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WORK AND LEISURE

The Six Parts of Life

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Part 2 of 3

WORK OR WORKING THAT IS LEISURING RATHER THAN TOILING

It is always optional, never necessary, either biologically or economically. One can stay alive and healthy without leisuring. One can possess the means of subsistence and enjoy the comforts and conveniences of life without leisuring. But if we pass from just living to living well, living a morally good human life, then it must be said that leisuring is the only form of work that is morally obligatory. In other words, one can live well without toiling, but one can not live well without leisuring.

Before I pass on to playing or amusing one's self (the last of the four main categories under which our activities can be classified), let me summarize all the points we must bear in mind about the

two distinct forms of work, toiling and leisuring. I feel compelled to do so because most people think of leisure as the very antithesis of work. The fact that most people think of work as working for a living prevents their understanding the different kinds of work.

The form of work that is toiling aims at obtaining wealth, the means of subsistence and, beyond the necessities of a bare livelihood, the amenities as well—the comforts and conveniences of a decent human life.

In sharp contrast, the form of work that is pure leisuring does not aim at wealth, neither the necessities of a livelihood nor the amenities of a decent life, but aims rather at living well, a morally good human life. Leisuring is, therefore, morally obligatory, even though it is neither biologically nor economically necessary. The goods or values that leisuring aims at and achieves are goods that perfect the human person individually and also contribute to the welfare of the society in which the individual lives.

Both labor and leisure contribute to the social welfare, but in different ways. The results of labor enrich the wealth of the community as well as obtain wealth for the individual who toils. The results of leisure improve the community as well as perfecting the individual person, by enriching it not by wealth but by all the goods of civilization or culture—all the arts and sciences.

The results achieved by both labor and leisure are extrinsic to or consequent upon the activities that constitute both forms of work. The result achieved by leisuring always perfects the performing individual in mind or character. It may also be an improvement in something else; for example, some art, science, or other body of knowledge, or some social institution. In sharp contrast, the result achieved by labor may sometimes be solely an improvement of the materials on which the laborer worked. The performing agent, the worker who toils, may be in no way perfected as a human being by the work done. That is never the case when the worker leisures in stead of toils.

However, it is also true that work may involve a mixture of toiling and leisuring. Its results may involve both some perfection of the worker and also some improvement of the materials worked on. I shall return to such mixtures of toiling and leisuring when I come presently to a delineation of the spectrum of work, which ranges from work that is purely toil at one extreme to work that is purely leisure at the other extreme, with all degrees of admixture in between.

Work that is toil may, at one extreme, be mainly physical in character with little or no mental activity involved. This is what we call unskilled labor. At the other extreme, it may be work that is mainly or exclusively mental rather than physical in character. When that is the case, the leisure component in the mixed character of the work done predominates. Some knowledge is acquired, some skill is developed, that perfects the individual as well as the materials on which he or she works.

This is especially true if the mental activity involved is to any degree creative, rather than the performance by rote memory of a repetitive routine. To the extent that anything is learned by doing the work, it must be leisure-work that is mental rather than physical. When the work done is purely leisure-work, without any admixture of labor or toil, it always has a mental component, even though strenuous and prolonged physical effort may be involved in doing it.

Before we turn to play or amusement, one more point must be mentioned in our consideration of work in both of its forms, toiling and leisuring.

The production of wealth being the purpose of toil, the results of such work are always possessions, either things possessed by the worker or things possessed by the company or corporation that employs the worker or by the community in which the worker lives. In contrast, the result of work that is leisuring always confers intrinsic perfections of mind or character upon the worker even when, in addition, the work produces external goods, either economic goods or the cultural goods that perfect the community in which he or she lives.

PLAYING OR AMUSING ONE'S SELF

There can be no question that it is optional rather than biologically or economically necessary. But there is some question about whether it is morally obligatory.

To answer that question, we must move on to the result at which play or amusement aims. The purpose of play being pleasure and pleasure being one of the real goods that enrich a human life and contribute to happiness, it would appear to follow that we are under some obligation to play and amuse ourselves in our pursuit of happiness or in our effort to make a good human life for ourselves.

That statement must be immediately qualified by a consideration of the limited value of pleasure as one of life's real goods. Some real goods are goods without limit. We cannot, for example, have too much knowledge or too much skill. Other real goods, such as liberty, wealth, and pleasure are limited goods, of which we can have too much, more than is good for us to have or good for our fellow human beings in the community in which we live. Overindulgence in play or amusement is, therefore, not morally permissible, even if some enjoyment of the pleasure derived from play is morally obligatory for the sake of leading a good human life.

Two further questions remain, one about the pleasure that results from play and the other about the character of that activity.

Of the four main categories under which our activities can be classified, only play produces a result that is entirely intrinsic to the activity itself. When the activity is purely and simply play, no extrinsic consequence then follows upon doing it. We are playing or amusing ourselves purely and solely for the pleasure that is inherent in the activity performed.

To whatever extent a given activity has some extrinsic result as its consequence, whether that be health, wealth, or the perfection of our minds and character, the activity ceases to be pure play and takes on another aspect. Just as work may involve in varying degrees an admixture of labor and leisure, so an activity that is in one respect play may also in another respect fall under some other category. It then becomes utilitarian play.

Is playing or amusing ourselves ever purely physical or ever purely mental? Clearly, there are some forms of play that are purely mental or are for the most part so, involving little or no physical effort. On the other hand, it is doubtful whether any form of play can be purely physical, since playing usually involves some skill or know how, which is a mental trait.

One fundamental problem in the classification of our activities under the four main categories has emerged in the preceding discussion.

We have noted admixtures of toil and leisure in some kinds of work. We have observed that a given activity may be play in one aspect and something else in another. It is also the case that a given activity may, at different times, serve all the purposes so far mentioned: It may aim at enhancing our health, at increasing our possessions, at improving or perfecting ourselves, and at giving us

pleasure. It may even achieve two or more of these results at one and the same time.

How, then, shall we characterize the diverse particular activities in which we engage to fill the time of our lives? Some may fall wholly under one of the four main categories. Some may fall under two or more of them, varying in the degree to which the differing aspects of the activity constitute an admixture of different categories.

IS A PARTICULAR ACTIVITY SLEEP, TOIL, LEISURE, PLAY, OR SOME MIXTURE OF THESE?

A particular activity may fall solely under one of these categories; for example, ditch-digging or feeding an assembly line is sheer toil. It may fall primarily under one of these categories, but have an additional aspect that is subordinate to its primary character; for example, a person employed gainfully as a gardener may, in addition to earning his living by that activity, enjoy the work he does as much as he would any other form of play.

Sometimes, however, an activity of one kind is transformed into a different kind of activity. For example, at one time, tennis was entirely a sport of amateurs. It subsequently became a professional sport. Engaged in by amateurs, it was once entirely play. When it is engaged in by professionals whose exclusive interest in the game is the money or the reputation they make, it becomes toil. For some professionals, it can, of course, be a mixture of toil and play.

There is still one more alternative. A particular activity may fall under two or more categories where neither aspect of the activity is primary or subordinate. The individual engaged in the activity would continue doing it if either one of its two aspects were absent. The individual may be equally motivated in either direction.

Professional musicians who earn their living by the performance of their art are workers whose work involves an admixture of toil and leisure. They would continue to exercise their skill and try to improve it even if they were no longer employed in an orchestra or no longer had to earn a living by such employment. If that is not the case, then working in an orchestra is simply toil for them.

Another example of double motivation is to be found in any activity that aims at both health and pleasure. A physician may recommend to a patient that for his health's sake he swim a certain amount of time each day. The patient who follows that recommendation may be one who enjoys swimming as a playful exercise, but

now engages in it with the regularity prescribed for therapeutic purposes.

Swimming thus becomes for the patient both sleep and play. By calling the patient's swimming therapeutic or utilitarian play, we indicate its double motivation. If an exercise prescribed by a physician were performed by a patient who abhorred that activity, it would be purely sleep for that person, though for some other individual who engaged in that activity solely for pleasure and not for the sake of health, it would be pure play.

Consider the case of the professional athlete—in football, base ball, tennis, or basketball—who performs without pleasure, who does not need to perform for the sake of his health, and who has reached the point where no increment of skill is likely to occur. He may even have lost interest in the game and continue to play it only for the money earned by doing so.

Then it is sheer toil for him, but it need not be so. It is quite possible for athletes to enjoy what they are doing for its own sake as well as do it to earn a living, and at the same time also strive to improve their performance by increments of skill. Under such triple motivation, the activity becomes an admixture of toil, play, and leisure.

Eating and drinking, activities which for many individuals are nothing but biological refueling, and so fall entirely under the category of sleep, can be for other individuals who take sensuous delight in fine foods and excellent wines a playful indulgence as well. They eat and drink not only to refuel their energies but, whenever they can, they do so also for the pleasure inherent in the process. For a rare few, entitled to be regarded as gourmets, eating and drinking beyond the calls of hunger and thirst are purely playful activities. Just as we called an exercise prescribed by a physician, one that is also enjoyable to the patient, therapeutic or utilitarian play, so we might call a gourmet's eating and drinking playful or sensuously delightful sleep.

I have so far called attention to activities that have double or triple motivations, requiring us to classify them under two or three of the main categories. I turn now to activities that at first blush appear to be pure instances of leisuring. I have in mind such activities as teaching, producing any work of art, giving lectures, writing books, engaging in political life, or for that matter practicing any of the learned professions that serve the well-being of others and the welfare of society.

All of these would appear to be prime examples of pure leisuring, especially if their performance involves some learning—some increment of knowledge or skill—on the part of the performer and some contribution to society as well. They remain pure leisuring if the performing agent has no other motivation than self-improvement or the social benefits conferred, or both.

However, that “if” italicized in the preceding statement introduces a supposition that is usually contrary to fact. Many practitioners in the learned professions and many creative artists work for some extrinsic compensation as well as for the rewards of leisuring. For them, the activity in which they engage is work that can be called compensated leisure. We dare not overlook the fact that for many others (one dares not say how many), the extrinsic compensation, the money they earn, is their only motivation. Then it is toil for them, not compensated leisure.

By their very nature, the aforementioned activities are such that one can learn and benefit others. They should, therefore, have the aspect of leisure, even if they are activities that earn a living.

What for some individuals is pure leisuring and for others compensated leisuring can become for still others work that is toil with out a scintilla of leisuring in it.

Monetary gain is their only interest. They would turn to some thing else if they could earn more money by doing it. If self-perfection and social service are no part of their aim, we are entitled to ask whether they have not violated the ethics of their profession. Can they be regarded as true practitioners of a learned profession or of one of the fine arts if the work they do is nothing but toil for them? It makes no difference whether the compensation received is large or small.

A large part of our population today consists of employees of government, from the president, justices of the Supreme Court, members of the cabinet, and senators and congressmen down to the clerks in government bureaus, police officers, and so on. Let us call all of them citizens who are also office-holders, whether elected or appointed. The rest of us are citizens not in public office.

Non-office-holding citizens who perform their duties as citizens by engaging in political action of one sort or another do so as forms of leisuring. How about the others—the citizens who are also office holders?

We know that the work they do for compensation is in that respect highly or slightly compensated toil for them. But does it also have the aspect of leisuring, as it should for them as well as for ordinary citizens? I need not pause to comment on what a negative answer means for the general welfare of the state, for the integrity of government, and for the prospects of a democratic form of government.

Work that is sheer toil seldom has any playful aspect. By those who have to earn a living, it is done solely for that purpose. Work that is pure leisuring or leisuring in part may be just as devoid of any inherent pleasure as the drudgery of sheer toil is.

When we understand that leisuring as well as toiling is work in the full sense of that term and when we understand that leisuring is never to be confused with play, we should not be surprised by the statement that leisure activities or activities that have a leisuring component may be just as painful and as fatiguing as work that is toil.

It follows that both forms of work, whether in separation or in combination, may require us to resort to play for its relaxing and recreational effects—removing the strains and tensions of work and refreshing our energies. The playing we do for this purpose then becomes therapeutic or utilitarian play.

Nevertheless, it is also possible for leisure-work, or work that has an aspect of leisuring in it, to have an aspect of playfulness, because the worker genuinely enjoys the work while doing it. This is not true of what I have called sheer toil and may also be called, for that reason, drudgery.

No housewife, as contrasted with women employed in other occupations, would fail to recognize that she also is engaged in work. Domestic work, the doing of household chores, is certainly work, not play. Much of it is sheer toil, as much for the housewife who does not receive an hourly or weekly payment for it as it is for the domestic servant or hired hand who engages in such work to earn a living.

The tasks performed, whether by the housewife or by a hired hand, consist of repetitive chores, from the doing of which almost nothing is learned and in the doing of which little pleasure is found. The work is for the most part manual rather than mental; its repetitiveness makes it stultifying; having nothing creative about it, it yields no self-improvement. The drudgery of the toil is alleviated

only if an element of leisuring enters into the work for the housewife because she does it as an act of love and for the good of the family. Then it differs from the same work performed by a domestic servant solely for the money to be earned.

In contrast to such domestic work, which is largely manual rather than mental and repetitive rather than creative, such activities as gardening, carpentry, repairing plumbing or electrical gadgets, and the use of other skills to improve the household, are work that is leisuring rather than toiling. They can also be play to whatever extent the doing of them is enjoyed.

I have left to the last the most interesting example of an activity that can fall under all four of our main categories, either entirely under one or another, or involve some admixture of several at the same time. Consider sexual activity. If its motivation is purely biological, it belongs in the category of sleep. If it has no other motivation than financial gain, then it is toil. If it is indulged in solely for the inherent pleasure in the process, it is sheer play.

Is it ever leisuring? Does it ever have an aspect of leisuring combined with some other aspect? Yes, if the sexual union of two persons is an act of benevolent love on their part, an act that confers mutual benefits. We know that the sexual act may be performed by one of the partners without pleasure. Then, if it is an act of love, it is leisure-work without any aspect of play. When it is performed with pleasure, it is erotic love as distinguished from other forms of benevolent love that do not involve any sexuality whatsoever.

When the sexual act is performed without love, it may be sleep, toil, or play, but there is nothing leisurely about it.

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.

When work is pure leisure, it may or may not be compensated. 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: (1) sheer toil that is compensated and thereby earns a living for the worker; (2) pure leisure that is also compensated; and (3) 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 and 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 or robots 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 have anticipated 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 of compensated work are the tasks or undertakings that persons would discharge or take on even if they did not have to work for a living. Included here are all forms of productive artistry, all forms of scientific re-

search 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 service, practicing law, 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.

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 be performed 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 work is sheer toil, those for whom 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 larger the creative input of the work, the more it is self-perfecting, the better it is as work for a human being to do. 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 it 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 worker. 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 compensated work does not exhaust the whole range of activities that are leisuring. 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” derives through the French word “loisir” from the Latin word “licere,” which 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 hereby 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—(1) an optional use of free time, (2) 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 office-holders 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 leisure.

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