

INTANGIBLE SLAVERY AND FREEDOM AT WORK:
A PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY

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Abstract. In this paper, I am introducing a distinction in the notion of slavery, as tangible slavery and intangible slavery. Tangible slavery is the notion of slavery in a strong sense, in which slavery is understood as a system based on property law. I am distinguishing tangible slavery from a weak sense of slavery, intangible slavery, which refers to the situations in which an individual continues to work in place despite being dissatisfied with the work. The force to work against one own will is an outcome of complex situational effects generated from both external forces such as working environment, policies, culture, and internal forces like complacency, aversion to taking risks, refusal to explore new possibilities. I have mentioned and emphasized external forces at a minimal level. The focus of the paper is on the reasons related to the individual level, which creates a puzzle about individual freedom. The puzzle is – despite improved work conditions in modern times, why there seems to be a decrease in the level of work satisfaction? The first section of the paper provides an explication of the tangible and intangible distinction, showing the puzzling situation of freedom at the workplace. In the second section, I have presented a historical survey of evolution in the notion of work and freedom. In the third section, I have discussed freedom and liberty and elaborated on the idea of slavery with an example. In the final section, I have tried to formulate an approach from existential philosophy to overcome the puzzling situation of freedom at the workplace.

Keywords: slavery, freedom, work, existentialism, job satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

Discussions about the notion of freedom have been a favourite perennial question for philosophers. Two contrastive perspectives,

which sums up the story of both sides of the debate about human freedom are worth starting the paper. On the one hand, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (2008, 45) asked a peculiar question about being a free human being and declared, “Man was born free, and everywhere he is in chains. There are some who may believe themselves masters of others and are no less enslaved than they. How has this change come about?” On the other hand, Jean-Paul Sartre (2007, 29), explaining the meaning of humans being condemned to be free without solace or resort to means of justification, said: “That is what I mean when I say that man is condemned to be free: condemned, because he did not create himself, yet nonetheless free, because once cast into the world, he is responsible for everything he does”. In this paper, I will situate the debate of man being in chains and man being free in the context of freedom available in the workplace atmosphere of formal set-up. I will argue that the formal structure of a workplace environment creates a puzzling situation for the individual because many times a person feels chained despite being condemned to be free.

In the first section, I will elaborate on the feeling of being in chains by positing a distinction into the concept of slavery, which I am dubbing as tangible and intangible slavery. Tangible slavery is a form of slavery in a strong sense, in which slavery is understood as a system based on property law. I am distinguishing tangible slavery from a weak sense of slavery, intangible slavery, which refers to the situations in which an individual continues to work in place despite being dissatisfied with the work. The force to work against his own will is an outcome of complex situational effects generated from both the external forces such as working environment, policies, culture, and internal forces like complacency, aversion to taking risks, refusal to explore new possibilities. I have mentioned and emphasized external forces at a minimal level. The focus of this paper is on the reasons related to the individual level, which creates a puzzle about individual freedom. The puzzle is – despite improved work conditions in modern times, why there seems to be a decrease in the level of work satisfaction? The first section of the paper

provides an explication of the tangible and intangible distinction, showing the puzzling situation of freedom at the workplace. In the second section, I have presented a historical survey of evolution in the notion of work and freedom. The third section further discusses the concept of freedom in tandem with the thought experiment of the *tale of the slave*, found in the novel *Anarchy, State and Utopia* by Robert Nozick (1974), for connecting the discussion on intangible slavery with the approach to freedom. In the final section, I have tried to formulate an approach from existential philosophy to overcome the puzzling situation of freedom at the workplace.

1. TANGIBLE AND INTANGIBLE SLAVERY

Slavery is one of the oldest institutions of human culture. It emerged as soon as people transited from being hunter-gatherer to an agricultural society. The abundance of food and an increase in population paved the way for the institution of slavery, which clutched almost every human civilization from east to west. What I call tangible slavery is synonymous with the formal form of slavery as understood as a system based on property law. According to one of the formal definition of slavery by Laura (2004, 162), “slavery is any system in which the principles of property law are applied to people, allowing individuals to own, buy and sell other individuals, as a *de jure* form of property.” In Laura’s definition of slavery, the term *de jure* refers to legally described practices, irrespective of their existence in reality. *De jure* is often contrasted with *de facto*, which describes the situations existing in reality, even if it is not legally recognized. Tangible slavery, in a formal sense, is a well understood, researched, and known topic, I will not further elaborate on it.

My focus is on the concept of intangible slavery, which falls into *de facto* category. Rather than defining the concept of intangible slavery, I would describe it by situating it into a real-life workplace situation. I attribute the reason for favouring description over definition and explanation of intangible slavery to two famous

quotes of two influential personalities of their respective domains. The first is to be found in the Irish poet and playwright Oscar Wilde's Gothic and philosophical novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (2008, 187) - "To define is to limit". The second belongs to Ludwig Wittgenstein's revolutionary work *Philosophical Investigation* (1953, 25): "the meaning of a word is its use in the language". Although the context of these quotes is vastly different, they both points to the need for a description of the situation, to understand the meaning of terms rather than solely focusing on the definition and explanation. This much digression for the sake of choosing description over definition enough clarifies the matter at hand.

Moving on to the actual description of the term intangible slavery in a workplace scenario, which goes something like this: one has to submit his documents to an employer; one has signed a bond or contract of employment; one is voiceless in the decision making; one has to bring one's work to home; one is continuously bullied by his superior; sometimes one becomes a victim of sexual abuse; one is denied clothing in his way; one does not get proper rest or recreational service during work; one is given unrealistic targets to achieve; asking for leave is often treated as part of seven deadly sins; one is accused of taking rest during the office time; one has to report every activity even when it is not related to the job; feeling of disheartening and worthlessness at the job; one's feeling of insecurity despite loyalty.

Prima facie, any critic of such descriptions of intangible slavery at the workplace might shrug off them as a description of complaints by a disgruntled ex-employee. However, such descriptions are not an exhaustive list but an attempt to sketch a picture to show how intangible slavery might look like. Unlike tangible slavery, there is no apparent master-slave relationship; no one is being a subject of owing, buying, or selling a person; or is being robbed from their remuneration by unilaterally withdrawing it. I argue that elements present in the formal sense of slavery, *i.e.* tangible slavery has included only the external condition of an individual. This is why there is a need to expand the notion of slavery to cover the inner

state of the individual. I argue that the concept of intangible slavery could serve as such expansion, which attempts to include the internal predicament of an individual in a workplace environment. From an external look, an average office going individual might look happy, clean-shaven, formally dressed, with a nice paycheque and bank balance, paying taxes in time, getting respect from his peers and society. But internally, the individual might be feeling in chains, stretching and crushing him from all sides; feeling the pain of a whip without any mark on the body. Such condition of painful situations that are not visible to the perceptual system but are present nevertheless is what I have been calling intangible slavery. One cannot see or touch it, but only feel it.

At this point, one might suspect my motivation to add unnecessary distinction containing the negatively valenced term *slavery* with not so apparent term *intangible*. The answer to such objection leads to the requirement of an understanding of current work culture, and how the embeddedness of an individual in the work culture impacts the freedom of the individual who is situated in that cultural environment. The point will be clearer with the exploration into how the notion of work evolved.

2. THE EVOLUTION OF THE NOTION OF WORK

I will present a chronological historical account of the various western philosophers and intellectual on their ideas related to work. The aim is to collect fragments of ideas present in different times and places and weave them together to provide a sense in which these scholars conceptualized work. The benefit of such historical exposition is that it will help us connect the idea of intangible slavery with the notion of freedom.

Starting with the mythological and biblical conception of work, according to Christian doctrine when Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden for eating the apple, the punishment for defying God's wishes was work, "By the sweat of your brow, you'll

lead your food until you return to the ground” (Genesis 3:19). Work became a distinguishing feature between life in paradise from the life of the actual world. Adam had to work as a punishment until he was 930 years old.

Athens, 335 BCE, Aristotle opened his public school, The Lyceum as a centre for learning for wealthy and cultured Athenians (Lynch 1972, 15-16). Aristotle made some bold claims regarding the nature of work and leisure:

But leisure seems itself to contain pleasure and happiness and felicity of life. And this is not possessed by the busy but by the leisured; for the busy man busies himself for the sake of some end as not being in his possession, but happiness is an end achieved, which all men think is accompanied by pleasure and not by pain. (Lord 2013, 1338a1)

Aristotle emphasized the difference between *proper* occupation and *noble* leisure in his writings. He proposed leisure not as mere amusement but as a combination of pleasure, happiness, and blessed living (1338a1). He argued that such leisure is not possible for those who are busy in some occupation because occupation aims at a necessary end. So, between work and leisure, the former is extrinsically good and later intrinsically good, as he wrote:

What one acts or learns for also makes a big difference. For what one does for one’s own sake, for the sake of friends, or on account of virtue is not unfree, but someone who does the same thing for others would often be held to be acting like a hired labourer or a slave. (1337b15-20)

Aristotle famous remarked, “there is no leisure for slaves” (1334a20). My interpretation of the point is that Aristotle did not mean the absence of leisure in the sense of tangible slaves. But for the intangible slave as “there is no leisure for slave” in an incomplete quote because the quote from full sentence, “there is no leisure for slave but people unable to face danger bravely are the slaves of their assailants” (1334a20).

Hippo, Roman Africa, 396 AD. After becoming Bishop of Hippo, Saint Augustine, in his sermons on the New Testament, tried to resurrect the notion of work as a result of original sin, “From this cup of sorrow no one may be excused. The cup that Adam has pledged must be drunk” (Brown 2013, sermon 10). He told his audience, many of whom were slaves that the work is always going to be miserable, the only relief is to the next life in God’s kingdom.

Rome, 1508, the Florentine painter, sculptor, architect, and poet Michelangelo was commissioned by Pope Julius the 2nd to begin painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel (Sherman 1986, 24-25). He was given complete freedom to design the work and promised a lot of money in return. Michelangelo, along with his fellow Italian genius, Leonardo da Vinci embodied a new approach to work. They worked for money; hiring out their talents to the highest bidders in the courts of Europe but they were not slaves in an intangible sense because they did not work just for the money, they did it for the inherent fulfilment. In the Aristotelian sense, their work became leisure for them. Our modern ideas of work are a lot the Renaissance idea of remunerative creative genius. Our own ambitions are now democratized versions of the aspiration of men like Leonardo and Michelangelo. We too wish to be paid and creative.

Württemberg, Holy Roman Empire, 1520, Martin Luther, the founder of Protestantism, made a crucial point that one could serve God through the work of many different kinds. Not just as it previously been argued by Catholicism simply by entering the priesthood, “the common work of a servant and handmaiden is more acceptable to God than all the fasting and works of a monk or a priest, when they are done without faith” (Luther 2017, 93). For Luther, God has endowed each one of us with talents that can be used to help another out, which is how work becomes moral. Everyone undertaking essential tasks, he mentioned cleaning, milking, downing, teaching, wears what Luther called the *mask of God*, since God is behind each mask, and mask demonstrates God’s love (Forde 1972, 40-42). Work, for Luther, is, therefore, the best means to employ the doctrine of *loving thy neighbour*. Protestantism

is responsible for a momentous re-evaluation of the worth and dignity of ordinary labour. Similar praises for ordinary work blossomed in Paris, France 1750. Diderot and d'Alembert published the first volume of the *Encyclopédie*, which sets out to cover each and every branch of human work there is (d'Alembert, Jean Le Rond, 1995). The *Encyclopédie* is filled with admiration for ordinary work as of farmers, bell-makers, locksmiths, cloth weaver, bankers, so on and so forth. It is the longest illustrated poem in praise of ordinary work ever written. It had a huge impact on how people perceive the prestige of work.

Paris, France, 1844, the exiled Karl Marx finished his series of notes as *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. These notes are on capitalism, containing some of his most interesting thinking about work. He attacked capitalism not because workers did not get paid enough or were exploited but for a more interesting reason: because too often, their work becomes boring, which is the true problem (Marks and Engels 2009). Marx, who worked twelve hours a day on most days, was no enemy of work. What infuriated him about capitalism is that it seems to prevent people from enjoying their work, enjoying it as much he enjoyed his. The reason for Marx is that capitalism encourages the production of goods, disconnected from the talents and aspirations of the workers. That is what he so desperately wished to correct. Communism for Marx was not a project for getting rid of work, but about making work more enjoyable.

University of Chicago, 1899, Norwegian - American economist and sociologist, Thorstein Veblen, published his first book—*The Theory of the Leisure Class*. He argued that, as soon as people make it in society, they try to show superiority by displaying signs of what leisurely and idle people they are:

Conspicuous abstention from labour, therefore, becomes the conventional mark of superior pecuniary achievement and the conventional index of reputability; and conversely, since application to productive labour is a mark of poverty and subjection, it becomes inconsistent with a reputable standing in the community. (Veblen 2007, 30)

Veblen very clearly captured an idea of being the upper class that was about to die forever. He well may have been right for his own time, but everything was about to change. Within a few decades, everyone fell prey to a new cult: the cult of working hard and being very busy all the time. Soon, only the unemployed were considered idle people. Everyone started working away furiously. The richer one is, the more one keeps working to show that one is good and serious. Being idle became a new taboo. With work newly prestigious, one of the major challenges of societies became that of correctly mining the talents of everyone, and helping them to find their way into the right job, that is the jobs which will fulfil them and make them money as well. USA, 1945, Katharine Cook Briggs and her daughter, Isabel Briggs Myers ran the first Briggs-Myers Indicator Test (Block 2018). The test developed throughout the second world war indicated personality types and tried to pair people out with ideal jobs. The test used 93 questions to figure out which one of four main personality type a person might be—Introvert-Extrovert (I-E), Thinking-Feeling (T-F), Sensing-Intuition (S-N), Judging-Perceiving (J-P) (Myers 1962). For example, an introvert will enjoy thinking and working alone in small peaceful groups and will be suited to work as an accountant, a dentist, or a librarian; an extrovert will enjoy action-dominated, high-octane work, and might go for acting, salesmanship, or trading in financial institutions. The goal for Briggs and Myers was to find the type that suits one best; work for them was about making the correct lifestyle choice that suited one's personality. It was not about arbitrary aims, such as money.

In the USA, on January 22, 1984, Apple Computers launched the only national airing of its famous 1984 advert during the halftime commercials of the Super Bowl (Hertzfeld 2004, 73). The 60-second advert sees a heroine, dressed in bright running gear, saving the army of soulless workers from the conformity of standardized work, by destroying the Big Brother-like leader. It was an idea as old as the Renaissance: there is good work and bad work, and the good work is creative kind, except now, unlike in Michelangelo's day, thanks to

technology, this is for everyone. The advert carried the famous tagline: You'll see why 1984 won't be like "1984" (Hertzfeld 2004, 73). The advert underlined the liberating colourful and energetic Mac as a deliverance from the technophobic drudgery of industrial labour. The future of work is going to be fun, original, and expressive in Apple's hand.

Apple's advert could be seen as an exemplar for the emergence of celebrated terms associated with the notion of work in modern times, such as efficiency and effectiveness, throat cut completion, strategic work planning, time management, work at home, flexible timings, job specifications, job responsibilities, job engineering, job rotation, promotion, 360 appraisal, corporate culture, corporate retreat, perks and incentives, training and development, career growth, workaholic, profit, outsourcing, bonus, so on so forth. These positively valenced words colour a beautiful picture in mind about the corporate world, where people are dedicated to their work, they reside in the fair and just system in which they are treated equally and get their share of benefit according to work performed by them. They mostly perform white colour jobs and seem to be the happiest creatures of planet earth. How can one think of any kind of slavery in this utopian corporate setting, about this paradise on earth? For millions of the unemployed or the unhappily employed, the dream has not turned out to be so easy. It can be doubly painful when one is meant to having such fun at work to find no work at all, or work that does not fulfil one's soul. The modern world has made the career crisis one of the central difficulties of existence. People have been asking so much about their working lives. So no wonder they sometimes don't deliver against the expectations that people now have of them. Too often, jobs are closer to the toil of Adam than the life-enhancing creativity of Michelangelo. That remains the challenge for the future of work. To illustrate this challenge properly, in the next section I will dig into the notion of freedom.

3. WHAT MAKES US FREE?

The answer to the question of intangible slavery in the utopian corporate setup lies in the notion of freedom. Depending upon the context, the term freedom has many connotations. In philosophy and religion, the idea of freedom is closely connected with the concept of liberty. Freedom and liberty, both are identified with free will without undue constraints. According to Hayek (2013, 21), “Freedom is also traditionally understood as the independence of the arbitrary will of another.” State of freedom is contradicted with slavery because a slave must continuously succumb to the will of others. On the other hand, a free person has no obligation to follow the will of others; she can choose what to do, what not to do, as far as she is not encroaching into the freedom of others. One of the comprehensive ways to grasp the concept of freedom is with positive and negative liberty demarcation of freedom as proposed by British philosopher Isaiah Berlin (1958) in his classic essay of *Two Concepts of Liberty*:

I shall call the 'negative' sense, is involved in the answer to the question 'What is the area within which the subject - a person or group of persons - is or should be left to do or be what he is able to do or be, without interference by other persons?' The second, which I shall call the 'positive' sense, is involved in the answer to the question 'What, or who is the source of control or interference that can determine someone to do, or be, this rather than that?' (Berlin 1958, 2)

In the context of the workplace, the worker is free to the degree to which no one interferes with her work. Freedom to work in this sense is the area within which a worker can perform his task unobstructed by others. If the worker is prevented by others from doing what she could otherwise do, she is to that degree not free; and if this area is invaded by others beyond a certain minimum, she can be described as being coerced, or enslaved. This kind of enslavement is what I have been calling intangible slavery. An increase in negative freedom implies a reduction in the restriction of

the possible action of an agent. I argue that intangible slavery results from the misuse of a positive sense of freedom. The argument of positive freedom for workers goes like this:

1. Humans are rational beings; they can do what they wish with their own.
2. The nature of work and job is designed and directed by rational minds, towards rational goals such as profit maximization.

Therefore, rational beings would necessarily be aligned with methods and procedures adopted for the goal, wishing against them would be irrational.

The argument of positive freedom is inspired by the proposed metaphysical heart of rationalism by Berlin (1958, 15) as “To want necessary laws to be other than they are is to be prey to an irrational desire - a desire that what must be X should also be not-X.” The positive rational freedom for workers would entail that they should assimilate the substances of work atmosphere and culture of whatever place they are working on as children assimilate the laws of logic or mathematics even without understanding them because they will later realize the rationality of such laws that are governed by reason. The idea of intangible slavery gets attached with positive freedom not because it cannot make workers happier by manipulating them but due to its ability to rob the human essence by treating them as objects or means to some goal not as an end in themselves. Such treatment denies the freedom of workers, even with all the good intentions of occupiers; the benevolent owners try to mould the culture and environment of an organization according to the goals it aims to achieve. Such goal-driven strategy and mindset give birth to the intangible form of slavery in an organization. In the past, socialized forms of positive view freedom had resulted in the form of totalitarian, nationalist, communist, authoritarian structure. The danger of such tendencies looms over in our modern-day work as well but under the cloth of advancement. Berlin considered both concepts as a representation of human ideals but warned about the susceptibility of the positive concept of freedom to social-political abuse.

To have a better understanding, how intangible slavery could fit in today's mostly democratic world, thought experiment, *Tale of the Slave*, by Robert Nozick (2013, 269-270), in his award-winning novel *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* could be of great assistance. In the tale, he invites us to imagine ourselves as slaves. There are nine stages in the tale. In the first stage, you as a slave are totally at the mercy of your brutal master, he can beat you at any time as per his whims, you are subject to all the cruelty, you are not allowed to take rest, you cannot go anywhere, you have to complete all the work given by your master, you cannot raise any objection to his decisions, he can treat you as an object of his desire. In the second stage, your master becomes a bit kinder, he will not beat to according to his whims but will beat you when you break the rule, he will even provide you some time off from work. In the third stage, now he has a group of slaves while distributing things, the master takes into account the need, merit, talent, of the slaves according to the principles acceptable to all you. In the fourth stage, you are even granted to work only three days; the rest four days are your own, you can do whatever you want to do in those four days. In stage five, the master allows the slave to work outside wherever they wish to work for wages but on one condition; that they will have to give three-seventh of their wages to the master, the master also retains the right to recall the slaves in case of emergency and also prohibits the slave to participate in any dangerous activity that will damage the effectiveness and efficiency of the slave, like cigarette smoking and mountain climbing. At any time, the master can also increase or decrease the share of wage from your end to him. In stage six, there is a change, suppose the master has approximately a thousand slaves who now have become your master too, all the 10000 slaves except you are allowed to vote on decisions concerning the distribution and usage of income earned by you and all other people, they can also jointly decide the legitimacy of your activities, with the power of voting. In stage seven, although you don't have the power to vote, you are given the liberty to persuade another 10000 in favour of policies that you want to be

implemented. To persuade others, you are also allowed to participate in discussions concerning policy matters. In stage eight, taking into consideration of your efforts, you are granted the right to vote but with one caveat that your will mark your vote only if a tie occurs, on that issue your vote will be opened and considered, no tie has ever occurred yet, your ballot has never been opened yet. In the final ninth stage, you are fully granted the right to vote with them with all 10000 people, but like in stage eight, your vote will carry the issue only if a tie occurs.

At the end of his thought experiment, Nozick asks a baffling question directed to reader, “The question is: which transition from case 1 to case 9 made it no longer the tale of a slave?” (269). Through his thought experiment Nozick wanted to speculate on how a minimal state might have risen without overtly violating right of the people, “through a series of individual steps each arguably unobjectionable has placed us in a better position to focus upon and ponder the essential nature of such a state and its fundamental mode of relationship among persons” (269). As an analogical account *Tale of the Slave*, provide crucial insight into how the changes might have occurred in the tangible slavery implicitly paving the way for the intangible slavery. In the discussion on evolution of notion of work, I tried to argue that despite things appeared to be changing for the better, but the underlying goal remained same, to squeeze the slave to get most of him, but the means to get this done got so much changed that we even got estranged from human aspect of ourselves and became the robots in terms of efficiency and productivity. So, the answer to the title of section *What makes us free?* lies in the words of Dostoevsky (2014, 221), who tried to sum up whole meaning of human life in one statement, “man only exists for the purpose of proving to himself every minute that he is a man and not an organ-stop”. Complaining about overlooking one most precious value above all values, he pointed out that all sages, lovers of human with the help of statistician can make the list of positive human values like peace, freedom, prosperity, wealth and so on so forth, and take average through statistical figures relying on scientific and economic

formulae, but they all tend to forget on the value that is of *free choice*, what makes a human real human, and puts it different from “twice-two-make-four” (223). Whenever this value of free choice is jeopardized, it will always lead to some form of slavery. At workplace setup, denying free choice leads to intangible slavery.

4. EXISTENTIAL APPROACH TO DEAL WITH THE PUZZLE OF WORKPLACE FREEDOM

Throughout the paper, I tried to present a contrast between the functioning of an organization and job satisfaction by workers, which often led to puzzling questions. The puzzle, I wanted to foreshadow in the paper is this: despite improved work conditions in modern times, why there is an increase in the level of work satisfaction? The puzzle can be dealt with from two perspective—one global organizational, and two locally from an individual perspective. In the paper, I am considering the attempt to deal with the puzzle from the perspective of an individual. Because the puzzle presents a kind of existential crisis to one’s life, I would primarily reply to the insights present in existential philosophers to deal with the puzzle.

A critic reading this paper might suspect that I have deliberately painted a gruesome picture of the workplace clothed into the discussion on the freedom to make a case for the presence of intangible slavery. They might be right to some extent, given how so many people seem to enjoy their work, enjoying to the extent that there has been a boom in the entrepreneurial mindset. More people have started taking the risk of starting their own startups than ever before. They are taking huge risks for getting autonomy. However, at a closer look, are these instances not the proof that people, fed up with the intangible slavery, want to exercise their spirit of free choice to do what they think suits best to them? The puzzle also points towards one more dilemma of work: On one hand, it is hard

for one to survive if one does not have a job, and on the other hand, if one gets the job but is not satisfied with it; what is the way out?

The central proposition of Existentialism, *existence precedes essence* is a good starting point to deal with the puzzle (Sartre, 1985, 345). The celebrated slogan of existentialism means that the consideration of the *existence* of an individual, i.e., recognizing the individual as an independent, acting, responsible being, before assigning *essence*, i.e., trying to fit the individual in various preconceived labels, roles, definitions, and stereotypes. It also implies that an individual cannot be pinned down a particular job. Another critical aspect of an individual is acceptance and recognition of what Heidegger (1996, 135-136) called *thrownness*, “An entity of the character of Dasein is its there in such a way that, whether explicitly or not, it finds itself in its thrownness.” People are thrown into a particular and narrow social milieu, surrounded by rigid attitudes, archaic prejudices, and practical necessities, not of their own making. However, in the Heideggerian sense, thrownness is not a limiting deterministic way of life but an indicator of being thrown into the world of possibilities. He wanted to bring forth the *facticity* of being born in a concrete historical situation. Sartre (2003, 649-656), has also used the term *facticity*, as a limitation and condition of freedom. In the conception of limitation, facticity tells about the things one was not free to choose such as birthplace, parents; as a condition of freedom is acceptance of facticity and creating one’s own values for oneself. There is a critical distinction between the conception of facticity by Heidegger and Sartre. For Heidegger, the emphasis of drawing freedom from the possibilities of *thrownness* into a historical situation, for Sartre such possibilities undermine the choice. The question is how one *transcends* from the facticity and *thrownness* of one’s situation? The answer lies in another existential concept of *authenticity*. Heidegger suggested the answer to living an authentic life, moving from *they-self* to *our-selves*. They-self is surrendering one’s self to a socialized, superficial mode of living. Our-self is a mode of living according to one’s own free choice. Sartre considered living in *bad faith* as an inauthentic mode of living; where bad faith is telling

oneself that things have to be a certain way and shutting one's eye to other options. Sartrean authentic living is the exercise of freedom which humans are condemned. Behind all these concepts and jargons of existential philosophy lies a simple call to the human being, an ancient aphorism—*know thyself*.

After the overview of some of the core concept of existential philosophy, it is time to apply insights from the existential thinker to the puzzle of freedom at the workplace. Imagine a person, let us call the person John, who always complains of feeling trapped in his job, blaming to an external factor such as I cannot leave my job and pursue my interest because I have a family dependent on me; my superior is a terrible person, and has become a hurdle in my career growth; I am born in a poor family, I cannot do what my heart desires; economic, social, and political condition of my country is not such that I can aspire to dream big; my fate is predestined; Whatever is happening to me is because of greater purpose designed by God almighty. John feels invisible shackles around him while going to his job, like a slave, an *intangible slave*. The question is, who is responsible for the condition of John. The answer to the question cannot be provided in a binary fashion by blaming either John or the organization in which he is working. John, like all human being, is a situated person in the world. Situatedness implies the interaction between organism and environment both. In the workplace situation, the creature is John and the environment in the organization. I would only focus on the individual John because environmental conditions are beyond the purpose and scope of this paper.

The existential answer to the condition of John is that neither his boss, family, company, society, government, fate, greater purpose nor God, is responsible for his self-imposed form of intangible slavery. Blaming his *thrownness* and facticity, John refuses to recognize that he is condemned to being a free creature because he is living in bad faith, refusing to see other alternatives. The bad faith of John stems from sparing himself from short term pain of losing the job but suffering from a long-term psychological impoverishment in the

form of intangible slavery. Due to bad faith, John insists that he has to a particular kind of job, limiting himself to the definition of his job rather than a free creature. However, one cannot be too harsh with John because he has closed his mind to other possibilities. After all, the path to knowing *thy-work* and *thy-freedom at work* is often uncharted territory for the individual. There are no easy answers available even within the billions of search results of Google; no God to whisper the solution into your ears; no celestial announcement from the sky to enlighten one about oneself. The work takes a lions' share of one's adult life, figuring out the job which would fulfil one's choice as a free individual is not going to be easy. It is up to the individual to discover her own path. Existentialist philosophy does not provide a path but provides some suggestions like one need to start listening to one's own self about one's passions and interests which is close to one's free choice; one would have to explore many options before them. Existential philosophers never suggested that search for meaning in life is going to be an easy task. One would stumble many times, frustrated on the time and energy wasted on the endeavours of exploration. One shall not stop until she solves the puzzle by working as a free individual to the job that makes one feel satisfied. End and means to the path might differ from person to person according to one's own expression of individuality: one might feel fulfilled in making codes and program for software; some might feel fulfilled in painting; some in teaching; others, some in managing companies; some in running non-government organizations; some in travelling; in mountain climbing; so on so forth. But one would sometimes have to *leap of faith* in Kierkegaardian sense, without thinking much about the set pattern of the society, government, and other-selves.

CONCLUSION

The distinction between the two conceptions of slavery, tangible and intangible, is an apt way to make sense of angst, as felt by human

beings due to not exercising freedom in matters of work. The distinction was not introduced to make any metaphysical or ontological claims but to find a way to express the inner state of a person whose dissatisfaction primarily lies in the obstruction of freedom by external or internal forces. To make the notion of intangible slavery clearer, I presented a historical survey of influential ideas regarding work, extract from a series of writings of prominent scholars. Any discussion about the forms of slavery is incomplete without a focus on the concept of freedom. By analyzing Berlin's *two concepts of liberty*, it emerged that freedom, in a negative sense, along with the respect for the pluralism of human values and goals is a truer and more humane ideal than the ideal of freedom in the positive sense, which might cause the danger of authoritarianism. With pieces of help from Nozick's *Tale of the Slave*, the answer to *what makes us free?* came to reside in free choices in matters related to oneself. I tried to frame the question of dissatisfaction with the work despite improved conditions as a puzzle and presented an individualistic approach to deal with this puzzle from the perspective of existential philosophy. Thus, from an existential point of view, one has first to realize his "thrownness" and the facticity of human existence, then coming out from the bad faith and exercising choices as a free human individual by exploring his various possibility to search and give meaning to work and life.

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