

## **Bullsh\*t Jobs – David Graeber**

Graeber, an anthropologist by academic background, wrote an essay published in August 2013 in which he explored his sense that lots of people appeared to be employed doing jobs that they did not think were of any value. The existence of such jobs in the private sector did not make economic sense, where was the power of the market in such a phenomenon? His essay developed the argument that such jobs were not created for economic reasons but were created because of underlying political and moral issues. The on-line response and social media content generated by the publication of this article encouraged him to seek further details and to this end he set up social media accounts where people (anonymised) could provide him with more details and allow him to further explore some of the issues he felt were important. From these data he explores economic, political, and moral implications of present day Western working practices.

Most of us enjoyed the book and it certainly made me think. I had explored some of the concepts he raised via sociology classes and I was struck by his explanations from feudal western Europe, through increasing industrialisation and on to the global economy. His division of labour into productive and caring was particularly enlightening. Some of us were concerned about his recruitment methods in terms of the scientific validity of these bullshit jobs but still appreciated his application of psychology and sociology when attempting to make sense of the phenomenon he explored. We also felt that interesting as his path to describe the underlying political and moral factors was it did tend to meander a bit. This brought about a sense of frustration in some of the readers.

Although the book was published in paperback in 2019, the year before the pandemic hit the West in a big way, its relevance is striking. Many of us commented on the way in which those key workers who allowed life to continue – shop workers, bin men, delivery drivers, hospital workers etc were not in the highest paid jobs, yet nobody was cheering on a Thursday evening for hedge fund managers or corporate lawyers or PR administrative assistants. Graeber's argument, lucidly and entertainingly developed, is that caring jobs are regarded as having their own reward because they bring about satisfaction to the worker and so do not need the same material reward. Complete nonsense that this should be the case we all said but it raises questions about how we value contributions to society's well-being.

The anecdotes he lists from those who corresponded with him will make you laugh and at times will make you cry. His background as an anthropologist helps give him a wider global perspective to the book's benefit.

His ideas and concepts will remain with me for a long time and I was so struck by his writing that I bought another of his books and can confirm that he is not a one-trick pony.