

# They are Wrong: The Work Does Not End an Essay

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The ‘end of work’ discussion (e.g., Adam Schaff, 1985; Jeremy Rifkin, 1995) has been concentrated on the narrow ‘paid job’ concept of work. Even futures researchers too often take this narrow concept as self-evident, so they follow job forecasts meticulously. Keeping people disposable is, however, a core value of the monetized profit economy. Automation has gotten rid of a lot of human workers and their jobs, but official statistics do not tell much about the total amount of work.

What then is work, if it is not paid jobs? I begin with two comments. The inventor of time-banks, Edgar S. Cahn writes:

*“Some public goods cannot be produced effectively without ‘social capital’ that only citizens can provide. Maintaining neighborhoods where children and families can live safely is work. Citizen action to fight crime, industrial pollution, or depletion of the ozone layer is work. Holding officials accountable is work. Yet we do not count any of that as work for purposes of national economic policy.” (Cahn, 2014, p. 2)*

Rania Antonopoulos, who studied the connections between unpaid care work and paid work, states:

*“Unpaid work activities entail every day routine household maintenance work, such as cooking, cleaning, shopping, doing the laundry, caring for children etc. Viewed from the point of view of classical economics, this work lowers the cost of labour, which at the macro level allows for a smaller wage fund and thus a larger pool of profits, which facilitates the process of accumulation at any given time. Unpaid time spent on these activities, then, can be thought of as a “subsidy” to the business sector, as a transfer, a “gift” if you may, from one institution, the household/family, to the institution of the market.” (Antonopoulos, 2009, p. 8)*

As far back as the 1980s, Hazel Henderson’s analysis posited that the whole of human existence, and the whole of the economy, is dependent on the ability of ‘Mother Nature’ to produce what humans need. In addition, the entire economy builds upon the unpaid work done in households, communities, and in society at large. These two basic layers must work well to make possible the upper two layers of the cake, the public and private sectors, which comprise the monetized part of economy. The private sector is only the icing on the cake. (Henderson, 1993)

## Myriad faces of work

It's difficult to imagine and define where **work** begins and ends. For example, it cannot be restricted only to human beings. There are worker bees and worker ants. Does not the plankton photosynthesizing do work? Does not a tiger hunting his prey for nourishment do work? Did not our ancestors do work for millions of years knapping stones to make knives and axes? Indeed, work began eons before ancient emperors began to print their images upon pieces of metal and call them *money*. And finally, does not the engine powering a machine, or a vehicle, do work?

Against this background, it sounds at least false, if not misleading, to count only paid jobs as work. But why is this such a dominant view today? The magic word is *exchange* — commerce. Money became the predominant tool of global exchange when elephant tusks or beaver pelts or buck skins were replaced first by those pieces of metal, later by printed paper, and now by electronic impulses. For example Max Weber analyzes the monetization through differentiation of enterprises from mainly self-contained households. (Weber, 1968, pp. 370–384).

There are at least three types of unpaid work that remain **outside** the *formal* concept of productive work. 1) The first type of work is ancient, consisting of activities both of gatherer-hunters, nomads, fishers and farmers: people who lived without money. The System of National Accounts of 1993 (SNA), includes these activities as unpaid 'economic' work. 2) The second type is unpaid work in households, including caring for the young, old, and sick; it is, in SNA-terms, 'non-economic' — even if in fact it subsidizes both economic enterprises and the state itself. Unpaid work particularly burdens women, who carry out the lion's share of unpaid domestic work. 3) The third type of informal work consists of voluntary, unpaid work done mainly for the well-being of the community and of others — humanitarian work, nature conservation, green work. (Antonopoulos, 2009, p. 4)

In addition to these three types, there is an increasing number of unpaid internships — as well as forced labor. International Labour Organization ILO estimated that forced labor in 2012 ensnared 20.9 million people; this number includes human trafficking and forced sex work (ILO Global estimate of forced labor, 2012, p.1). See Figure 1.

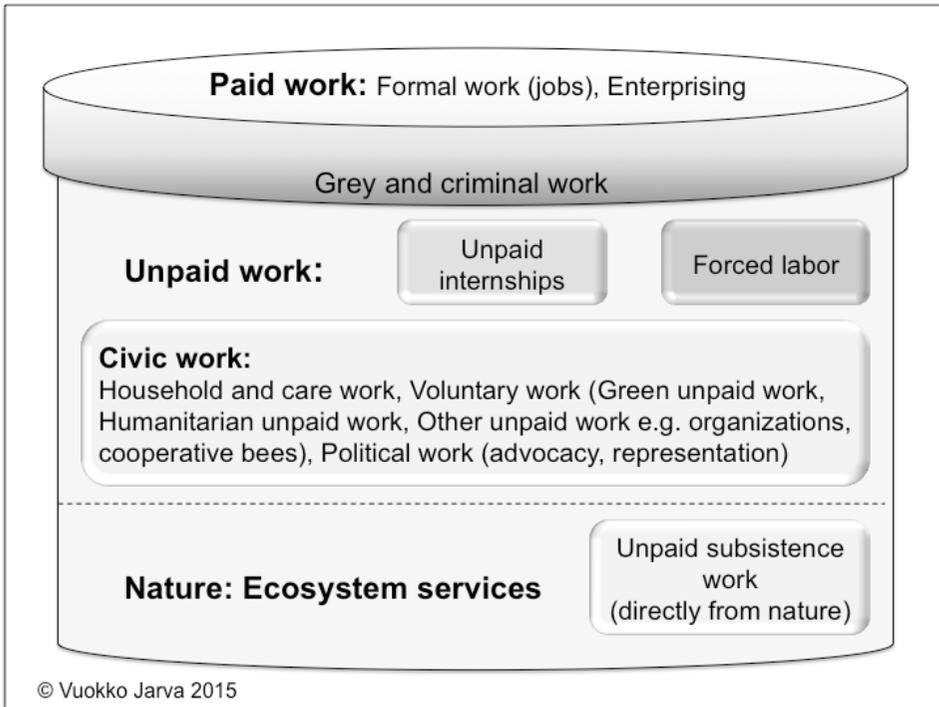


Figure 1. Hazel Henderson's cake applied in human work types

Why do I define household and caregiving work as civic work? Usually households are treated as half-closed systems that benefit only household members and are very private. But this is a rough misunderstanding and understatement. Do not households feed the workers, and the children (the workers of the future), and take care of them as best they can? Households nurture and grow not only the next generation of workers, but also of consumers, and the ability to consume. Households also support actors in the market, such as merchants.

What I call 'green unpaid work', the caretaking of nature and of natural resources, benefits society in many ways, so it also must be counted as productive civic work.

## The invisible wonder of core economy

Once upon a time, when people were few and lived directly from nature, the basic units of organization to carry out the work were relatively small groups of people, families, tribes or clans. The family has recently shrunk in some parts of the world, now consisting of only a nuclear family, parents, or one parent, and a child or children. Especially in big cities, a household can consist of only one single person, without a family.

Nothing has changed, however: a nuclear family or a lone individual provide for the most basic necessities. Thus it seems natural that Neva Goodwin and her group should consider the household to be at the very core of the economy. (Goodwin, 2008)

But their definition of the *core* is more extensive; it includes the community as well. Members of households spend active time doing work in a variety of organizations. One person might collect one trash every day, then help an invalid cross the street, then help organize a children's football team. Some people specialize in political influence, others in overseeing the performance of public officials or the corporate responsibility of business firms. (Goodwin, 2008).

These activities use social capital, without which the societal machine would not run.

Lately efforts have been made to count the value of the core economy in monetary terms, so as to compare it with the (still) "official" GDP or GNP. Eurostat first suggested, as early as 1999, counting the value of household production as a satellite, separate but comparable, account. But as of now, nothing has been realized on European level.

In Finland, Johanna Varjonen and Kristiina Aalto counted the value of household production in 2001, and found it was about 40% of GDP. It was about the same as all industrial production. Since then they have updated their figures, and have stated that the value of household production has remained close to 40% of GDP. In 2008, when the present recession began, it jumped from 38% to 41%. This is the gift households give to the official monetary sector. Who could imagine generous business owners who would donate an entire industry's total industrial production as a gift to the people? (Varjonen – Aalto, 2005, 2013)

Veerle Miranda counted both compensated time and the costs of unpaid household work for OECD countries. The people in the OECD spend one tenth to one fifth of their time doing unpaid work. As she comments, the value of unpaid household labor is, on average, about one third of GDP (Figure 2).

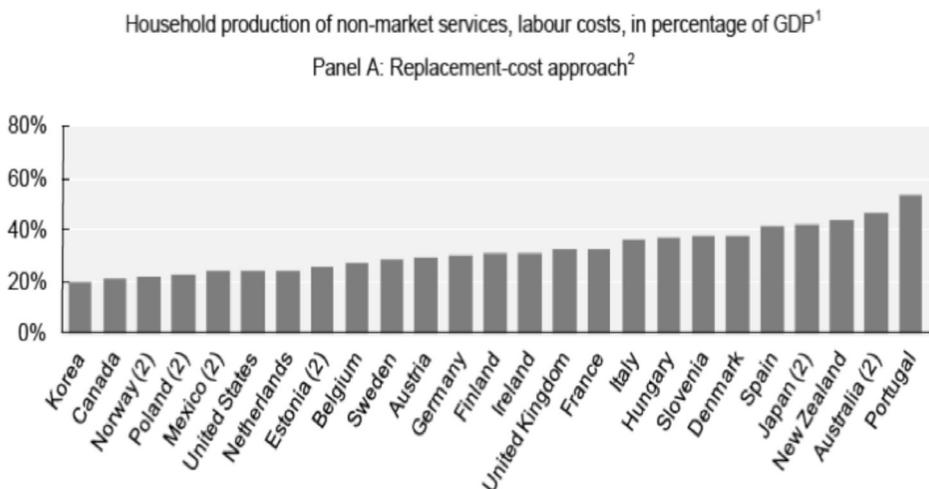


Figure 2. Value on unpaid household work in OECD.  
(Source: Miranda, 2011, p.29)

Routine household work comprises the lion's share of unpaid work, and women in all OECD countries do more of it. Next comes care for household members,

then shopping, then time spent in travelling required by unpaid work. Care for non-household-members takes some time, too, but it's a minor amount. (Miranda, 2011)

Other unpaid work for the core-economy remains excluded from these calculations, and is not followed regularly. Some information can be gained from time-use surveys, which in many countries are performed regularly. For example, a time-use survey 2009 in Finland gives some information about unpaid work. 29% of the population, age 10 years or more, had done some voluntary work during the previous four weeks. Most of it was in sports and exercise clubs. Next came work for community and religious organizations. During previous four weeks, 59% had helped neighbors or work-colleagues. Most active in this core-economy work were people aged 45 to 64. Among professional groups, farmers were the most active. It must be pointed out, the employed were more active than the unemployed. (Vapaaehtoistyöhön osallistuminen pysynyt ennallaan 2000-luvulla, 2009).

### Don't forget: even nature works for us

Natural resources are considered free to take, use, and exploit — but that is changing. Consciousness of the vulnerability of nature's ecosystems is gradually increasing — though it has not yet reached anywhere near big multinational companies or top political decision-makers. Nature is the biggest collective worker, as the Table 1 below shows. Robert Costanza's working group has given the estimates. (Costanza et al, 1997, 2014)

The term *ecosystem services*, describing the work nature itself performs, became popular from the report 'Ecosystems and Human Well-Being Synthesis' to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment Board (MA) in 2005. Putting a monetary value on natural resources — as if they could be owned — is problematic at best, but I use the figures to demonstrate how much more nature provides the world than national economies do.

Table 1. *Value of world's ecosystem services in US-dollars*

World	1997	2011
Ecosystem services	16-54 trillion \$	125 trillion \$
GDP	18 trillion \$	51,2 trillion \$

Sources: [http://www.esd.ornl.gov/benefits\\_conference/nature\\_paper.pdf](http://www.esd.ornl.gov/benefits_conference/nature_paper.pdf) and <http://community-wealth.org/sites/clone.community-wealth.org/files/downloads/article-costanza-et-al.pdf>

Nature is hardworking and tireless, but even so, it can be damaged. Its renewal process can stop, or run amok, such as sending us extreme weather conditions. If we stop trying to exploit and dominate nature and begin serious dialogue with it instead, maybe it will forgive us of our earlier sins and accept our cooperation.

Figure 3 shows how many ways nature benefits us. It offers not only different products, but also efficient regulating, repair and recovery processes. For example, without bees, our food production would be in deep trouble.

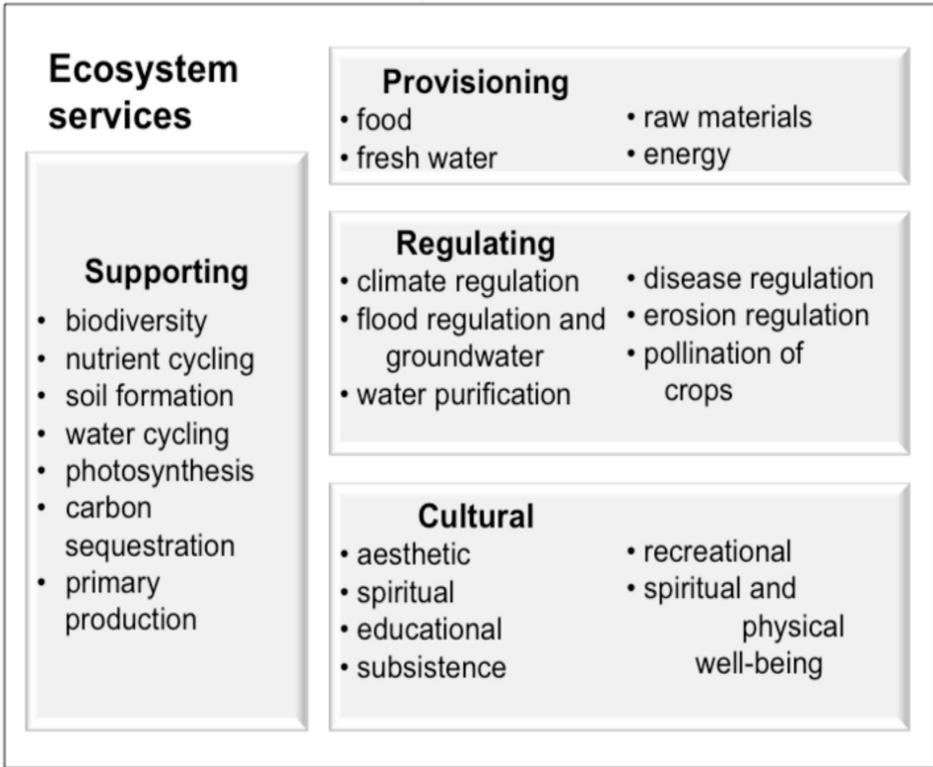


Figure 3. Ecosystem services  
 Source: <http://www.sll.fi/mita-me-teemme/ekosysteemipalvelut>

### How to revive through unpaid work?

A chronically chanting choir laments the economic recession and increasing unemployment. It is true that economic policy has caused tremendously unnecessary suffering and even unnecessary deaths; for example, see The Marmot Review (Fair Society, Healthy Lives, 2010).

Traditional economists sleep poorly and scratch their heads nearly skinless as they try to find solutions to the impossible problem of how to divide the decreasing pool of public money. But a few optimists sing different tune. The New Economy Foundation invites to encourage the activation of

*“resources embedded in the everyday life of every individual (time, wisdom, experience, energy, knowledge, skills) and in the relationships among them (love, empathy, responsibility, care, reciprocity, teaching, and learning).” (People, planet, power, 2015, p. 19)*

This probably is sensible, but how is it to be realized? Below I’ll give some ideas:

- Cutting working time gives space for family and voluntary work.
- Unpaid work as an incentive: strengthening the core economy and social capital through legislation and support. Social benefits should cover unpaid work, too.

- Documentable unpaid work as a personal incentive to get the support of the society (above the minimum subsistence standard).
- The addition of unpaid work in national and international accounting systems. (GDP,GNP).
- The addition of ecosystem services in national and international accounting systems (GDP,GNP).
- Directing taxation away from productive activities and toward activities that cause damage.
- Support of peer groups.
- In the monetary economy and the real economy, human dignity, wellbeing, and sustainability must be core values.

Some of these should not be difficult to achieve in a short time, but others will take more time because they require deep paradigmatic transformation. To begin we could pay more attention to the valuable unpaid work we ourselves and the people all around are doing.

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