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THE PARTS OF LIFE

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MORTIMER ADLER

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*V. I NOW COME TO THE HEART OF THE MATTER:
THE SPECTRUM OF WORK: COMPENSATED
AND UNCOMPENSATED*

Work is either toil or leisure or some combination or mixture of both. If it is sheer toil, it must be extrinsically compensated, since no one would voluntarily engage in it unless motivated by the dire necessity of having to earn a living. If it is pure leisure, it may or may not be compensated work.

In either case, it is the kind of work we should be willing to do without extrinsic compensation if we had no need to earn a living. When it is compensated leisuring, it is usually work that produces marketable goods or services. The same holds true for work that

involves some combination of both toil and leisure.

There are three pure forms of work: Sheer toil that is compensated and thereby earns a living for the worker; Pure leisure that is also compensated; and All forms of leisuring that can occupy time that is not taken up by sleep, play, and one or another form of compensated work.

In addition to the three pure forms of work, there are various admixtures of toiling and leisuring. At one extreme of the spectrum of compensated work, there is sheer toil; at the other, there is pure leisuring. In between, there are admixtures of toiling or leisuring, in which either the component of toil predominates (and then such work is at the lower end of the spectrum) or in which the component of leisuring predominates (and then such work is at the upper end of the spectrum).

Work that is pure toil, done solely for the sake of the money it earns, is also sheer drudgery because it is stultifying rather than self-improving. It improves only the materials on which the worker works, but not the worker himself or herself. It may be either manual work or mental work, but in neither case is it creative. In either case, it usually has deleterious effects upon the worker—upon his body if the work is mainly manual; upon his mind, if it is mainly mental. Far from resulting in any self-perfection it results in the very opposite—self-deterioration.

The tasks performed by such work are, for the most part, tasks that can be much more efficiently performed by machines—by robots and other automated machines—precisely because they are in essence mechanical rather than creative operations.

More than a century ago Karl Marx and, even earlier, Alexis de Tocqueville were right in describing such work as an activity that enhances or improves the materials worked on, but which at the same time degrades or deteriorates, both in body and mind, the condition of the worker. Neither of them could anticipate the technological progress that has now eliminated many of those tasks from the sphere of human work. That progress promises a future in which machines will further emancipate human beings from the drudgery that a large part of the human race has until recent times suffered, under the dire necessity of suffering it or starving.

At the opposite and upper extreme of the spectrum are those tasks or undertakings for which a person may in fact be compensated, but which that person would discharge or take on even if he or she

did not have to work for a living. Included here are all forms of productive artistry, all forms of scientific research or philosophical thought, political activity that involves compensated employment by government, employment by religious and other social institutions, and all forms of truly professional activity, such as teaching, healing, nursing, engineering, military services, legal services, and so on.

What characterizes all these forms of compensated leisure-work that makes it possible for us to think of a person doing such work even if he or she did not have to earn a living by doing so? In the first place, such work is always self-rewarding and self-perfecting, in the sense that the worker learns or grows, improves as a human being, by doing it. In the second place, it is always to some extent creative work, involving intellectual innovations that are not routinized and repetitive. It is in this respect the very opposite of mechanical operations. It may involve some chores that are repetitive, but these are a minor part of such work, giving it the aspect of toil.

In the third place, like other forms of work that involve little or no leisuring, such work is productive of goods valuable to others and, therefore, marketable, or goods gratuitously conferred upon society. Like other forms of compensated work, which impose certain obligations to perform for the compensation earned, such work, even though it is leisuring rather than toiling, can be just as tiring or fatiguing as sheer toil. But unlike those for whom their work is sheer toil, those for whom their work is compensated leisure may find some pleasure in the performance of their tasks. This makes the work they do play as well as leisure.

The more the work involves stultifying chores and repetitive mechanical operations that machines can perform more rapidly and efficiently than human beings, the less is it desirable work for human beings to do. It has less human dignity as work because it is self-deteriorating rather than self-perfecting, even though it produces marketable economic goods or services, or results in other social values. It is more like the kind of work one hopes technological progress will alleviate or eliminate entirely by producing machines that will perform such tasks.

The degree of compensation for the work done does not always match the place the work occupies in the spectrum of work. Work that lies at the lower end of the scale usually earns less than work that lies at the upper end of the scale, but that is not always the case. Nor is it always the case that individuals who have some options with regard to employment exercise their options by choosing

work that is more highly compensated.

They may, for very good reasons indeed, reasons that express sound moral judgments on their part, choose work that lies at the upper end of the scale, but is not as highly compensated as work that has less of a leisure component and offers them less opportunity for the enjoyment that is provided by doing work that also has the aspect of play. A well-paid job is not necessarily a good job, humanly speaking. It may be well paid for reasons having nothing to do with the character of the work or the quality of life it confers on the workman. The reverse is equally true. A good job, humanly speaking, may be poorly paid in terms of the marketable value of the products turned out by the work.

The foregoing delineation of the spectrum of work does not exhaust the whole range of activities that are leisuring—activities that are purely and never performed for compensation. What kind of activities constitute uncompensated leisuring?

Before I attempt to answer the question, let me call attention to the etymology of the English word “leisure” and the words in the Greek and Latin languages that our English word translates. The English word leisure derived through the French word “loisir” from the Latin word “licere,” means the permissible rather than the compulsory. This confirms one connotation that we have attached to the word “leisure”; namely, that it is an optional activity rather than compulsory. Regarding leisuring as permissible rather than compulsory leaves open the question whether, in addition to being permissible, it is also obligatory for ethical reasons.

The Greek word that our English word translates is “skole,” the Latin equivalent of which is “schola” and the English equivalent “school.” The connotation thereby given to the word “leisure” is that it always involves learning, some increment of mental, moral, or spiritual growth, and hence some measure of self-perfection.

These two connotations of leisuring; an optional use of free time for personal growth or self-perfection—leave only one further connotation to be mentioned: in addition to producing self-improvement, leisuring may also confer benefits upon other individuals or upon the organized community as a whole.

With this before us, we should be able to see why certain activities that human beings engage in without any thought of financial or economic compensation are leisuring in exactly the same sense as the activities we have called compensated leisuring. These include

all acts of benevolent love and friendship, among which are the acts of conjugal love and the rearing of children.

They include the political activities of citizens who are not holders of public office and who are not paid for the performance of their duties, as officeholders are. They include travel and other experiences through which individuals learn, such as serious conversation or the discussion of serious subjects. They include sustained thinking and intellectual activity that enlarges one's understanding, amplifies one's knowledge, or improves one's skills.

Every use of one's mind in study, inquiry, or investigation, in reading, writing, speaking, and listening, in calculating and estimating—all these, when the work involved is purely for personal profit, are instances of uncompensated leisuring.

VI. *IDLING AND REST*

We have already considered two kinds of activity by which we can fill our free time—uncompensated leisuring and play solely for the sake of pleasure. Two more were mentioned earlier in the listing of the six categories of human activity, but I have not discussed them so far. They are idling and rest. I use the participle “idling” rather than the noun “idleness” because the connotation of the latter is one of emptiness or vacancy, a vacuum that is filled by mere pastimes or time-killing diversions.

When, in the past, the owners of factories or their managers resisted the demands of labor for reduced hours of work, they gave as one reason the deleterious or corrupting effects upon the workers of the idleness that would result. It did not occur to them that they themselves had ample free time to dispose of, which they did not regard as an occasion for idleness but rather as an opportunity to engage in the pursuits of leisure.

The Latin word “*vacatio*” was the antonym for the Latin word “*negotio*,” which means business—an economically or socially useful employment of one's time. From the Latin word, we get the English word “*vacation*,” which many takes as signifying an opportunity for idleness. The Latin word like its English translation gives idleness the connotation of emptiness or vacancy when free time is devoid of anything but time-killing or time-wasting pastimes.

I mean something other than that by my use of the word “idling.” I give it a meaning that borrows from the meaning of the same word when applied to an engine that is idling. The engine is turning

over, but the gears are not engaged, and so the automobile is not moving. It is not going anywhere. The engine is not serving the purpose for which it was designed and placed in the chassis of the car. I think of human idling as a use of free time in which we are awake, not asleep, and in which we are engaged in any purposeful line of thought.

Our minds are turning over but are not moving in any intended or purposeful direction. All kinds of thoughts are likely to occur to us when we use free time to engage in idling, especially if the idling occurs toward the end of a day in which we have been engaged in work that is either pure leisuring, whether or not compensated, or has some leisure component in it.

Those who insist upon being busy all through their waking hours by engaging in some purposeful activity, whether that be some form of play or leisure, deprive themselves of the benefits of idling. Their lives are the poorer for it. The spontaneous creativity of their minds is seriously diminished or may even be totally suppressed.

“Rest,” like “idling” is a word that calls for a brief explication. Many individuals use that word as a synonym for slumber. “Take a rest” means for them lying down and going to sleep. When they say “Take a rest from what you are doing,” they are recommending that you relax by ceasing to work.

They have forgotten the meaning of the word “rest” when in the Bible it said that God, having finished the work of creation in six days, rested on the seventh when He contemplated the created universe. In that context, the word could not possibly have signified either sleep or relaxation. They have also forgotten the meaning of the word when the Sabbath is called a “day or rest”—a day in which one does not work, nor does one play or leisure.

Still further, they may not know what theologians have in mind when they speak of souls in the presence of God as enjoying “heavenly rest.” For orthodox Jews in mediaeval ghettos, or alive in the world today, the Sabbath or day or rest was a sacred day, devoid of other days. It had the same character for the Puritans. Strict observance of the Sabbath prohibited not only work of any kind but also play of any kind.

How, then, was the time of the Sabbath occupied—the time left free from all biological necessities? The answer is prayer and other forms of religious contemplation. Orthodox Jews, especially in the

mediaeval ghetto, did not need a day of rest to recoup the energies exhausted by six long days of unremitting toil. Sufficient slumber would serve that purpose. The Sabbath served another purpose for them, it expanded their lives beyond confinement to sleep and toil. It took them out of one world into another. It refreshed their spirits, not their bodies.

Rest, in the sense of contemplation, is the very opposite of the activities subsumed under all the other categories. All of them have some practical purpose in this life. Rest lifts us above and out of the exigencies of practical involvement of every kind.

Is there any rest for those who are not religious—who do not devote time to prayer and the contemplation of God? There is, if the contemplation of works of art and the beauties of nature has the same effect for them. It has the effect when the enjoyment of beauties contemplated involves a degree of ecstasy, which takes us out of ourselves and lifts us above all the practical entanglements of our daily lives.

The orthodox Jew and the Benedictine monk fill much of their free time with rest. They lead three-part lives, constituted by sleep, work, and rest. The motto of the Benedictine Order is *ora et labora*” (prayer and work). Chattel slaves in antiquity and in modern times, serfs in the feudal system, wage-slaves, as Marx called them in the early years of the industrial revolution, led two-part lives—of sleep and toil—with little or no play because they had little or no free time. They worked seven days a week and often as much as fourteen hours a day. The feudal serfs and nineteenth-century factory workers led three-part lives only to the extent that some time was allowed on the Sabbath for religious observances.

VII. *THE OPTIONS OPEN TO US FOR THE USE OF OUR FREE TIME*

In the concluding portion of this lecture, I wish to put some questions to you, one main question first, and then two subordinate ones. For many years, in lecturing about work and leisure and in conducting discussion of these subjects, I have put the following question to my audiences. On the supposition that you were under no compulsion to earn a living, for whatever reason, what would you do with all the free time at your disposal? The amount of free time at your disposal would be at least two-thirds of every day since only one-third or less would be taken up by biologically necessary activities.

The supposition is real for those who have independent means and have no need to work for a living. It is also real for all who, while engaged in work at present, can look forward to a future in which their retirement from compensated work, puts the same amount of free time at their disposal. Even those for whom the supposition is not real now or who do not have it as a reality in their future should face the question as a way of considering the quality of their lives; for under present conditions of increasingly shortened hours in the work week, they too have enough free time at their disposal to think about the options they can exercise in filling it.

Idling, properly resorted to, cannot take up too much of anyone's free time. It should be done only occasionally and then only for brief periods. Nor can rest occupy a large portion of anyone's time, except for religious persons who enter strict monastic orders whose members are withdrawn from all worldly cares, or for others like them whose religious devotions occupy a large part of their waking life.

After the time consumed by necessary biological activities and after what little time is devoted to rest and idling is subtracted from the day's twenty-four hours and the time of the week's seven days, there is still a considerable portion of free time available to those whose good fortune it is not to have work for a living. Suppose that were you. What options would you exercise to fill it? Let me tell you how I would judge, on ethical grounds, the answers you might give.

Were you to say that you would use up the free time at your disposal in one or another form of play, my judgment would condemn you as a childish playboy, a profligate, overindulging your lust for pleasure. While pleasure is a real good that enriches a human life, it is, as noted before, a limited good—good only in a certain measure—and so it should be pursued with moderation.

Were you to respond by saying that you would stay in bed slumbering many more hours than workers can allow themselves, and that you would kill the rest of your free time with pastimes or idleness, I would condemn you as a sluggard, choosing for yourself a contracted life, one devoid of the qualities that make it a decent and honorable human life. One does not have to be an orthodox Christian acquainted with the seven deadly sins, to know that sloth is one of them.

Its seriousness consists in its being an utter waste of one's talents and of one's human resources. Quite apart from these moral judg-

ments, I would also be obliged to warn the sluggards, the slothful, profligate playboys and playgirls, that they are doomed to suffer boredom and ennui by this use of free time. To escape from it, they are likely to resort to ways of killing time that may turn out to be irreparably injurious to their health—to alcoholism, to drug addiction, to sexual excesses and depravities, or to other forms of human corruption.

What, then, is the ethically right answer to the question? The major portion of the free time at one's disposal, on the supposition of no need to spend any of it working for a living, should be devoted to doing things that fall within the range of the widely diverse activities that constitute uncompensated leisuring.

A reasonable modicum of play should be added, not only for its own sake but also to relieve the tensions of serious and intense leisure-work and to refresh the energies exhausted by it. That would still leave time for idling and rest, sacred or secular, to be enjoyed by those who are wise enough to make them parts of their expanded lives.

As compared with the contracted two-part life of the chattel slave, and the three-part life of the feudal serf or nineteenth-century industrial wage-slave, the person who adopts the answer I have set forth has chosen for himself or herself an expanded four- or five-part life. In such an expanded life, one part is, of course, sleep (the hours devoted to the biological necessities). This part is common to all human lives.

Beyond it, for the person not engaged in any form of compensated work, a five-part life would consist mainly of

leisure activities, embellished by a
modicum of play, and enriched by a
little idling, and
some measure of rest.

The only part of life here omitted is toil.

If, in addition, either idling or rest is omitted, it becomes a four-part life. In any case, a four- or five-part life is the ethical ideal—the kind of human life the morally virtuous man would choose to live.

While it must be reiterated that the omission of any semblance of toil from life in no way diminishes its excellence, we may still ask

whether a six-part life is possible. To answer that question consider the individual whose work to earn a living consists entirely of compensated leisure.

That leisure-work has an aspect that resembles toil only to the extent that the receipt of compensation imposes certain obligations upon the worker as to the use of his time, the punctuality of his performance, and so on. The work done having mainly the aspect of leisure and, only in a minor respect being like toil, the person so engaged would be able to use the rest of his free time for play, for idling, for rest, and especially for additional leisure activities that are uncompensated.

This brings us, finally, to two further questions that have been implicit in the original question I posed. What about the person whose work involves both toil that is drudgery and also leisure that is compensated? If you were that person, what would you do if, suddenly, you came into a large fortune that exempted you from the need to work for a living? Would you continue in the same job, doing the same work, or would you seek a change?

The answer, of course, depends upon the extent of the repetitive chores and the stultifying drudgery involved in the job. If that were large enough to be disagreeable or even insufferable, you would most probably seek to quit work.

If, on the other hand, the leisure component in the job were very large, and the chores and drudgery slight and infrequent, you might choose to continue doing the work, because you enjoyed doing it, because you personally profited from doing it, or because you performed a useful social service. Whether or not you continued to take compensation for the work you did would make no difference to the quality of your life.


The last question I am going to ask is the easiest to answer. The supposition is still the same. You have just learned that you no longer need to work for a living. The work you have been doing to earn your livelihood is purely a leisure activity. Would you continue to do it, more or less in the same way, with the compensation for doing it foregone because unneeded?

If your answer is that you would not continue, that you would stop doing any work, and devote most of your greatly enlarged free time to amused yourself and to killing with pastimes the remaining hours that would hang heavy on your hands, my response would be, as before, a moral condemnation of you as slothful and immod-

erately playful. It would also carry a warning about boredom and ennui.

The ethically right answer should be immediately obvious. You should continue doing the work you have for so long been doing, with nothing changed except the removal of any aspect of toil and the foregoing of any compensation.

All of the foregoing questions, together with the answers indicated as ethically sound, apply to all workers who have the good fortune of being able to look forward to a long and healthy life after retirement from compensated work, regardless of how much drudgery and how much leisuring was involved in it.

To retire from compensated work without prior planning for the uncompensated leisure-work that should take its place is to face the disaster of a life that has become contracted and emptied of its most meaningful content—a prolonged vacation that is not only boring but also disabling, both mentally and physically. 

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