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Major Paper 1

A Conflict of Interests

Labor is any kind of work done by a human being to create a useful product, a kind of service or tangible object. By trading this labor we become integrated in the economy where many individuals come together with products of their own labor. It is when these parts come into context of the economy that they are rated for their value in order to determine fair trade. People partake in an economy any time they engage in a transaction and rate the value of others' labor constantly in their purchases and hiring of services, yet the decision can hang on a thread of certainty. The implications of these ratings have grave impacts on the individual laborer by influencing payment, recognition from society, social status and also the free market economy as a whole. In order to maintain a healthy supply and demand system where commodities and services flow smoothly from the laborer to the consumer it is important for any person involved in an economy to carefully decide on the value of labor.

However, it is not always easy to determine the value of one's labor due to the conflict of two perceptions: the reputation of the laborer as described by Adam Smith in "Theory of Moral Sentiments" and the usefulness of the labor to the individual and society as described by Joseph Addison in "Spectator 160". According to Smith, the value of labor is independent on what actually gets done but rather it is dependent on the social status of the laboring individual. Ideally, we should support those who provide useful labor in order to sustain a thriving economy and society, but this is masked by our natural instinct to support those in the upper-class who provide the labor.

Adam Smith implies a kind of value connected to work of the laboring person in his "Theory of Moral Sentiments". If a person is of a higher class, he or she is more likely to be

revered, regardless of the actual efforts and product. Born as an upper-class citizen, everything a person does is esteemed. Standing at the highest place in society in class standing, a king has no need to take any risks for performing valiantly as his reputation is already secured because he is the most valued laborer in the eyes of his people. With little question his citizens believe that the laws he writes and commands he declares must be beneficial and thus valuable for his nation. There is little question of his wisdom, knowledge, and motivations, each which would normally be carefully considered when determining the value of lower-class labor such as by a store clerk or a shoeshine.

Smith even goes so far as to say that "knowledge, industry, valor, and beneficence, trembled, were abashed, and lost all dignity before [the great]", demonstrating that even if the king does not possess these qualities compared with somebody lower, his work is still valued above them. The higher the class standing, the less spectacular labor needs to be to receive credit. The lower the class standing, the less valuable any labor is, even if it is virtuous. Even despite low quality labor by someone with such high authority, the natural instinct of mankind is to value the labor. Without a trained conscious of how useful labor might be, it may actually inhibit the economy by simply wasting resources and distracting from useful labor.

Looking at a parallel to the economy in the social context, the usefulness of labor is described by Joseph Addison as he discusses two categories of geniuses in his "Spectator 160". In either case, the genius takes risks to create something that is more likely to be useful to society as it has the potential to push culture to grow further. Though each genius is valuable in this same kind of way, each has very different tactics but still "draw[s] the admiration of the world" by laboring to create everlasting, valuable works. These give rise to recognized works by writers such as Shakespeare, Homer, Pindar, Aristotle, Virgil, and Milton which are considered highly

valuable to our society today as they are imitated and studied rigorously. These authors are revered for the work they did to encourage growth in society and not by their social standing.

The first type of genius creates a unique style, both innovative and unrestricted. Though this may seem crude, the labor was planned out meticulously and purposefully for the author to depict his or her ideas about the world. Here a large risk is taken by this type of genius but the impacts are immense with the prospective to spring up some new part of culture. While working upon the same motivations, the second type of genius works based upon the rules and boundaries established by society, often imitating parts of others' work. In either case, the culture and ideals are captured in a snapshot of both geniuses' work, interpreted in a useful way for pushing society to develop further and to leave history for future generations. It is valuable to create works that are not imitating others but risk producing something new and possibly strange, no considering reputation alone but the beneficial impacts on society and the economy.

Labor is difficult to establish because we are conflicted by our perceptions of the actual product of labor and who is doing it. The higher the class of laborer the less important it is that the product is useful in order for it to be considered valuable, whereas it is more important for the lower class of laborer to generate a useful product in order for the work to be considered valuable. In order to preserve a healthy economy and society, we must be aware of our natural desire to revere the labor of those with authority and high-class in order to judge the actual usefulness of their work. Valuable labor can be defined by the value of its product, but the class standing of the laborer inhibits our view of the product.