

ATTENDING TO OUR WORK: A FRAMEWORK FOR  
UNDERSTANDING AND EVALUATING THE DIVISION OF LABOR

Anthony Thomas

Dr. Joseph Bien, Dissertation Supervisor

ABSTRACT

The division of labor is a pervasive and long-standing feature of human life. Yet there is little consensus--either in philosophy or in other disciplines--regarding its status. Using a contemporary evaluation provided by psychologist Fathali Moghaddam, I develop a framework for understanding and evaluating the division of labor. The key elements of the framework involve attending to the effects of labor, the nature of human capacities, and the proper relationship between the individual and society. This framework is both philosophically and practically valuable. Its philosophical value is demonstrated both by an examination of influential works in the history of philosophy (including those of Plato, Aristotle, Locke, Rousseau, Smith, and Marx) and by the identification of related issues worthy of further philosophical investigation. Its practical value lies in the structure that it provides to the ongoing debates about the division of labor. Settling issues regarding the effects of labor, the nature of human capacities, and the proper relationship between the individual and society will enable an effective evaluation--and, if necessary, an appropriate restructuring--of the division of labor. The division of labor is dilemmatic in that it has beneficial and burdensome aspects. Going forward, a new account of human nature is needed if there is to be an adequate understanding of the division of labor in all of its complexity.