that follow each other according to an «objective regulation by which means become relatively independent ends»; and all this happens originally, even before «the particular tasks are [...] delegated to various people» [22].

Also regarding the unity of action (*Handlung*), Scheler reveals that there is a gap between the intentional level and that of real action. The junction to fill it lies in the dual intentionality of the will that, after having taken on the ideal content/purpose of the action through moral intention, intent, reflection, proposal, and on to decision, passes to "wanting-to do" (*Tunwollen*) and starts the series of activities oriented to the body-alive, that determine the movement of limbs and lead to the lived realization of the content/goal itself or execution (*Ausführung*)[23].

However, Scheler is keen to emphasize that the ethical/subjective investment is maintained throughout the entire act of acting (*Handlung*) and to its completion. Instead, in work the opposite happens: even if the person has thought up the goal/object to realize, as soon as he puts his hand to the work, psychologically he finds himself going through a situation of attentive discontinuity in which the attention separates for the most part from the goal thought up and turns to the process of its execution which, once finished, gives the achieved goal.

According to this description, work differs from action in that it manifests a singular ethical and anthropological vulnerability, inasmuch as the finalizing factor is necessary for the activation of work and its accomplishment, but at the same time even in the most elementary case of work, it must remain external to and distant from the executive process.

This means that the technical-executive segment delegated to the realization/production of the goal is indifferent to the quality of the finalization, which can be ethical-subjectivizing or technical-objectivizing without involving variations of realizative-productive efficiency.

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[21] Scheler, *Arbeit und Ethik*, cit., p. 179.
[22] *Ibi*, p. 180.
[23] M. Scheler, *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik. Neuer Versuch der Grundlegung eine ethischen Personalismus*, GW 2, 1954, p. 137. English edtion: *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values. A New Attempt toward the Foundation of an Ethical Personalism*, M.S. Frings and R.L. Funk (trans.), Northwestern University Press, Evanstone IL, 1973.

In fact, Scheler himself revealed that, since the late feudal era, the division of tasks in work multiplied exponentially and completely banished the general unitary goal from the consciousness of the work activities of individuals. Thus the goal, which was previously objective only for parts of the psychic process, to which however it continued to belong, now became objective for the entire subject and was consigned to absolute monarchs with the support of deism's theory of harmony[24]. For this reason, Liberalism considered the whole of economic life as a rational-natural mechanism in which those who work only for themselves, already with this, without doing anything more, give shape to an optimal state of human society[25].

However, according to Scheler this was an enormous sophistry.

The need for a form that would plan economic life soon returned to the fore and, given the manifest ethical-anthropological vulnerability of work, technical organization was the one to respond, providing objective systems of technical ends to regulate the act of working[26]!

So it came about that, in the dynamics of economics and work, the inefficient spontaneous form of subjective finalization of means was replaced by technical organization with its dense and functional network of means/goals. This also brought with it the swift ascent of technical-work action as unique model of action. Technique, which in the pre-modern era constituted «a means with a finite measure of adequacy to well-defined proximate ends», thus became the only praxis capable of supporting the new vocation of man to dominate over things and himself. As Hans Jonas observed:

«now, *techne* in the form of modern technology has turned into an infinite forward-trust of the race, its most significant enterprise, in whose permanent, self-transcending advance to ever greater things the vocation of man tends to be seen, and whose success of maximal control over things and himself appears as the consummation of his destiny»[27].

Technological action was able to compensate for the *vulnus* that was produced in Modernity on the level of the ethical-anthropological finalization of work, and came to occupy a central position in the system of human purposes and to gain credit as capable of overcoming the present «nakedness of a nihilism in which near-omnipotence is paired with near-emptiness, greatest capacity with knowing least for what ends to use it»[28].

3. Towards an evolution that generates positive interactions between work and person

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[24] Scheler, *Arbeit und Ethik*, cit., p. 180.
[25] *Ibidem*.
[26] *Ibi*, p. 181.
[27] H. Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility. In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*, H. Jonas and D. Herr (trans.), The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1984, p. 9.
[28] *Ibi*, p. 23.

At this point, it seems there is no escape from the situation in which «the realm of making has invaded the space of essential action»[29], to establish the domination of technique as the destiny of the West[30]!

The phenomenology of work conducted by Scheler even sharpened the sensation of irreversibility of the process, in the degree to which it revealed ethical-anthropological vulnerability as intrinsic to the *eidos* of work, which has been and still remains the principal carrier and vehicle of that outcome.

At least, this awareness protects us from embarking on useless attempts to overcome the division-of-work, given that this is manifestly the unavoidable condition of human work. In this way, in contrast to what may seem to appear immediately, we can realize that the phenomenological description of work can produce the effect of a radical overturning of the consolidated understanding of the relationship between work and the person, one that enables us to glimpse an unhoped-for opportunity in the sudden crisis of work caused by measures to contrast Covid19.

In fact, by manifesting the ethical-anthropological vulnerability of work, that description intervenes on the level of our habitual attention, where the ethical-anthropological vulnerability of work dwells. It shifts it from the Promethian-compulsive dimension of work by which it responds only to the will to power, and instead makes it point to the anthropological deficiency, the undeniable premise of all actions, including those of work and technique. In this essential context, work and technique acquire a perhaps worrisome pervasiveness in human life, in the sense that there is no intention of action that does not need to turn to the technical-work segment to bring to effective realization its own purpose[31]; however, there also emerges the necessary extrinsic nature of the ethical goal, which at the origin causes the work and technical processes to activate and execute. It follows that the greater our awareness that working, inasmuch as it is eidetically division-of-work, is indifferent to the quality of the finalization, be it ethical-anthropological or technical-organizational, the freer we can be from the mentality that connects work exclusively with economic finalization and organizational functionalism, so that work can be opened to further "profiles of value"[32], that remain hidden and inaccessible in the current view of the consolidated organization of work as socio-economically self-sufficient and self-referential.

Thus we discover that when work is carried out by human beings, it is not merely an executive procedure of technical goals fixed by mechanical laws like work in nature, which in physics is calculated with the formula $<F \cdot ds>$ (= force x displacement) or like merchandise-work in economics,

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[29] *Ibi*, p. 9.

[30] Cf. E. Severino, *Il destino della tecnica*, Milano, Rizzoli, 1998; U. Galimberti, *Psiche e techne. L'uomo nell'età della tecnica*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1999.

[31] Cf.: **Author's book 1.**

[32] Totaro, "Lavoro ed equilibrio antropologico", cit. p. 319.

evaluated as average yield like any other raw material. Human work is adequately defined by the expression "carry out a task"[33], where the executive dimension of human work activity is clearly linked to the moral dimension. In fact, we can understand a goal and an action as a task, in the degree to which we make them part of our personal moral goals of life; otherwise, what one carries out is only a response to an external command, order, or directive and is inevitably felt as alienating. It is true that Scheler says work is always subjectively marked by a certain degree of "displeasure" because subjective creative freedom is necessarily subordinated to the complex of objective conditions imposed upon us[34]. It is also true that he thinks the worker need not demonstrate great individual initiative in order to work well: only a limited understanding of the goal of his work is required of him, at least the minimum that allows him to move his limbs appropriately[35]. But the results of Scheler's inquiry press us to carry out a psychological update of fundamental importance for us, who by now consider ourselves all social workers and tend to underestimate just how much the exercise of the individual capacity for finalization has real efficacy on the course of the world[36].

Scheler's philosophy of work and his discovery that work can mean for man "carrying out a task" frees us from the paralyzing unilaterality of the expectation of a structural and objective solution to the problems of alienation connected with work. It opens ethical-subjective paths for us to travel in our efforts toward the structural transformation of the world. For example, we can apply ourselves to overcoming the "alienation produced by working" that is the more recent version of the Marxist "alienation during working"[37], in which the work activity itself phagocytises the wholeness of the human from whom it originates. Today, it is also the most subtle form of alienation, inasmuch as it strikes self-employed work and the helping professions; the subject who works reduces himself to a function of his work, voluntarily exploiting himself, and can suffer from workaholism/work-addiction, the destructive phenomena of burnout or "syndrome of emotional breakdown," the corrosion of character[38]. In this context, it could be crucial to put into practice the choice to work toward our anthropological re-balancing through a personal ethical "super-investment" of our social work, to graft this work, in and of itself aimed at technical goals and *ad extra* utility, into the sphere of further and broader finalization that strives for the achievement of personal ethical values and needs. This deeper understanding of human work as "carrying out a task" will enable us – in virtue

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[33] Scheler, *Arbeit und Ethik*, cit., pp. 167, 179.

[34] *Ibi*, p. 175.

[35] *Ibi*, p. 178.

[36] *Ibidem*.

[37] Cf.: F. Totaro, "Alienazione nel lavoro e alienazione da lavoro", in **Author's book 2**. The translation of the Italian texts into English, where not otherwise indicated, is ours.

[38] Cf.: W.E. Oates, *Confessions of a Workaholic. The Facts about Work Addition*, World Publishing, New York 1971; H. Freudenberger H. J., *Burn-out: The High Cost of High Achievement*, Anchor Press-Doubleday, New York 1980; C. Maslach, *Burnout. The Cost of Caring*, Malor Books, Cambridge MA 2003; R. Sennet, *The Corrosion of Character. The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*, W.W. Norton & Co., New York-London 1998.

of the essential division between moral and technical goals, that it exhibits within the more generic division between goals and means – to break the closed circle that still in the late-modern mentality chained work to the mere satisfaction of life's needs and to the values of economic profit. Now we can introduce work for survival or even consumption (socially organized work) into the context of the broader service of the good life (work as carrying out a task), so that one is not reduced to working-for-survival/consumption or living-for-work, even when it is actually so, but may one always live working-for-good-living.

In this, our reflections valorize the line of socialism ranging from aspects of the work of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon to *Cahiers de la Quinzaine* by Charles Peguy, which develops the idea that work is anthropologically positive, inasmuch as man engages his moral creativity in an *ouvrage bien fait* and derives satisfaction and personal growth from this ethical "surplus labor", to use a characteristic expression by Proudhon's[39].

This psychological stratagem, arrived at through philosophy, re-establishes for the working action the breadth of goals and correct motivational succession that are proper to the human being. It can fill out and complete the Aristotelian conception of the practical-productive dynamic in which the human operator – a slave in antiquity, a worker today – is a mere instrument who has no faculty of finalization, but only serves the owner, who alone determines the goals to achieve and the means of production[40]. This psychological stratagem through which the person ethically invests the social work he carries out to satisfy life's needs, should not be confused with the ancient practice of self-induced suggestion of the Stoic Epictetus, explored later by Hannah Arendt[41]. Epictetus refused his consent to reality in order to suppress interest in things over which he had no power and to achieve ataraxia. But for Saint Augustine, this practice was only a ploy[42] whose results in the pursuit of happiness are ephemeral.

In the spontaneous behavior of workers in 2020, the year of Covid-19 appearance, and the consequent transformations of work, we have observed a real individual finalizing potential put back into practice: workers were able to incorporate into their goals of life the goals of the social organization of work, and even to compensate for its *defaillance*! It was an immediate reaction to the emergency, without a doubt. As Paolo Iacci, professor of Management and Development of Human Resources at the State University of Milan confessed to *Sette*, the weekly publication of the

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[39] E. Morley-Fletcher, "Concezione del lavoro e destinazione del profitto nel settore *non-profit*: come contribuire alla sostenibilità del *Welfare*", in: *'Cento anni di lavoro'*, cit., pp. 64-66.
[40] Cf.: Aristotle, *Politics*, C. Lord (trans.), The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2013, I (A), 4, 1254a 15-20: «the slave is an assistant in matters that concern». In the previous lines Aristotle had specified that the slave serves the life of the owner and not the production of objects, and for this reason he is the practical instrument of property of the owner and belongs to him entirely.
[41] Cf. H. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Secker & Warburg, London 1978.
[42] Augustine of Hippo, *De Trinitate*, XIII, VII, 10: «Ideo igitur vult quod potest, quoniam quod vult non potest».

newspaper *Corriere della sera*: «In some cases, it was almost miraculous to see how the productive processes continued without interruptions or inconveniences for the clients, something that was not at all a given»[43].

But it happened. A window was opened upon the ethical depth of people who work! From this experience, in the Covid-19 phase of our life, we are realizing how much the structure of value, that belongs to us personally and originally motivates us to engage in socially organized work, makes it possible for us not to mentally evade work activity and its "displeasure". Indeed, we are realizing that we can bring work back to our own life project. We can subordinate the necessary technical-organizational finalization of the work to our own personal ethical project of life. Furthermore, we are discovering that when work is subordinated to the aims of one's life project, it becomes functional to the personal anthropological growth: we can no longer do without the contribution to human development of an activity as fundamental as work, through which exclusively what is ideal is brought to realization, overcoming the resistance of physical reality and resisting the obtuse totalitarian dynamics of techno-economic organization.

4. *Conclusion*

A richer relationship between the personal dimension and that of work is emerging, while the transformations in lifestyle and work habits are still underway, due to the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic and the containment measures of social distancing. In fact, in this crucial situation in which so-called weak bonds necessarily prevail, many people have discovered that they possess a previously unknown resilience they can use to be an active and proactive part in the «new phenomena of work that have causal qualities and properties that cannot be reduced to those of the constitutive elements»[44] and above all demonstrate in action a previously unknown self-understanding of the worker as «personal subject of networked social formations»[45]. Convinced that «work alone cannot meet the challenge of its functional-instrumental reduction»[46], the new subject of reflective modernity[47] fills his own work and the technical-economic organization of productive goals with «aware and self-governed components of action and of being»[48] that frees him from the productive and consumeristic impositions of the will to power and also responds to the radical need of anthropological finiteness to

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[43] R. Querzé, "È homeworking (non così smart), genera sospetti, rende antipatici", *Sette-Corriere della sera* del 12.02.2021, p. 40. The English translation is ours.
[44] P. Donati, *Quale lavoro? L'emergere di una economia relazionale*, Marietti, Genova 2017, pp. 7-8. The translation of the Italian texts into English, where not otherwise indicated, is ours.
[45] *Ibi*, p. 75.
[46] Totaro, "Lavoro ed equilibrio antropologico", cit., p. 317.
[47] Cf.: U. Beck, W. Bonss, C. Lau, *The Theory of Reflexive Modernization. Problematic Hypotheses and Research Program*, «Theory, Culture & Society», 20/2 (2003), pp. 1-33.
[48] Totaro, "Lavoro ed equilibrio antropologico", cit., pp. 318-319.

accomplish its «desired but 'lacking' or deficient relationship» with whole being[49] and to establish «before and beyond any production and work»[50] an «engagement towards a more-of-being with respect to being, which-one-already-is», taking on the task of making-happen for us the being, which is for itself[51].

Thus, work once again presents itself as the protagonist of a social morphogenesis[52]. But, in contrast to what happened in proto-modernity, today the transformation to be achieved is directed to non-repressive but evolutionary containment of the will to power as the exclusive mandator of the economy, work and technique.

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[49] F. Totaro, *Assoluto e relativo. L'essere e il suo accadere per noi*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2013, p. XXIII. The translation of the Italian texts into English, where not otherwise indicated, is ours.

[50] Totaro, "Lavoro ed equilibrio antropologico", cit., p. 317.

[51] Totaro, *Assoluto e relativo*, cit., p. XXIV. Cf. inoltre: **Author's article.**

[52] P. Donati, *Sociologia della relazione*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2013. In addition: Id., *Morphogenic Society and the Structure of Social Relations*, in M.S. Archer (ed.), *Late Modernity. Trajectories towards Morphogenic Society*, Springer, Dordrecht 2014, pp. 143-172.