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Models for Career Education in Iowa



THE WAY WE WORK

**Some Notes on the Philosophical Base
of Career Education**

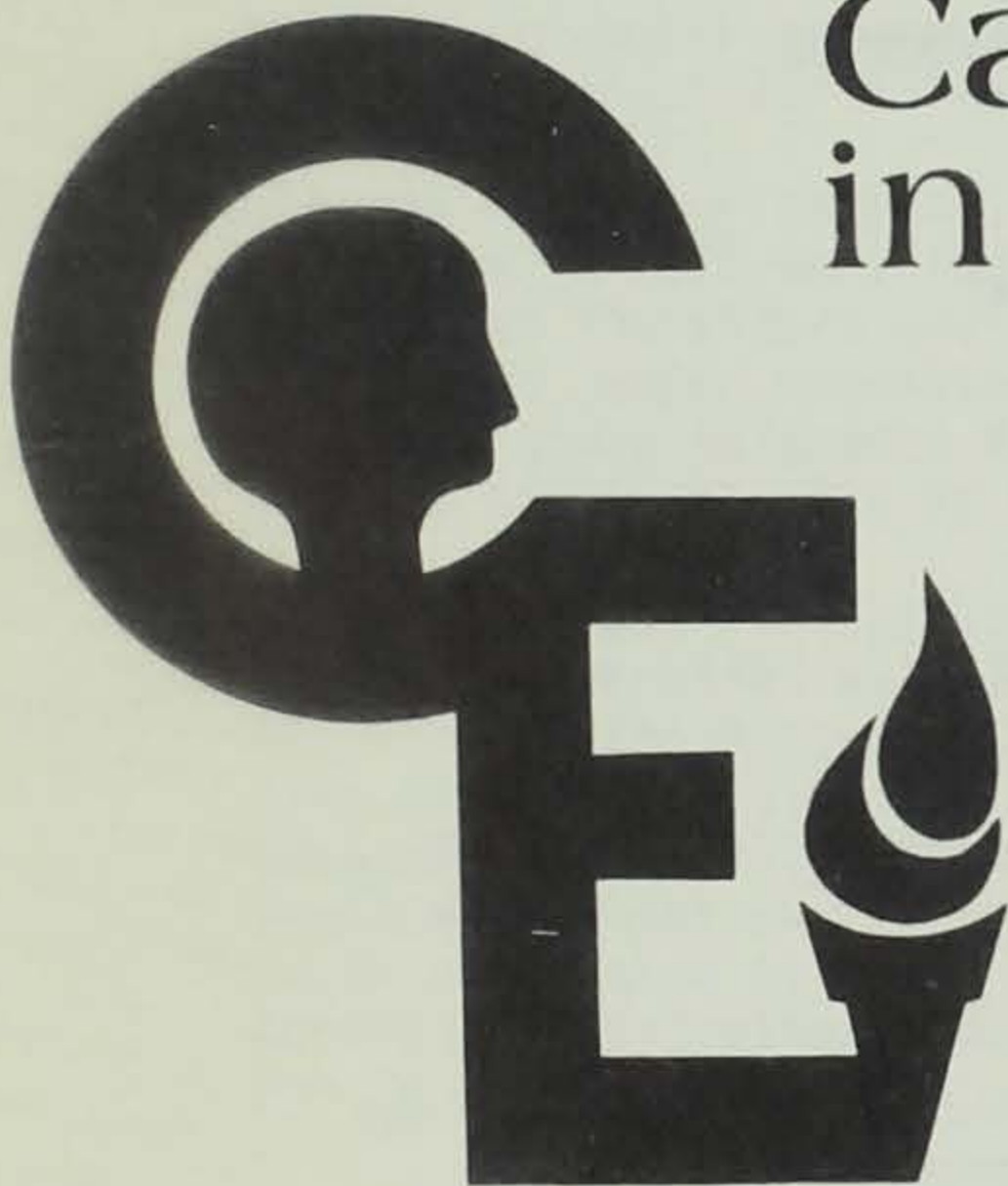


Department of Public Instruction

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Models for Career Education in Iowa



THE WAY WE WORK

Some Notes on the Philosophical Base of Career Education

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Department of Public Instruction
Grimes State Office Building
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PREFACE

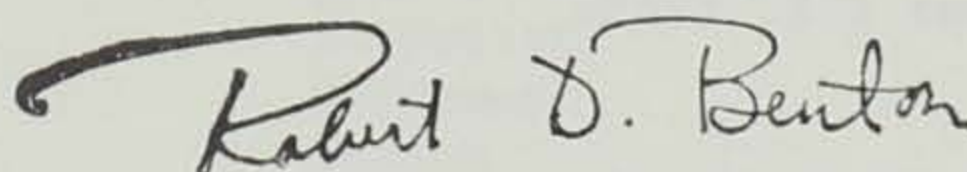
Career Education - Is it good for kids? -- That's a question that has prompted many of us to search for a greater understanding of the concept and to reassess the types of experiences our educational programs provide. This search is resulting in a growing commitment to assure curriculum objectives and activities that provide career education experiences for all students.

An exemplary project, "Models for Career Education in Iowa," was initiated in 1971 thru the Iowa Department of Public Instruction. The purpose of the effort was to research, define and describe an emerging concept of career education and to suggest possible approaches for implementation in grades K-8. In 1972 the project was expanded to include the curriculum of high school students.

The project is sponsored by the Iowa Department of Public Instruction in cooperation with Iowa State University and nine local school districts. The project staff under the direction of Dr. Alan Kahler, Iowa State University, is working with the following local schools: Shenandoah, Humboldt, Davenport, Marshalltown, Carroll, Sheldon, Osceola, South Winneshiek and Springville Community School Districts. The third party evaluation is being provided by the Iowa Center for Research in School Administration under the leadership of Dr. Ralph Van Dusseldorp and Dr. Walter Foley.

A series of workshops were conducted involving participating school staff and outside resource persons with various backgrounds and expertise. These workshops have provided a multi-discipline approach in establishing understanding and agreement of a set of basic objectives of career education. During the summer of 1973, staff from each of the nine districts participated in workshops to prepare first draft curriculum materials for use in the respective school settings during the 1973-1974 school year.

The publications which follow were developed as part of the responsibility of project participants and staff to provide visibility to the findings and accomplishments of the project. These guidelines and instructional materials are provided at this time to assist local school personnel interested in initiating programs, services, and activities for their students.



Robert D. Benton, Ed.D.
State Superintendent of
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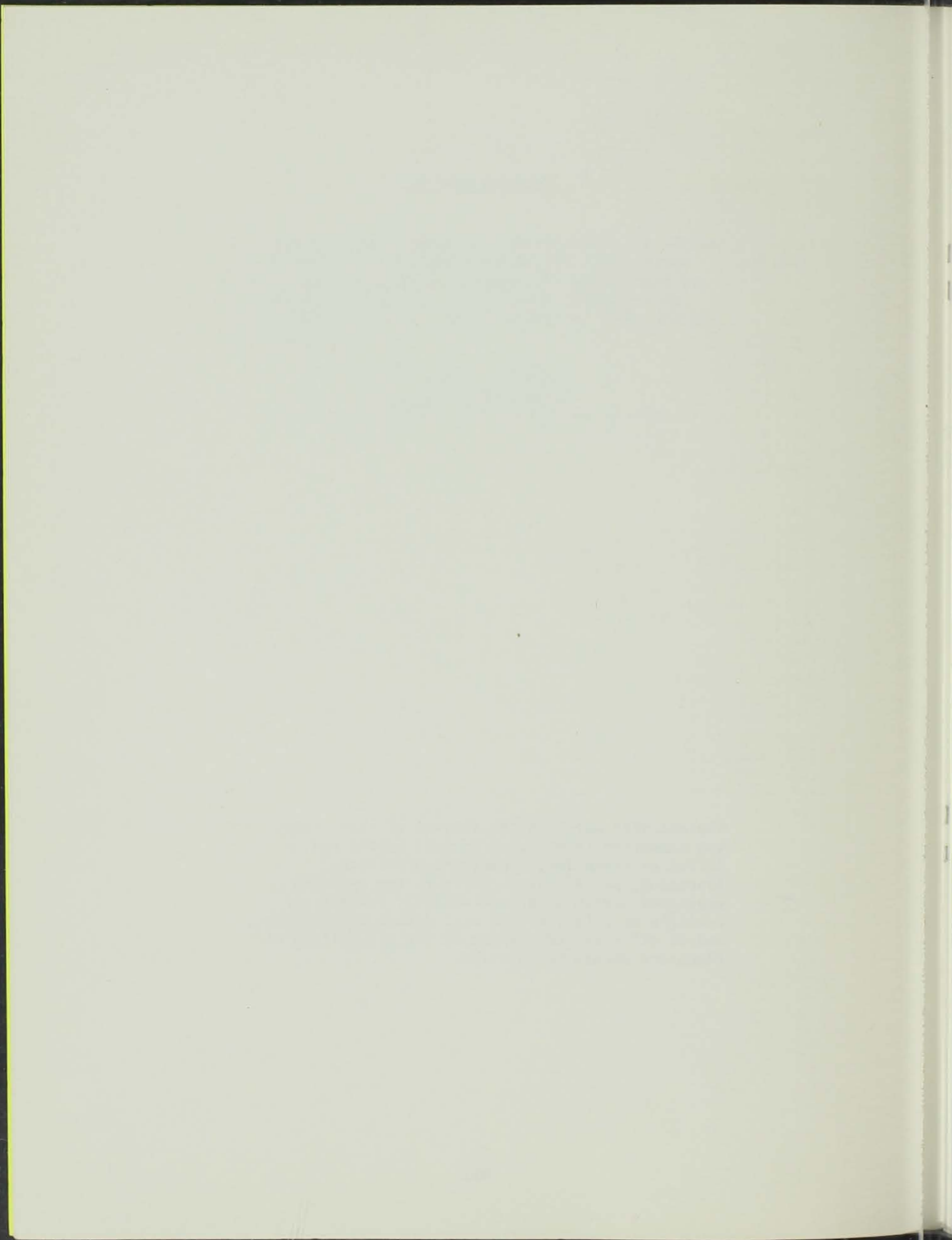
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The ideas in this paper were stimulated by a series of discussions with the staff of the Iowa Career Education Project, Alan Kahler, Director, held on the campus of Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, on February 25-26 and April 29-May 1, 1974, and are presented by

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THE WAY WE WORK

Some Notes on the Philosophical Base of Career Education

Van Cleve Morris

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A New Coinage in the Realm

The word "career" has a faint, upper-middle-class ring to it. Customarily, we do not speak of pursuing a career in bricklaying, selling shoes, or tightening bolts on a production line. These, by convention, are trades, jobs or occupations. Of course, at the other end of the social spectrum there is something spoken of as a "calling," a high-toned rubric for gainful activities allegedly sponsored by some celestial voice; we are "called" to service as a missionary, a social worker, a nun, an evangelist, or a true-believing revolutionary. It is from this notion that we have come to use the word "vocation" (from the Latin vocare, to call) which, in English, sounds considerably less pretentious and is often applied to work of more prosaic origins.

Somewhere else on the socio-economic ladder of productive functioning are what we call the professions (medicine, law, teaching, the ministry, and a few more modern others like accounting or research science). Here is another term which, like vocation, conveys the innuendo of some level of personal commitment and identification not usually associated with the other, more modest terms.

Now comes something called "Career Education," two common enough words but conjoined in an unfamiliar linkage, suggesting a new context for discussing educational goals and procedures. The original phrase-maker was Sidney Marland, until recently the U. S. Commissioner of Education, who suggested the term in 1971. Marland apparently touched some deeply buried political nerve because the term caught on and had the honor of being mentioned in the State of the Union Message of the President of the United States in January of 1972. Whatever the term means, it is obviously something that we must contend with.

The very fact that we have so many words for the gainful, i.e., income-producing side of our lives--job, trade, occupation, vocation, career, profession, calling--forces on our attention the possibility that work really cannot be understood in a generic sense, but must be analyzed more cautiously in its variety of idiosyncratic forms. For example, we are mindful of the pragmatic obligation to work in order to live. But we have always attached more significance to work than the mere pay-off in groceries. There is something about work, which, if not exactly ennobling in the Puritan sense, is nonetheless somehow central to our make-up. Our work yields "psychological groceries," food for the spirit and ego as much as for the digestive tract.

It is this psychological yield from our work which is really behind our continuing interest in job training, vocational preparation, and, in the present case, career education. We know that skills and abilities and competencies are required in anything we do, and the educator is understandably attentive to those requirements. But the educator's responsibility to his students embraces a wider concern: to comprehend the larger dimensions of a "life work," to understand what a life (or part-life) might be like if one spent it as an electrician, a nurse, a life insurance salesman, a hairdresser, an accountant, a stenographer, a TV repairman. Since the educator is one of society's primary communication links to the young, he needs to know what such a life would offer, what the rewards and agonies of it may be, and how best to convey to his students these understandings--usually not found in the training manual. The phenomenon of "growing up" embraces a number of things, but certainly a primary element is to find a sphere of activity compatible not only with one's skills and abilities but with the subtler features of one's personality and make-up--one's views of oneself and what one wants from life. This search for compatibility is partly the teacher's responsibility.

It is in this context that the term "career education," for all its upper-middle-class baggage, may come closer than any of the other labels to embrace the larger perspective the educator is looking for. A career is neither a "calling" nor an "occupation." Or, it is both and then some. A career, at whatever level of the economic ladder, is, at bottom, a decision--a personal decision on that work one feels fitted for, what one will settle for in terms of economic rewards, and finally--all things considered--what one wants to do with one's life.

The word "career" conveys a continuity of purpose and performance without sounding ecclesiastical; it is the secular equivalent of "calling," suggesting a significant initiative by the individual without the complications of a quasi-metaphysical, inner voice. The word "career" also has another attribute not found in the other labels for what we do. It embraces a wider catalogue of what I have referred to above with the generic term "life work." For example, a career might become a conscious repudiation of gainful employment altogether. An individual might adopt a life-style of creative drifting, a mode of existence in which deliberate indigence is coupled with the private search for new values.

No matter what our personal reaction might be to this drop-out option, the educator, as well as the wider society, needs always to make room for such individuals; they represent the fall-out of a society committed to a wide pluralism in life-styles. And this is the virtue of the term "career." Unlike the other labels--most of them oriented to what one does during actual working hours--this term conveys a larger reach of consideration, somehow going beyond the context of services rendered and payment received. It pulls in a bigger picture, a fuller set of variables to ponder, and is for that reason a more valuable nomenclature for the educator's discussions regarding "life work."

Shades of Marx

With the larger reach of the term "career," we may be in a better position to examine the basic feelings we have toward work as such, and to understand how we have rationalized those feelings into a systematic definition of work as a part, perhaps the most significant part, of our experience. For example, in earlier discussions regarding vocational training or education for work, there was a periodic appeal to a kind of ideological explanation for it all. The argument ran that work was not merely a survival mechanism but had something to do with a higher category of aspiration, with man's relationship to other men, and to his world. Out of the grubbiness of the class struggle, so said the Marxists, has emerged the metaphysical explanation we somehow have always been looking for: Work is the prosaic name for man's reason for being! In one particularly illuminating passage in a work devoted to explaining Karl Marx's dialectical materialism and its relation to education, we hear the following:

Labor is the very touchstone for man's self-realization, the medium of creating the world of his desire; and it is labor which should make him happy. Indeed, the essence of man is in his striving to achieve his desires. He is not provoked into learning and achieving by the pragmatic stimulus of an external threat. He labors to transform his world, to put his own mark on it, to make it his, and to make himself at home in it.¹

In this Dionysian age of creature comforts and vast quantities of leisure time, it may be difficult to keep a straight face when somebody is saying that "labor should make us happy." But Marx may have been righter than he thought, and his argument can be shown to have manifestations at a much less sophisticated level of observation, namely, how individuals react to prolonged idleness. It is a fact that, for most of us, work is something we need. When it is withdrawn for any length of time, we miss it. Vacations may be getting longer, and hours may be getting shorter, but more often than not the released time is filled with more work. In some lines of activity, jobs take on a Parkinsonian crescendo of expectations, expanding by unnoticeable amounts the areas of control thought necessary for their proper execution. Especially at the upper levels of the socio-economic spectrum in managerial and professional occupations, the evening briefcases are always full and the workload runs far beyond the 35- or 40-hour week.

¹Robert S. Cohen, "On the Marxist Philosophy of Education," Chapter VI in Modern Philosophies and Education, 54th Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education (Chicago: Published by the Society, 1955), p. 190.

Why do people work so hard and so much, even when they don't really need to? Why do they fear being laid off, even though unemployment compensation is available? Why do they, at almost every level of income, dread retirement and the forced idleness which that condition represents? The answer may lie not merely in our precipitous readiness for boredom in a world full of stimulation, but in our desire to put our own mark on the world, to make it ours. Since work is the primary instrument for achieving this, most of us feel cut off from our experience when work is withdrawn. Our personalities continue in existence, our friends and neighbors remain, our relatives are still there, but things are not the same. There is a foreshortening of personal influence over our environment. Things get done without our knowledge. In small but significant ways, the world starts getting "transformed," neither with nor against our will, but merely beyond it. It's an eerie feeling, betraying a far deeper interest than we would like to admit in how our little sector of the world is to be managed.

So Marx may be right for more reasons than he thought of. Work is the primary dimension of our being, and as such it is central to our ego and what that ego wishes to implant on an otherwise indifferent natural order.

Looked at in this way, choosing a career takes on a somewhat larger perspective. It becomes a choice of the mark we wish to make on our world. A career decision is not merely a match-up between our abilities and outlooks on the one hand and some line of activity appropriate to them on the other; it becomes rather a selection of where best to exploit the possibilities for changing things along lines of our own personal desire. It is the choice of weapons and the determination of the arena in which our own personal influence on the world can best be capitalized. The educator is therefore dealing with a third variable: not merely the student's aptitudes and interests, not merely the catalogue of occupational opportunities in the adult world, but something else both subtler and, in the end, more powerful, namely, the individual student's estimate of where his energies and talents can make the most difference.

The Puritan "Work Ethic": American Division

The question we should ask, however, is this: Is all this ideological argumentation necessary? The Marxian thesis, some claim, is so much overblown metaphysical prattle, going far beyond the point necessary to explain the motivations of real people living in a real world. Why introduce lofty, cosmological rhetoric into what is essentially a prosaic, everyday phenomenon? The answer may lie in a line of explanation at once more modest and more plausible, namely, that the meaning we attach to work eventually takes on the coloration of the surrounding culture and its values. Whatever else it may be, work is the medium by which a society expresses itself in the world. As the anthropologists are fond of saying, when you are searching for the essence of a culture, don't trouble yourself overmuch with its geography, nor its symbols, nor its peculiar folkways, nor the alleged

temperament of its people. These are ancillary. Look instead at its works! ...its literature, its institutions, its technology.² These are the ultimate measure of what the culture is all about. Thus, if work is the medium of cultural expression, then its role in our lives will inevitably be the product of what the wider culture expects.

This explanation turns out to be more compatible with the American experience. It is doubtful that the American people, either consciously or subconsciously, have ever believed that their destiny was to "transform" the world in the Marxian sense. Instead, our Pilgrim origins, our pioneering beginnings, our frontier westering, and more recently our fanaticism with technology have all combined to produce in us what might be called the "achievement syndrome"; and this syndrome lies much closer to the empirical real world of sheer adaptation than to some grand, political "dialectic" imagined for us by a nineteenth century social philosopher.

The American people have always reveled in encountering their environment in a quasi-aggressive way. Unlike Asian societies, and even unlike most European peoples, we have found excitement and exhilaration in trying to figure out how to turn our surroundings to our own account. Like most human beings, we have been dissatisfied with what the natural order, untended, had to offer. But unlike others, we have not stood by consenting to its inadequacies; we have gone ahead and done something about them! Our response as a people has been to wrest some kind of control over our situation, not out of some transcendental urge to reshape creation, but simply to make life more comfortable, manageable, and interesting.

In an earlier day, this took the form of struggling against the uncertainties of an alien and unexplored continent. Our predecessors discovered that deliberate, well thought out programs of environmental exploitation would eventually yield crops, houses, roads, and cities. Their simultaneous concern for human arrangements occasioned the build-up of our institutions--schools, churches, governments.

More recently, our desire to control the environment has taken a scientific, mechanistic turn. We have created a vast technology, engineered not only to rationalize our supply of food, clothing and shelter, but designed also to run far beyond these basic needs to create completely new wants we never heard of--wants and desires by now so firmly entrenched that we think their satisfaction is absolutely

²As Calvin Coolidge observed: "America's business is business!"

essential to the Good Life.³ The advertisers are in league with the manufacturers, and the entire economy is now devoted to the circular interdependence of want-creation, want-satisfaction, leading to more want-creation.

Looked at from this angle, work in America takes on a kind of machismo quality. The producer, the money-handler, the developer, the designer, the manager, the organizer of people and things becomes the new culture hero. We have run beyond the Puritan notion that hard work builds character to the more purely American notion that hard work is the key to ACHIEVEMENT! Achievement is now the American Goddess.⁴ Work is therefore inexorably inter-linked with the American character. Being task oriented, as they say, is the prime credential for the ACHIEVER, and achievement, per se, is the Number One expectation which the American culture lays on every one of us.

Looked at in this light, career decision-making requires the rearrangement of elements so far examined. One's ultimate mark on the world is not the most important consideration. Neither is one's own set of preferences and interests. What comes forward as the decisive criterion is a career's promise of future success and achievement. The student looks at the problem and asks: In what career could I best satisfy society's demand that, whatever I do, I should rise to the top of that field?

In this strategy, there is a surrender to the demands of the culture; it is the supreme "other-directed" leitmotif of our social system that each individual is expected to succeed. But it is a surrender to a higher, or at least broader ethic--that of the world of work itself as defined in the American consciousness. Aspiration, drive, desire, application, perseverance, getting ahead, climbing to the top...all those words that have lingered at the core of the American dream are summoned forth once more to set limits to the final choice.

³In a manner of speaking, we have carried the idea on control to its final fanaticism, namely, the dogma that control is good in itself and that whatever can be done to or with environment should be done. In the past century, we have turned scientific problem-solving into an end in itself, but the cruel irony is that technology has become our problem: How to control the control-mechanism?

⁴This is as good a place as any to point out that there is as much machisma as machismo in this notion. The liberated woman is just as committed as any man to achievement as such; indeed, the women's liberation movement is predicated on the demand that women be allowed the chance to achieve in any field of their choice. Achievement is a man-invented ethic; now the women want it for themselves, never questioning it as the ultimate American value.

An Existential Variation

It goes without saying that the "counter culture" advocates of the Sixties and Seventies have drawn our attention to the frailties of the preceding argument. There is a thinness of vision, a shallowness of definition of the human spirit in the notion that our days should be devoted merely to impressing our fellow citizens with how much we can accomplish. Perhaps, they claim, a choice of career can be founded on something closer in, something nearer the center of authentic personal living. We all may want, in a vague and undefined way, to make our mark on the world. And we all may have some ego need to achieve something that can be acknowledged and recognized by other people. But it still may be true that what is most evidently on display is not our work but ourselves. Some attention to this dimension is required.

Unfortunately, in much of the contemporary rhetoric on selfhood, there is an overkill of sentimentality regarding the presumed beauty of the inner person. There is also an overload of haziness and vagueness concerning just what it is we are talking about. For the purposes of this discussion, it is imperative to bring this notion down out of the air and into the context of real living. If this is possible, we may get some illumination on how this factor has its own influence over career selection and life definition.

The Existentialists, following the Greeks, have a name for it. Jean Paul Sartre speaks of "the human project," and he explains it in somewhat the following way: Each human life is a slow accretion of experiences, responses to those experiences, and the outlooks and values which are generated by this dialectic. Each of us has a zero start, a point of origin for this enterprise which presupposes nothing. Of course, it is true that each of us is born at a particular time, of a certain sex, of a particular set of parents, in a particular place. These are what he calls the "facticity" of our individual situation; they are given.

However, what is not given is our response to these predicates of our existing. We are the sole authors of the meaning we attach to these conditions of our being, and hence we are individually the sole authors of the response we make to the fact of our existing. As the Existentialists say, existence precedes essence, meaning that we wake up to our existing first, and then define ourselves later. The activity of defining ourselves, of giving ourselves an "essence," is "the human project."

The Existentialists lay a heavy load on us: each individual's "human project" is his alone. His life, his behavior, his choices, the values on which he builds his responses to his situation--these are of his origin. He is responsible for them. In one telling passage, Sartre reminds us that the individual is ultimately responsible even for his irresponsibility! We cannot escape. Existing means choosing. And since there are no other agents requiring us to choose in this or that way, we must assume the full responsibility for the decisions we make and therefore for the kind of person we turn out to be.

Of all our choices, it is obvious that the choice of life work is the most decisive in defining ourself. It is almost the same thing: to choose a career, in the largest sense of this term, is to define who you are in the world. But in an Existentialist perspective, the final criterion for this choice is not the mark one hopes to make on the world, nor the "track record" of achievement one hopes for, but simply the creation of a human life. It is the act of bringing into existence one, solitary, unique, unrepeatable instance of what it means to be a human being. Each of us is given one opportunity to define the word "human." We define it with our life.

As the central piece in this project, a career takes on the role of energy source and defining element in the individual's effort to make a personal statement about his existence. A career's first essential, therefore, is its power to provide the medium of expression for what an individual wants to say. A particularly poignant passage from Studs Terkel's book, Working, may help in understanding this point. Mr. Terkel first introduces us to one of his interviewees: "She is twenty-eight. She is a staff writer for an institution publishing health care literature. Previously, she had worked as an editor for a corporation publishing national magazines." Then he quotes her from the tape recorded conversation:

Jobs are not big enough for people. It's not just the assembly line worker whose job is too small for his spirit, you know? A job like mine, if you really put your spirit into it, you would sabotage immediately. You don't dare. So you absent your spirit from it. My mind has been so divorced from my job, except as a source of income, it's really absurd.⁵

⁵Studs Terkel, Working--People talk about what they do all day and how they feel about what they do (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974) p. 521.

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