

## PRECISIONES AL CONCEPTO DE TRABAJO CORRESPONDENCIA INÉDITA Y. R. SIMON - H. ARENDT

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The transcription of two hitherto unpublished letters between Yves Simon and Hanna Arendt in 1953 is offered. The documents contain valuable reflections on the concept and meaning of work. The texts are preceded by an introduction, which attempts to establish the relevance of the texts in the general body of Yves Simon's thinking about work.

### 1. Introducción

Yves R. Simon (1903-1961), pensador de origen francés, aunque afincado en los Estados Unidos desde el estallido de la II Guerra Mundial, resulta de sobra conocido por sus valiosas contribuciones en el ámbito de la filosofía social y política, interés que cultiva desde su etapa de formación universitaria en el “Instituto Católico de París” y en la Universidad de la Sorbona. En contacto con los círculos intelectuales de la Francia de los años inmediatamente anteriores a la II Guerra Mundial, solía frecuentar los encuentros que se llevaban a cabo en casa de J. Maritain —al cual se verá después unido por una relación de amistad—, donde despertaría su interés por la filosofía de tradición tomista<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Maritain, “Yves R. Simon, Brother in Arms”, en *Notes et Documents*, 1979 (14), 4: “Porque tenía más aprecio a la verdad que al Aquinate, su mismo progreso en la verdad hacia que apreciara al Aquinate con más y más conciencia y determinación”.

La reflexión de Simon sobre una realidad de trascendencia antropológica y social como es el trabajo ofrece una riqueza singular, en la medida en que toma en cuenta tanto los elementos manejados por el pensamiento clásico, como la complejidad que conoce el trabajo en las sociedades modernas a partir del fenómeno de la industrialización. Son muy escasos, sin embargo, los estudios acerca de este aspecto de su reflexión<sup>2</sup>, a pesar de que esta cuestión atrajo la atención del autor desde la primera etapa de su actividad intelectual, como se pone de manifiesto desde sus primeras publicaciones.

El objetivo de estas páginas consiste en ofrecer dos textos inéditos, que aportan importantes precisiones y una mayor elaboración del concepto de trabajo con respecto al que queda reflejado en diversos lugares de su obra precedente. Se trata del texto de una carta dirigida por Y. Simon a Hannah Arendt de fecha 18 de mayo de 1953, junto a la respuesta de ésta en carta fechada el 13 de julio del mismo año. A continuación, como introducción a las cartas, se indican las líneas fundamentales de la reflexión sobre el trabajo en los escritos del autor, que constituyen el marco adecuado para la lectura de las cartas<sup>3</sup>.

Ya en 1936 el autor publica dos artículos titulados *Travail et contemplation* y *La definition du travail*, que se verán seguidos poco después, en 1938, por su ensayo *Trois leçons sur le travail*. La carta dirigida a Arendt que se recogerá después tiene su origen,

<sup>2</sup> Existe una monografía que tiene su origen en una tesis de doctorado presentada en la Facultad de Teología de la Universidad de Navarra: A. González Díaz-Barreiro, *El trabajo en Yves R. Simon*, Pro manuscripto, Pamplona, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Los textos manuscritos de la citada correspondencia mantenida entre Y. Simon y Arendt fueron ofrecidos por el "Y. Simon Institute" y en particular por un hijo del autor, Anthony Simon, al autor del trabajo de doctorado citado en la nota precedente. Expreso mi gratitud a ambos por ese ofrecimiento, que permitirá conocer con mayor precisión los perfiles del pensamiento de Y. Simon sobre el trabajo.

precisamente, en la alusión que ésta realiza en *La condición humana* al ensayo de Simon<sup>4</sup>.

Al año 1947 corresponde otro escrito, *The Concept of Work*, que recoge su colaboración a un congreso<sup>5</sup> y que resulta para nosotros de particular interés, porque se alude expresamente a él en la carta que escribe a Arendt en 1953 para hacer algunas matizaciones sobre su contenido.

El tema del trabajo siguió atrayendo el interés del autor en años posteriores, como pone de relieve un curso impartido sobre esta materia en la Universidad de Chicago en 1958. Este trabajo docente cuajará después, en buena parte, en un libro publicado con carácter póstumo, *Work, Society and Culture* (1971).

No es posible, naturalmente, ofrecer en estas páginas un panorama completo del pensamiento que Simon expone en las fuentes precedentes. Bastará con indicar aquellas observaciones de la carta en las que el autor precisa o aporta algún matiz a lo que había expresado en su obra anterior.



<sup>4</sup> Cfr. H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, University of Chicago Press, 1958, cap. IV, nota 5. La referencia a la obra de Simon y, más en general, al pensamiento católico liberal o de izquierda francés, critica una concepción según la cual el trabajador trabaja para sí mismo y no para el producto, como instrumento en la producción de objetos cuya forma final desconoce totalmente. Arendt concede que esa circunstancia tiene importancia histórica pero no resulta pertinente en una descripción de las articulaciones fundamentales de la *vita activa*. Como se verá, esta observación incide en la distinción que Simon trata de profundizar en la carta entre trabajo y arte.

<sup>5</sup> Y. R. Simon, "The Concept of Work", en R. B. Heywood (ed.), *The Works of the Mind*, Chicago, 1947, 3-17.

## 2. Características metafísicas del trabajo La distinción trabajo–arte

En su ensayo *Trois leçons sur le travail*, Simon aborda una primera caracterización del trabajo partiendo de lo que puede considerarse su arquetipo o primera expresión, el trabajo manual. Entre las características metafísicas de este tipo de trabajo, el autor había afirmado con anterioridad a 1953 cuatro rasgos principales:

- a) La *utilidad*. El trabajo es una actividad útil, de carácter instrumental, es decir, que persigue un fin o está en función de un resultado diverso a la misma actividad.
- b) *La transitividad*. Estamos ante un tipo de actividad que, aun teniendo su origen en el agente, se dirige siempre a un objeto exterior que recibe la acción y en esa medida se perfecciona. El efecto inmanente de la acción de trabajar, la perfección que queda en el sujeto, no forma parte, señala el autor, de las características metafísicas del trabajo.
- c) El trabajo es también “una actividad *móvil*, intrínsecamente sometida a la ley del cambio y del tiempo” (p. 2). Implica una sucesión de cambios físicos que se realizan prolongándose en el tiempo sobre una materia externa. Esto es lo que hace que trabajo y reposo se excluyan recíprocamente, puesto que en el reposo la movilidad está ausente.
- d) Finalmente, considera Simon que el trabajo es una actividad *racionalmente dirigida*<sup>6</sup>. Esta característica se verá prolongada por el autor en los que él denomina trabajos de la mente.

A estas cuatro características antes señaladas, en la carta a Arendt añade una quinta: la *dependencia de la naturaleza*, entendida como un sistema de datos. Este punto resulta, según el autor, de la mayor importancia para abordar el problema de las relaciones

<sup>6</sup> Aunque la racionalidad no aparece expresamente en *Trois leçons sur le travail* entre las características metafísicas del trabajo, se ocupa de ella al tratar del trabajo del espíritu. El texto de la carta menciona expresamente esta característica, atribuyéndola a un escrito posterior al ensayo citado.

entre el trabajo y el arte. Si inicialmente consideró el trabajo como un tipo particular de arte, una reflexión más atenta le lleva ahora a advertir —tomando pie de una observación de Maritain— que lo propio del arte, si se prescinde de las limitaciones del conocimiento humano, es la pura creatividad. Así ha ocurrido con la aparición de la fotografía u otros procedimientos semejantes, que han exaltado la independencia creativa del artista. El trabajo, por el contrario, se encuentra sometido a leyes de la naturaleza<sup>7</sup>.

El texto del manuscrito introduce además una precisión. Cuando hablamos de trabajos de tecnología avanzada, se ha de considerar que estamos ante una “naturaleza artificial” o elaborada por el hombre. De ahí que ese tipo de trabajos se acerquen a la idea del arte como creación libre, de modo que en los procesos cuya evolución viene marcada por el progreso tecnológico, considera Simon que la realidad del trabajo se disuelve en la independencia creativa propia del arte.

Esta afirmación permite al autor criticar la descripción que ofreció Marx de la sociedad racional, en la cual el trabajo aparece como un elemento libre de toda restricción. Simon encuentra aquí, no sólo una visión revolucionaria de la emancipación respecto del poder social, sino también lo que denomina una fantasía técnico científica de sustitución de las normas libres propias del arte por las leyes de la naturaleza. En sentido paralelo discurre, a juicio de Simon, la propuesta de socialismo utópico de Fourier.

### 3. “Trabajos de la mente” y “trabajo moral”

El estudio de las características metafísicas del trabajo viene dividido por el autor en tres partes, que denomina el hombre y la naturaleza, el hombre y la humanidad y el hombre y la verdad.

<sup>7</sup> La cuestión de las relaciones entre los conceptos de arte y trabajo será abordada por el autor con posterioridad, en su obra de publicación póstuma *Work, Society and Culture*, New York, 1971, 73ss.

Junto al trabajo manual que es considerado por Simon como el arquetipo y que pertenece al primer elemento de la distinción recién apuntada, se ocupa a continuación de los trabajos de la mente. Al observar las diversas formas en que interviene la mente para ejercer su función directiva sobre el trabajo se pueden distinguir varios tipos de trabajo intelectual. El primero al que alude el texto que comentamos es el pensamiento científico. Consiste en la dirección del trabajo manual, es decir, en la acción del hombre sobre la naturaleza física que tiene por objeto alcanzar una ventaja para el hombre. En la carta dirigida a Arendt se recoge una alusión tangencial a esta cuestión, por considerar que el escrito de 1947 resulta suficientemente claro.

Tampoco corrige o añade precisiones sustanciales —sobre lo expresado en ese *paper*, aunque sí con respecto a su ensayo anterior— al tocar el tema del “trabajo moral”, que se encuadra en la triple distinción citada anteriormente en el elemento denominado “el hombre y la humanidad”. Simon alude con la expresión trabajo moral al esfuerzo que cada hombre debe realizar para ganar el control sobre sí mismo, por poner orden en la esfera de los apetitos, tanto en el orden de la persona como en el de la sociedad. El texto dirigido a Arendt reconoce haber cometido un error o una reducción en su primer ensayo *Trois leçons sur le travail*. Allí asumía que los diversos tipos de trabajo podían sistematizarse desde la distinción bipolar trabajo-contemplación. Este error se habría evitado fácilmente —añade Simon en el manuscrito que estamos comentando— de haber tenido más en cuenta la distinción tripartita de Aristóteles para los hábitos intelectuales: el área relativa al arte, la regida por la ciencia y aquélla en la que domina la prudencia.

#### 4. Características ético sociales del trabajo: cumplimiento legal y expansión libre

Al lado de las características metafísicas del trabajo, Simon considera otro aspecto de esa realidad, el de sus características ético sociales, en el que ahora se detiene con algo más de atención. Al ocuparse de esta dimensión del trabajo, el texto de la carta vuelve sobre una distinción acuñada por el autor años atrás —aparecía ya empleada en el ensayo de 1938—, que constituye un paso más en la delimitación del concepto de trabajo. Simon distingue dos grupos o tipos de actividades del hombre, las de “cumplimiento legal” (*legal fulfillment*) y las de “expansión libre” (*free development*); es decir, aquellas que se realizan en cumplimiento de alguna legalidad, en el sentido más amplio, y otras que discurren libremente. Tal distinción viene a completar las características metafísicas del trabajo, el cual queda enmarcado entre las actividades de cumplimiento legal. Simon lo había expresado con las siguientes palabras: “para que una actividad que presente las características metafísicas del trabajo sea también trabajo en el sentido ético social, se requiere que pertenezca al orden del cumplimiento legal”<sup>8</sup>.

El autor ilustra la distinción con algunos ejemplos: la acción de dar un paseo con objeto de facilitar la digestión constituye una actividad de cumplimiento legal, sin embargo, esa misma acción física de dar un paseo para gozar del paisaje y del ejercicio que comporta sería de expansión libre; de modo semejante, cultivar un huerto para alimentar a la familia o hacerlo durante el tiempo de ocio porque se considera un ejercicio interesante y agradable.

Tal distinción resulta cercana a la consideración del carácter penoso o enojoso del trabajo y al lugar que se atribuye a este elemento en la definición o en el concepto de trabajo. Como afirma el texto de la carta, Simon está convencido de que el trabajo no puede definirse como una actividad necesariamente penosa o

<sup>8</sup> Ver Y. Simon, *Trois leçons sur le travail*, Paris, 1938, 16s.

dificultosa, pero al mismo tiempo afirma que la definición de trabajo debe contar de algún modo con ese elemento.

La carta se hace eco de la crítica que expresó Maritain a esta noción de cumplimiento legal como rasgo típico del trabajo, por considerar que el contenido relevante de esa expresión quedaría mejor expresado si se sustituyese por la noción de "utilidad social". Simon admite que durante años estuvo tentado de admitir la observación de su colega, pero que la cuestión que ahora atrae su atención —la del contraste entre el trabajo y el arte— le lleva a prestar más vivo interés a la noción de cumplimiento legal.

En el texto de la carta dirigida a Arendt afirma no haber alcanzado una decisión firme, pero manifiesta su inclinación en un determinado sentido. La respuesta resultaría de una comparación entre la necesidad implicada por las reglas del arte y la necesidad que entraña la sujeción a una naturaleza que —según se ha descrito antes— sitúa al trabajo en oposición parcial con respecto al arte. Aunque de forma tímida y desde la falta de certeza, Simon sospecha que las reglas del arte, por ser formas de creación libre, se asimilan a la categoría de expansión libre que, en el contexto ético social, contrastan con el sentimiento de obligación, restricción o constrección que acompaña la experiencia del trabajo con una frecuencia sorprendente (cfr. lín. 115 y ss.). Ciertamente, la noción maritainiana de utilidad social da cuenta de algunos de los factores encerrados en la expresión "cumplimiento legal", pero Simon prefiere mantener esta última y mostrar que se funda en el tipo de necesidad —sujeción a la naturaleza— que sitúa al trabajo en oposición parcial al arte. Desde el punto de vista socio ético el trabajo habla tanto de disciplina como el arte de libertad, y este contraste no queda suficientemente expresado en la noción de utilidad social, puesto que no puede decirse que el trabajo es socialmente útil por esencia y el arte no lo sea. Y concluye: "Estas son, hasta el momento presente, cuestiones pendientes de solución".

No obstante, en la fase final de la elaboración de la carta, todavía añade Simon una observación relativa a esta cuestión del cumplimiento legal como elemento característico del trabajo, según

queda reflejada en el *post scriptum*. Se trata de una alusión al fin o propósito de la acción.

Parte de la distinción entre las acciones que tienen por finalidad la supervivencia y aquellas otras que se dirigen hacia formas de vida más nobles, para establecer desde ahí una comparación entre la acción del trabajador y la del artista. En ambos casos estamos ante acciones ejercidas sobre la naturaleza física, pero el trabajador que actúa más directamente por la supervivencia o para su sostenimiento tiene, por decirlo así, más de trabajador; mientras que el artista que trabaja de modo directo sobre formas de vida más nobles o altas, representa con más propiedad la condición de artista que la de trabajador.

Esta observación —continúa el texto del manuscrito— puede arrojar algo de luz al problema de la utilidad social frente al cumplimiento legal. Si el trabajo es, en un primer sentido, una acción ejercida sobre la naturaleza para la supervivencia del hombre, tal noción de trabajo se realizaría completamente en la figura de un ermitaño que cultiva su huerto, y aquí la referencia a la utilidad social sería absolutamente innecesaria. Además, según consideramos el trabajador en la sociedad, podemos observar que las actividades dirigidas a la supervivencia son propiamente los negocios de las organizaciones sociales más bajas (en Aristóteles, la familia). Por el contrario, la comunidad donde prospera el arte es la más completa y perfecta de todas: el Estado, la República o la comunidad humana.

En este sentido, el recurso a la noción de utilidad social no resultaría muy provechoso para la comparación entre el arte y el trabajo, sino que sería más fructífera la oposición entre la supervivencia y las formas de vida más altas. Por lo demás, la conexión entre la supervivencia y el cumplimiento legal, de una parte, y las formas de vida más altas y la expansión libre, de otra, resulta obvia (cfr. lín. 150 y ss.).

## 5. Carta de Y. R. Simon dirigida a H. Arendt

820 North Notre Dame Avenue  
South Bend 17, Indiana  
May 18, 1953  
Mrs. Hannah Arendt  
130 Morningside Drive, Apt. 6D  
New York, New York

Dear Mrs. Arendt:

I was very happy to have this long conversation with you and to introduce to you my little pupil Charles Kahn. As you saw, this boy is as charming as he is brilliant; being without a father, I think he likes to be treated by me as a son; having five sons of my own, I am so well trained in paternal love that I enjoy immensely an extra son of such distinction.

I felt honored more than I can say by your persistent interest in my writings and your desire to read my papers on *work* is for me a highly valued encouragement. I suppose that you have, by now, received my book on free choice; I am packing for you everything I have published on the subject of work, and after I have directed the University of Chicago Press to send you my *Philosophy of Democratic Government*, I shall be wondering whether I can still speak of your persistent interest in my publication: this kind interest may well be quenched forever.

As I mentioned to you, I consider that the essay in the definition of work which makes up the first of my *Trois Leçons...* and appeared in beginner's English in the *Review of Politics* was radically spoiled by an initial error. My 1947 paper shows the way in which I would now correct this error. Yet I would like to give you a more elaborate idea of my present views on the definition of work.

I retain the distinction between the metaphysical and the social-ethical characteristics of work. But I would divide the study of the

metaphysical characteristics into three parts which might be entitled "Man and Nature", "Man and Mankind", "Man and Truth". Under *Man and Nature*, I would first describe manual work. In spite of the fierce and relentless opposition of all the intellectuals I know, I keep holding it obvious that the fullest and truly archetypal realization of the concept of work is found in manual labor. What distinguishes manual labor is the fact that it includes the final phase of action upon physical nature. The metaphysical characteristics of manual labor are utility, transitivity, mobility, rationality —these are studied in my early papers— and dependence upon nature as system of date (*das Gegeben*). The last point, untreated in my previous writings, now seems to me of major importance for the problem of the relations between work and art. In the last of my *Trois Leçons...* I treated work as a particular case of art and elaborated on the paradox that Aristotle, who knew so well the meaning of art as intellectual virtue ignored so shockingly the cultural significance of work. As my friend Maritain stressed it many times, the fact that human art borrows elements from the world of experience and preexistent reality is entirely due to the limitations of human knowledge and entirely foreign to the essential tendencies as art as such. If allowed to follow its own inclination without hindrance or limitation, art would be pure creativeness, free from obligation to any pattern, exemplar or actual data. We can easily see that in diverse historical periods art sometimes inclines towards larger acceptance of its indebtedness to existent nature and sometimes asserts more daringly its ideal of independent creation. I like the words of Cocteau: "The photographer has liberated the draftsman". Thanks to photography and similar devices, the art of our time is characterized by an exaltation of creative independence, which is the kind of freedom that is proper to art as such. All other things being equal greater creative independence from nature causes an artist to be more of an artist, but does not cause a worker to be more of a worker; it rather causes a worker to be less of a worker and to become something of an artist. A primitive farmer is more of a worker than the operator of the most highly scientific machinery. If I can mention Sorel without irritating you, I would

recall that for him the object of physics is constituted by a nature of laboratory, an artificial nature. In highly scientific industry the "laws of nature" with which man has to reckon are to a considerable extent laws of artificial nature, of man-made nature, of things brought about by the restricted but indomitable creativeness of human art. In advanced technology work comes closer to the idea of art as free creation and in the same measure undergoes a transformation which removes it from the basic forms of work. At the limit of a process whose direction is indicated by the evolution of technology, *the distinct reality of work would disappear into the independent creativeness of art*. In Marx's terminal description of the rational society where work is free from all constraint we have not only a revolutionary picture of emancipation from social power but also a technical and scientific dream of a substitution of free rules of art for the laws of nature. And here is a question that I like to submit to you: in spite of all statements about the determination of social forms and ideologies by the technological substructure, I suspect that Marx also believes that the behavior of nature can be modified by the forms of social life. Among the Utopian socialists whom Marx despises but to whom he owes so much, one went far in this direction: according to Fourier there is such connection between the natural and the social realms that disorder in society brings about disturbances in nature; conversely when *harmony* —the 8th and last of the phases of human evolution— is brought about by the phalansterian organization of production and life, nature is going to work out unprecedented wonders. Fourier has no inhibitions and goes on to describe the helpful animals which will then contribute to the enjoyment of life by man reconciled with each other as well as with mother nature. Stripped of romanticism and put in scientific language, this story boils down to the proposition that revolutionary change in society entails, on the part of physical nature, greater submission to the designs of man. True, I expect much from the double consideration that work is a kind of art and yet contains a law of submission to nature which is in sharp opposition to the artistic idea of creation.

After this inquiry into manual labor I define a first kind of work of the mind: technical thinking. On this subject I think that my 1947 paper is sufficiently clear. I intend to inquire into the following problems: (1) granted that every work is rationally directed, I wonder whether greater rationality intensifies the character of work, weakens it, or behaves neutrally towards it. I hardly hesitate to say that greater rationality brings technical thinking closer to science and makes it less of a work. (2) As I compare with each other the preceding remarks, it seems to me that we should speak of a joint evolution of technical thinking toward science and toward art. The world vision of science must be mechanistic and thereby exclude all natures. There is not even one nature in the world of Descartes, for extension is not a nature. The elimination of natures suits the free creativeness of art. But technology produces an environment where man does not recognize himself: this is why we are all crazy about art, meaning the fine arts. In our mechanistic wilderness we look for an environment worthy of man, and since we have lost contact with nature, the best we can do is to seek in the products of humane arts the company that we do not find in those of mechanistic arts.

I do not have right now anything new to say about what I called "moral work" in the 1947 paper. The big mistake of my early essay —page 8 of *Trois Leçons...*— was the assumption that diverse kinds of work are sufficiently systematized by the polar opposition of manual work and contemplation. The footnote number 14, page 85 of the reprint *Work and Workmen* expresses, by its clumsiness, the unacceptable difficulties entailed by this mistaken attempt at a dualistic reduction. This error would have been easily avoided if only I had remarked the relevance, for the present subject, of Aristotle's tripartite treatment of the intellectual habitus: there is work in the area to which art is relative, and in the area designated by science and in the area designated by prudence. With regard to "pure intellectual work", i.e., research directed toward contemplation, I intend to maintain my positions in spite of the ire aroused among my intellectual friends: pure intellectual work is least of a work and it is the highest kind of work. My intellectual

friends make an assumption that I do not grant, viz., that work alone grounds respectability and a title to a ration card. It is not without interest to remark that even in the contemplation minded circles where I live, no one wants to be described as a non-worker.

With regard to the social-ethical characteristics of work, my biggest question concerns: "legal fulfillment". I feel sure that work cannot be described as necessarily painful or irksome, and I feel equally sure that the definition of work must express the permanent foundation of pain at work. Mr. Maritain, who was writing on related topics at the time when I wrote *Trois Leçons...* strongly objected to the feature of "legal fulfillment"; he said that anything of relevance conveyed by this expression is better conveyed by reference to social utility. In the last few years I have often been tempted to rally to M. Maritain's view. However, the partial contrast between work and art is now attracting my attention, revives my interest in the characteristic of legal fulfillment. I am undecided but I think that I know where to find a decision. The answer should result from a comparison between the necessity embodied in the rules of art and the necessity embodied in this subjection to nature which, by the preceding description, sets work in partial opposition to art. I am not clear enough about the rules of art to dare a conclusion. What I suspect is that the rules of art, by the very fact that they are not the forms of existent things but those of free creations admit of a "free expansion" which, in the social-ethical context, contrasts with the feeling of obligation, restriction and even constraint which accompanies the experience of work with such striking steadiness. Although the characteristic of social utility does account for many of the facts to which I refer when I speak of "legal fulfillment", I shall retain the latter expression if I can show convincingly that it has a foundation in the kind of necessity —subjection to nature— which sets work in partial opposition to art. Considered from the social-ethical standpoint, work speaks of discipline as loudly as art of liberty. Can it be said that this contrast is sufficiently accounted for by social utility? Can it be said that work is socially useful by essence and that art is not? These are for me, at the present point, unanswered questions.

Perhaps some light can be derived from the remark which concludes my 1947 paper: work is the domain of precision and honesty, where cheating means failure. Clearly, when the question is to protect society against the sophistry conveyed by our "sophisticated" notion of culture, the pattern set by the worker is more reliable than the one set by the artist. Whether this is a mere accident should be decided by a comparison between the discipline procured by the rules of art and that procured by the workman's submission to nature. Of course, we shall not disregard the presence of a work component in the activity of the artist: *le métier*.

With regard to the notion of authority suggested in page 70 of *Trois Leçons...* I wish to call your attention to the confession of error in footnote 15, page 25 and footnote 23, page 61 of *Philosophy of Democratic Government*, assuring unity of action is not the most essential function of authority although it is, under definite circumstances, a function of essential character.

I am thankful to you for having prompted me to new inquiry into the subject of work. But I am not sure that the reading of this long letter will not be for you a total waste of time.

Please give my regards to Mr. Blücher.

With all best wishes, I am

Respectfully yours,

P.S. As my secretary was typing —with a few mistakes— this letter it occurred to me that the social ethical characteristics of work include a specification of the general idea of action upon nature. Something must be said of the purpose of such action. The relevant division is that into action aimed at survival and actions aimed at the nobler forms of life. Let us compare, again, the worker and the artist with each other: both act upon physical nature, but the worker who acts more directly for survival is more of a worker and the artist who works more directly for the nobler ways of life is more of an artist and less of a worker. This remark may throw some light upon the problem of "social utility" versus

"legal fulfillment". If work is, in some primary fashion, an action upon nature for the survival of man, the notion of work would be completely realized in the case of a hermit who cultivates his vegetable garden and reference to society would not be absolutely necessary. Moreover, as we consider the worker in society, we may remark that activities for survival are properly the business of lower social organizations —in Aristotle, the family—. On the contrary, the community where art thrives is the most complete and perfect of all: the state, the republic, the human community. Were we to elaborate on the contrast between work and art, social utility would not yield much. The contrast between survival and higher forms of life would be more fruitful. Now, between survival and "legal fulfillment", on the one hand, nobler forms of life and 'free expansion' on the other hand, connections are obvious. Q.E.D.

**6. Carta de H. Arendt a Y. Simon**

Hannah Arendt  
July 13, 1953

Dear Mr. Simon:

Your letter was a great joy and stimulation and I wanted to reply immediately, still in the Schwung of our conversation and under the spell of your letter. Then I postponed to read first the announced publications; they arrived all except the Philosophy of Democratic Government. Thanks very much; they helped me in many ways and are carefully annotated. Yet: in the meantime we went into vacations and here I am, like two months ago, only with your letter to which I shall reply in bad order. I wished we could talk; there are so many points which I'd like to raise with you, and

the written word, especially in letters where it is so manifestly a substitute for the spoken word, is always in one's way.

I am of course glad that you hold out against our intellectual friends who want to be recognized as laborers, which they so obviously are not. But the fact that they want it, is characteristic and noteworthy. It indicates not merely the older puritan-protestant connection between work and self-respect, but the newer and much larger self/interpretation of all our society as a society of labor. The emphasis has shifted from the product to the laboring activity itself.

You know that I make a distinction between labor and work; let me try it out by comparing and arguing with your propositions. You enumerate the chief characteristics of labor as utility, transitivity, mobility and rationality plus dependence upon nature as underlying material, *hypokeimenon*. I would not directly deny any of them, except the rationality (this was an idea of Marx for whom eventually all characteristics of man —animal rationale as well as *homo faber*— sprang from his being an animal laborans, which in turn was defined as the specifically human modus of the metabolism with nature, necessary for every living being), but I would add that they all are on the basis of coercion: labor is never a free activity, not only or primarily because it depends on matter, but because it is necessitated by our body, whose needs have a quality of coercion which no other human need has. Labor as necessitated by daily life and therefore daily repeated does not necessarily result in any lasting product. It exhausts itself in the activity itself; its products are consumed immediately.

Work on the contrary is concentrated in the product which is supposed to last longer even than the life of the worker. The product is not consumed but used. There is an element of sheer labor in all work, but not vice versa. It is characteristic that the Greek used their slaves for domestic duties, which are labor par excellence, because nothing is ever achieved except the continuation of life itself. They also used them for work in the mines which was itself not yet work strictly speaking, but produced the matter necessary for it. Works, the products or working, but not

laboring, activity erect together the human artifice with which we make ourselves at home on the earth. Every worker adds something of his own to it which is supposed to be somehow more than he and his life.

Labor becomes work for the first time in agriculture, not because of the surplus which the earth grants us but because of the cultivated soil which is the lasting product of agricultural work. This is like a symbol of making oneself at home on the earth and the beginning of the erection of the human artifice.

The great error of Marx as I see it is first that he misinterpreted labor as though it were work, that he thought that labor itself, as metabolism with nature, could ever become productive. In this, he followed the tradition which was interested only in man as homo faber, because the Greeks had eliminated labor from the free life through the institution of slavery, and were philosophically interested only in the activities of free men, *techne* and *poiesis*, *politeuein* and *philosophein*. Marx' greatness is that he understood the decisive difference between our and all previous ages to lie in the political equality of laborers; he proceeded to the greatest dignification and justification of labor ever conceived. But even he did not dare to break entirely with the tradition and ended by misrepresenting labor as productive work in the old Greek sense. His second error seems to me to be only a consequence of this, although it presents itself formally as a contradiction in Marx's work itself. Marx hoped of course that labor one day would be abolished and the pathos of his revolution is nourished by this hope more than by anything else. This hope seems to me entirely unwarranted and very dangerous. This, more than the classless society, is the utopian element in Marxism.

Art seems to me still to belong to the realm of the human artifice and to have a little more to do with work than you imply. But fundamentally I agree with you, especially on the liberation of modern art. (Sorel does not irritate me in the least; of course, the nature of physics is a nature of laboratory, an artificial nature).

I think our real difference is the following: You say a primitive farmer is more of a worker than the operator of scientific

machinery. I do not think, first, that the latter has anything in common with the artist, because creativity is even more obviously lacking in the operator than in the primitive farmer. Perhaps an operator, a mere operator, is neither a worker nor a laborer, but he has more in common with the laborer; And I think, second, that in our society where everybody wants to be a "worker", engaged in the activity of laboring, there is the great danger that we do the opposite of what Marx did: namely interpret and pervert all work into mere labor. There are quite a few possible demonstrations to this —first of all the fact that we have become a consumer's society as distinguished from a user's society: we consume everything, even things which are made in order to be used. Labor has taken its revenge. When we hoped to eliminate it altogether through technology, which is never possible simply because we have a body, it started to invade all other activities. Second our attitude to what we are doing: we work in order to live instead of only laboring for the conservation of life. We refuse hard labor, and rightly so, but do all our work as though it were labor.

Third: if our friends insist that they are workers, they do not mean that they are adding their own work to the human world, but that they fit and function well in society by their activity, regardless of products. It is not the pride of the craftsman which makes them say they are workers, but the eagerness of functionaries who pretend that their activity is indispensable in the division of a gigantic labor process.

Contemplation: I was always struck by a curious similarity between contemplation and sheer labor, and that is that both are pure activities which neither aim at nor have any tangible results. It is as though labor belonged to the process of physical life in a similar way as contemplation belongs to the process of a living soul.

One more remark: You insist repeatedly on art acting upon physical nature, though in a different way than work and for different purposes. What do you do with poetry —the originator or all art? Words are not nature. What does he act upon?

If Marx believed that nature can be modified through the organization of society? This is a very interesting question which I am a bit afraid to answer. He himself nowhere says so. Man for him is a natural being, his humanity being his nature; the "laboring force" is a natural force according to him. Still, I think your suspicion is somehow right and the influence of Fourier undeniable.

One final remark: What you call action for survival as distinguished from action for the nobler forms of life, I would call labor; and I would agree that labor itself and from itself is not "social", which is one of the reasons why people who were exclusively engaged in it were not admitted in society. Work is always social: it presupposes a commonly built and commonly inhabited world. Goethe once said: "Man weicht der Welt nicht sicherer aus als durch die Kunst und man verknuepft sich nicht sicherer mit ihr als durch die Kunst". This is a paradox in appearance only; what he meant was: "Man weicht der Gesellschaft nicht sicherer aus als durch die Kunst und man verknuepft sich der Welt nicht sicherer als durch die Kunst". This, I think, is true for all work. Labor, on the other hand, performed for strictly private purposes and in this sense a-social does not need any isolation from others, so that a division of labor becomes possible, a kind of socialization. But this does not make labor any more "social" in the sense in which you use the word: these are all private individuals who labor together for private purposes, whereas the most isolated artist works for the common world or the common good.

I do hope that you will show yourself soon again in New York. I am writing this letter in some disorder, disturbed by playing (nicely playing) children and beautiful hot sun. I trust you will forgive this.

I enjoyed your pupil who is not quite so "little" as his adopted father thinks he is. Will you give him my regards?

All good wishes for the summer

Cordially yours,  
Hannah Arendt

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