Toward the Work Society

The existence of slavery in ancient Greece must be faced. Still, it would be a mistake to jump to the conclusion that the ideal of leisure was far from the practice, or to deride it as hypocrisy. Slavery was part of the very foundation of the ideal. The classical Greeks wanted to be wise. To be wise one had to have leisure. Not everyone could have leisure. The body needs food and shelter and to get them requires work. But work is neither the noblest nor the most distinguished activity of man. All animals seek food and shelter. Man alone can think, reason, and invent. If some men at least could be freed from mundane occupations, they might soar to remarkable heights, and at the same time help lift up to a higher level even those whose workaday life kept them pinned to the ground, where vision is limited.

The free males of Athens, the citizens, numbered about 35,000. The slaves were four times that many. This did not mean that each citizen was a man of leisure supported by four slaves. Many slaves were taken into factories, mines, and the lower public offices as well as into rich households as private servants. The poor citizen had no slaves. He would have found the maintenance to say nothing of the purchase of one out of his reach. As
Aristotle remarks at the close of the *Politics*, the only slave the poor man had was his wife.

Athenian policemen were slaves. There were slaves who lived by themselves and paid their masters only an annual rent. In the factory system of the day there were gangs of slaves, supervised by slaves, who split their profits after paying their master his rent. The poor free man might be a farmer, shoemaker, carpenter or trader. Like the slave, though in lesser degree, he was bound to his work. Whoever has to work for a living is blocked on the road to wisdom and suffers, as far as leisure is concerned, the fate of slaves.

Thus when Aristotle states his case for slavery (which might well have been a case against slavery, so moderate is it for the times), we can treat his argument as similar to that he would have made for the man who was free but too poor to own slaves or property. There are men born to toil and others born to live the life of leisure. If the two groups are linked by a moral bond as in the family or household, then even those who work receive the benefits of those who do not. To be attached to a master is the best thing that can happen. The master, detached from lowly cares, is free for higher things; the slave receives from him—from the musician, the statesman, the thinker—what he could never himself create. As a result he is brought into a life more human, more refined, than ever he could have reached himself. The gain the slave and worker receive is so great that payment for it by toil is negligible in comparison. They are beneficiaries of the partnership.

The slave was not a Greek. Typically he was imported from Asia Minor and brought to Attica by the slave traders. Since the Greeks considered Asia Minor to be an inferior culture, they found it easy to believe their slave was by nature inferior. But they did not mark him by emblems or dress to an inferior status, nor did the state leave him unprotected from ill treatment. Emancipation was not difficult; slaves sometimes bought their own freedom. Many of them were used in households as tutors for the method by house. Slave prehens our exp tral mat a tyrann democrats is shame no great. In Ro Greeks, Greeks. The Ro “barbarian barians. slaves. B accordin One c or work day in an over, or bookbin in colon and craft life of th reveals a from the Hesiod pears on the Gree the mean It is not v his bare l
for the young. In fact, before the coming of public schools, the method of early education was typically composed of instruction by household slaves.

Slavery was accepted in Greece in a way difficult for us to comprehend. The word did not have for the Greeks the connotations our experience has given us. Politically slavery was almost a neutral matter. Without touching on it, one could favor a monarchy, a tyranny, or a democracy. Plato, for example, remarks that in democracy the slaves become as lax as their masters. If the master is shameless and impudent, so is the slave. There was obviously no great gulf separating master and slave.

In Rome, too, slaves were used as tutors. Often they were Greeks, so one could say the Romans had better tutors than the Greeks had. The slave's lot in Rome, however, was a harder one. The Romans did not have two simple classes of "us" versus "barbarians-fit-for-slavery." The Greeks were clearly not barbarians. The Romans had to make finer distinctions among their slaves. By and large their treatment of slaves differed widely and according to distinctions of culture, learning, and skill.

One can imagine the life of the Greek or Roman free farmer or worker: much like that of a European farmer or metayer today in an area where mechanization of farming has not yet taken over, or like the life of an artisan—an ironworker, carpenter or bookbinder, perhaps—working with tools similar to those in use in colonial America. In parts of the world many such farmers and craftsmen yet exist. Hesiod, the Greek poet, described the life of the farmer. It has a special interest. His Works and Days reveals a world far from the city, and a way of life that took little from the city.

Hesiod precedes Aristotle in time, which means that he appears on the Greek scene at an earlier point in the evolution of the Greek city-state. We can take from him, then, an inkling of the meaning of work and leisure in a rural agricultural economy. It is not what Aristotle talked about. He who farms the land with his bare hands and animals works hard. He never expects a life
of leisure. The mere idea is alien to his way of thinking. Leisure is something that can be attained by man’s ingenuity, but the farmer expects to have only such spare time as weather and seasons allow him. Hesiod sings a song to this life, but it remains a life tied to necessity. If food is what men need, someone will have to farm for it. Without farming, we cannot live.

Socrates seems closer to Hesiod than Aristotle. This is the impression Xenophon gives in his Recollections of Socrates, which, at least for the philosopher’s everyday side, drew a faithful likeness. Socrates is full of advice on how by doing some work we can resolve problems. He quotes the poet Epichamus: The gods sell us all good things for labor. He cites the story of Hercules who had to choose between easy Vice and hard Virtue. He quotes Hesiod: Vice can be found with ease, but before the temple of Virtue the immortal gods have placed labor. In fact it was, among other things, a verse of Hesiod’s that got Socrates into trouble: “Work is no disgrace, but idleness is.” In the use of this ground to help condemn to death a well-known man the temper of Greek times reveals something of itself. Artisans and artists fascinated Socrates. He liked to wander in and out of their shops, questioning and concluding and pressing on to further questions, and always to talk with others about carpenters, shoemakers, and smiths. When he counseled persons to stoop to work, the tone changed: try a little work; it won’t hurt you as much as you think, and just a little of it may solve your problem. But Socrates did not glorify work; he sometimes recommended it in small doses. He himself did no work, large or small.

Hesiod in singing the life of the soil goes further than Socrates would have gone, and he praises virtues other than those loved by Homer. The fighting man and the hunter and their virtues are outside Hesiod’s world. Yet one can live, as well as die, by fighting and hunting. Between the battle and the hunt the warrior and hunter take their ease and pleasure. In Homer’s world there is the cup filled to the brim, there are maids to bathe heroes, there is music, song and dancing, games with balls, lances, and weig blest spo though, does not honor of

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and weights, boxing, wrestling, running, fencing, and that noblest sport of all, chariot racing. They are not free of necessity, though, these warriors, any more than the farmer. The battle does not always go their way: the Iliad reports the games held in honor of Patroclus, at his funeral.

The farmer’s life is dominated more by the elements. He cannot escape them to join the city dweller in companionable life, indoors, free of the fear of frost or blight and of not getting the crops in on time. The farmer lives his life taking time whenever he can. Since he cannot master the elements on which he depends, he cannot be free for leisure. His work is important for those who have leisure, and all others beside — and so Hesiod lauds it. But he laments it too. In the Socrates of Xenophon work is an expedient. In Vergil’s Georgics it is a necessity, and a mock heroism. In Hesiod’s Works and Days it is a necessity too, and, worse yet, a curse.

To the authors of the Bible also work is necessary because of a divine curse. Through Adam’s fall the world was become a workhouse. Paradise was where there was no toil. This is the feeling about work one encounters in most of history’s years. Unavoidable, but nonetheless a curse. God himself worked to produce the world, or so King James’s translators rendered the passage in the Old Testament, but this working had another meaning. To work can mean to fashion, as God fashioned or formed the earth, and fashioning can require rest, as God needed rest after His self-appointed task.

The word we use today to signify exerting oneself to gain a livelihood has become broader and lighter. The term more in evidence years and centuries ago was labor. Today “labor” has the sense of strenuous exertion; in the past that is what it meant. “Toil” has an almost painful sense to it, and that, too, was what the word meant in centuries gone by. Work, on the other hand, had many meanings and could be used to refer to religious “good works,” to “works of art,” or to the “working” of wine. Not until the late nineteenth century did it become the comprehensive
word it is today, containing in one bushel basket all forms of exertion. The English word “work” has so wide and rich a range and so varied a past that a mere catalog of its senses would be several pages long. The encroachment of work was gradual. In Mark Twain’s day the word had not yet been applied enough to the field of politics so that he could use the phrase “a political worker” without adding quotes.

Before the nineteenth century’s close, if you worked, you labored or toiled, and if you did other than these, you did not do something; you did not work as you do today; you were something—a carpenter, mason, soldier, physician. One’s work then was rarely called work. The various things people did conveyed no such unity of feeling. Evidently they were so different they were not grouped under the one label of work. In common usage today, however, work is the generic term. It takes in all washing. Moreover, unless accompanied by the proper adjectives, the word no longer calls forth the image of sweat and pain, of labor under the sun. The old expression “a working-day face” has little sure meaning for us; we would hesitate before associating it with doleful madrigals. Even God can work today because work has also lost its odor of inferior status.

THE MEDIEVAL FRONTIER

Certainly machines have lightened man’s burden, and this makes one good reason for the change in the meaning of the word work. The working-day world has fewer briers than it had before. But the word began to change long before the load was lightened. In Egypt, Greece, and Rome, the sense of work remained labor and toil. Undoubtedly the word had its ups and downs—in commercial times work often climbs in esteem—but the ups and downs were of small amplitude compared to the wide sweep we are now tracing.

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began. The world had once more been brought back to a rural condition. The cities had fallen and been reduced. Along with its aqueducts, Rome’s population fell. In the second century A.D. it had been over 1,200,000. By the early Middle Ages it had dropped to twenty or thirty thousand. People lived under frontier conditions, and frontier life demands work — of men, women, and children.

The monasteries, it seems, led the way. In the West the most influential order was that of St. Benedict. His rule for monks, composed in the early sixth century, commanded them to engage in steady manual labor, thereby establishing a precedent in monastic history. “Idleness is the enemy of the soul” begins Rule XLVIII. “And therefore, at fixed times, the brothers ought to be occupied in manual labor, and, again at fixed times, in sacred reading.” Work in those days usually meant laboring in the fields. Monks were not to grieve if the needs of the place or poverty demanded they labor at the harvest. If they lived by the labor of their hands, as did their fathers and the apostles, then were they truly monks. Under the rule of St. Benedict work took a more important place than it did under St. Pachomius or St. Basil. Directly religious duties can scarcely have taken more than four or five hours on weekdays. The remaining hours on a daily average numbered about six for labor and four for reading. Benedict was not a fanatic, however; his rule was marked by reasonableness. Let all things be done with moderation, he would say, because of the fainthearted. And while work came to occupy more time than church service, the celebration of canonical office was the monks’ first duty. Nothing preceded it.

The Middle Ages were a time of pioneering. Although the drama of the destruction of the aqueducts to Rome is what leads us to picture a world collapsing dramatically to barbarian invasions, the deterioration of the Empire had long been going on. Without water Rome could not sustain its huge population. But in the West the turning back of the clock to a rural society had begun long before.
Decentralization began with the Empire still on its feet. The great landowners, influential with the Senate, indeed part and parcel of it, through privileged tax positions and other means, swelled their holdings at the expense of the city dwellers and small farmers. Little by little many of the newly propertyless were absorbed in huge rural estates, whose landlords, the *potentiores*, were thus supplied with small armies and a fixed labor supply. Others of the dispossessed went over to live with the barbarians, preferring their hard justice to the Roman government's corruption. As early as A.D. 328, Constantine had admitted that the most powerful *potentiores* could be checked only by the Praetorian Prefect and the emperor himself. At the end of that fourth century not even the imperial government could control them. By the middle of the fifth century, when the Marsilian priest Salvian was writing his *De Gubernatione Dei*, a fierce attack on the *potentiores*, the West was already cast in the feudal mold — on the one hand, great proprietors, on the other, tenants who lived on land not theirs, who performed services and paid taxes, most often in kind, and took their orders from their lords.

Though towns continued to exist in the West, and five centuries later new or rebuilt ones grew up, for a thousand years to come life and civilization was largely to be simple, agrarian, and rural. And at its dim beginnings there was very little to go on. Men had given up their freedom to gain food, shelter, and protection, the social security of an overlord. It was not really an exchange of freedom for serfdom, for when the exchange was made there was serfdom on both sides. Freedom and prosperity and a good life were mostly ancestral memories. The new world with a new religion and a new way of living had to go forward by itself, step by step, to win its own kind of freedom.

The first to push out were the monks. They had drunk more deeply than others of the new religion of Christianity. Perhaps the strength in Augustine's philosophy had affected them. Certainly the Rule for Monks fortified them, and certainly the Church in Rome remained as their background and symbol.

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Conceive if you can of Europe without central political authority, of a Church better organized than the state, of the philosophy of Augustine which made of the state a junior partner, of the spirit of Christianity mobilized in a hierarchy of active bishops. Think also of vast rural areas where the Romans and Celts blended together with Germanic newcomers. Here was the first zone for the conversion of the pagan. Once the peasants had been won, the next field was ready to be tried, the vast terrain of Ireland, England, Scotland, Iceland, Germany and Scandinavia. The people here were often hostile and brutish, and life was nasty—certainly according to those who had memory of imperial Rome. The peasants, while perhaps no shorter on intelligence than anywhere else, had no ear for the notes of classical literature, nor for a learned theology, much less for the possible delights of a life of leisure according to Aristotle.

What was needed was men, legions of men, willing to take on the job of demonstrating a superior way of life. The cities were gone and could not serve as communication centers for the irradiating new spirit. The strategy called for these legions of men to scatter out over the map of Europe, self-reliant men who knew how to face danger and death, who could make do, who could take whatever religious feeling was at hand, be it in a pagan peasant or a pagan temple, and turn it to good use in teaching virtue and worship, not doctrine, and in showing what material advantages, too, the intelligent, energetic Christian held in his grasp.

Thus flew the spark toward a new ideal of work. Classical tradition played no part in it. Indeed a contrasting view took hold: labor, manual labor, too, is good for the soul. As the army of missionary monks went out to build monasteries among barbarians and wildernesses, they had to prove their superiority. They had to work with peasants, to share in the labors of plowing and planting, cleaning away forests, and building houses. Think again, this time of a landing party of monks, with a solid boat, their beginning to reclaim land and clear away trees, to build
stone buildings in the Italian tradition, to plant vineyards, work metals finely, seek out herbal medicines, set up mills. Wouldn't such skill and zeal in labor be the talk of the countryside?

The beacon of Greco-Roman thought and learning never went out, of course, and burned its flickering brightest in Italy. But in the north it wavered feebly for long to come. Not that men glowing with missionary spirit had no access to it; they preferred to learn, develop, invent, or put to use other things—the wheeled plow, vaults and cupolas, the three-field system, horseshoes and collars, saddles and stirrups, water mills, the crank, seigniorial government and a vast body of theoretical literature on the rights and freedoms of state, church, individuals, kings, princes, slaves, and women.

In Italy, where the Renaissance first appeared, classical learning seemed more essential to the energetic men of Florence. That imaginary dialog between Alberti and Lorenzo the Magnificent fits the classical mood. The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries looked on the gothic ones with contempt. So far had Renaissance men been freed by those prior centuries that they no longer acknowledged their debt, indeed saw their inheritance as chains, and looked to the glories of a remoter past for inspiration. Looked to, but, try as they might, they could never bring themselves to make a copy of their ancient models; so Leonardo, Galileo, Michelangelo, and Brunelleschi stooped to do things with their hands that only a mechanic in Greece would have done. The Renaissance, as the foregoing chapter told, brought forth a new philosophy of work, leaning more on praxis than theoria, moving away from scientia contemplativa to scientia operativa. The honorable position the monks gave labor could not be shed so quickly, not even in Italy, any more than could another monkish innovation that went so well with work—the clock.

Perhaps because they sensed that manual work was so unusual a demand to make of monks, the Benedictines worked out a regular system of work and prayer or meditation. To some monks, as to Frère Jacques of the time-honored round, the bed felt good in
the cold, early morning. To others, contemplation, which did not die with the Greco-Roman world, seemed to be the more appropriate activity for a religious man. St. Thomas had insisted on it. So bells and clocks were used as never before to pull monks out of bed, to send them off to prayers and then to the fields, to mark off the time for work and prayer and contemplation.

To Luther, himself a monk, certain doctrines of the Church of Rome were dangerous for the soul, but not the praise of work that the monasteries had given to the world. Indeed the prospering monasteries by this time had begun to let manual work out to others. They had their own serfs, whose life, too, was now run by the bells. The original idea, though, was sound — to work is to serve God — sound not alone for Luther, but later for Calvin and Wesley as well.

The Reformation’s ideas of work have been examined by many scholars. It was, in fact, one of the most intense areas of historical study in the first half of the twentieth century. Many points of controversy sprang up — whether religious ideas or industrial necessity first created the new idea of work, whether its first flowering was in Catholicism or in Protestantism, whether work is less prominent for the reformers than other doctrines were, and so on. With or without saying so explicitly, however, most students agreed that out of the Reformation came a new atmosphere. Labor commanded a new tone. Once, man worked for a livelihood, to be able to live. Now he worked for something beyond his daily bread. He worked because somehow it was the right or moral thing to do.

It is outside our limits to trace the spread of this work ethic or gospel of work, as it much later came to be called, over Germany, England, Scandinavia and elsewhere in Europe. We are chiefly interested in the fact that it eventually reached the United States, there to obtain the fullest expression. Perhaps the linking of work to God is no longer so clear as it once was, yet we can certainly see that the shadows of the great reformers fell over the idea of work in America. Here, all who can must work, and idle-
ness is bad; too many holidays means nothing gets done, and by steady methodical work alone can we build a great and prosperous nation. Here, too, work is good for you, a remedy for pain, loneliness, the death of a dear one, a disappointment in love, or doubts about the purpose of life.

Today the American without a job is a misfit. To hold a job means to have status, to belong in the way of life. Between the ages of twenty-five and fifty-five, that is, after school age and before retirement age, nearly 95 per cent of all males work, and about 35 per cent of all females. Being without a job in prosperous times is bad enough, but being without one in a depression is worse yet. Then the American without work—or the German or Englishman—is a damned soul. Various studies have portrayed the unemployed man as confused, panicky, prone to suicide, mayhem, and revolt. Totalitarian regimes seem to know what unemployment can mean: they never permit it.

The modern doctrine of work affects all countries that try to solve their problems by industrialization. It has migrated to Russia, to China, India, and will make inroads on every modernizing nation, for work cannot be made methodical, rational or impersonal without the addition of some incentive besides the schoolbook triumvirate of food, clothing, and shelter. After the triumph of the United States in World War II—so heavily attributed to massive industrial productivity—the work ethic along with so many other things American was imported by countries all over the globe at an accelerated pace. In not a few nations new constitutions were drawn up. The very first article of one of these proclaims that the country is "a democratic republic based on work." It is hard to recognize from this definition the same Italy where the fervor of laboring monks had least shaken the Greco-Roman ideal of tranquillity, where Lorenzo and Alberti had agreed that the contemplative life must take an active life by the hand, where Thomas Aquinas had raised contemplation again to the skies, and where Venice had become the queen of serenity. Other countries have made similar constitu-
tional provisions, as though the saying would make it so. The American influence was indirect; the more direct pressure for a work clause usually came from the communists or socialists. In Italy today even the newest recruits to an industrial life, unskilled workers coming up from the south to cluster in and around the big cities, will say almost in unison that what one has to do in this life to make one’s way is, “work.” The latest version of the bill of rights for mankind, the UNESCO Declaration of Human Rights to which almost all nations have put a signature, proclaims, “Everyone has the right to work.”

**THE WORKLESS**

There have always been restraints to work, moral and legal brakes that have tried to prevent runaways at smash-up speed from destroying things people set store by. There have always been well-accepted canons of what work should not do to a man. It should not ruin his health, either physical or mental. Much of early labor legislation was designed to eliminate accidents and bad light or ventilation in work places. Nor should work ruin a man’s family. Legislation against child labor or to protect pregnant working women falls in this category. Work also cannot be allowed to destroy existing communal loyalties with impunity. Working for the enemy, unless governed by legal formula like the Geneva convention, is dangerously close to treason. At times governments have prevented the exit of special workmen or technicians on pain of imprisonment or death. Furthermore, work cannot violate explicit religious precepts. One of the oldest and firmest is the injunction against working on the Sabbath.

Religion and the state have a voice in maintaining all these restrictions on work, in relaxing them in an emergency and in taking up the slack when health and family seem imperiled once again.
By and large, then, church and state protect things of greater importance from work's inroads. They have to use discretion, however. The range of this discretion is what makes so plausible the thesis that industrialism or capitalism could not develop without a change in religious emphasis. It also makes clear why a religious or state blessing on work is necessary in all countries that wish to modernize themselves. Practical theologians never lost their concern for the health and welfare of individual and family; different considerations simply came into play; otherwise — and this remains a problem today — some of the harmful results of work were not obvious. Admittedly sometimes there were none so blind as pastor and priest. Still, it often happens that the effects of working conditions are hard to see. Take sedentary work, for example. What are its effects on diet, the spinal column, length of life, or the forms of disease?

If sedentary work will serve as a health example, the case of working mothers will serve to illustrate how difficult it may be to see the effects of work on the family. Though we shall consider the case more fully later, it directs our attention for the moment to this question: If there are legal and moral restraints on work, can we see them reflected in the groups of people who do not work? Who in the United States today does not work?

One group we can discard as irrelevant to the purpose at hand — the unemployed. The unemployed in modern terms are those who seek work but for one reason or another have not found it. What of the young? Up to the age of fourteen they are not even counted as being in the labor force. The old, too, do not work. The proportion of persons in the labor force today after the age of sixty-five drops rapidly — from nearly all men between twenty-five and fifty-four years to about one third of those who have passed their sixty-fifth birthday. As for females, they are not as much a part of the working force as men. For every six of them working there are nearly ten men, and the men are more likely by far to be holding full-time jobs. Nor, of course, do the sick have to drag themselves off to work. The proportion of the labor force at high disability is workless. "workless" present case; because it should or in

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force at home sick (the temporarily as well as the permanently disabled) is about 1\(\frac{1}{3}\) per cent. Here then is where we find the workless: in the young, the old, the female, the invalid. We say "workless" instead of "unemployed" to emphasize that in the present case these persons do not seek work but are without work because it is part of the law or custom of the land that they should or need not work.

Outside of these groups, though, is there anyone who is workless because he wants to be workless? What of the rich? Offhand one can maintain that they too work, even though they don’t have to for a living. To search for a workless man among one’s friends and acquaintances makes for an illuminating experience. In Europe anybody can still name a dozen. In the United States one has to search as hard as Diogenes to discover even two. A workless man today is no easier to find than an honest man was in his time.

To back up these assertions with more than impressions is not easy. If, however, we take property other than real or personal to indicate no need to work for a livelihood, we can assume that most such property exists in the form of stocks, and then look to see whether among stockholders there are many who in the occupation column wrote “none.” We find that, except for housewives, almost all stockholders have income from wages, salaries, or fees. Indeed, the great majority have greater income from work than from dividends. Those families whose other income is already over $10,000 make up over half of all stockholders. Nonemployed adults holding stock number about 30,000 out of 6.5 million stockholders, or about 0.4 per cent. Is this a leisure class, these “nonemployed adults”?

Another procedure would be to observe the rich families in the United States to see whether any of their offspring are lolling about, openly declaring their disinclination for work. Here too the search would not prove rewarding. They are all busy being bankers or lawyers or taking care of their investments and real estate or doing something equally productive. If they are not,
they give that impression. If they gave any other impression, like that of spending their lives enjoying themselves, they would soon earn the appellation of playboy, a word nasty in itself and smack- ing of unAmericanism or at best the international set. Luther's denunciation of living on income or rents or interest as unworthy of the name work perhaps continues to have its effect.

There used to be a kind of person in America who openly proclaimed his aversion to work. The type, though not already gone from sight, seems to be going fast. He is or was called the hobo. He seems even to have had some intellectual justification for his way of life. Though the justification never reached a high level, it was undeniably based on the ancient idea that if one has not wealth, he might yet avoid work by cutting down his requirements of life. The hobo took pride in the fact that he only worked when he needed to to keep alive, or was forced to by superior strength. The hobo's numbers have been cut down by adverse changes in transportation and the law, by the elimination of boxcars and the applying of vagrancy ordinances. Diogenes today would have even further obstacles to contend with. If the barrel he lived in were to rest anywhere on ground, that ground would be private or public. In the first case he would be trespassing, in the second he would be obstructing traffic or disturbing the peace or violating the city's hygiene ordinances. But neither laws nor technical change can bottle up all modern aversion to work. Each generation will have its protestants: their names will change, and often their number; their ways of expression will change too in the effort to cope with the changing laws and technology of work.

Whether one is rich or poor the chance of escaping work today is slim. The pressures toward it are too great, the lack of comprehension of not working is too complete. One is not appalled or indignant on learning that another doesn't work; one simply does not understand, doesn't know where next to turn for conversation, cannot size up the ostensibly human object standing there. Thus can one appreciate the misery in which many aristo-

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was different. Boswell in his *London Journal* rarely uses the word work in any sense whatever, yet throughout almost all that period he was in the condition of what we would today call looking for a job. His daily writing we would today call work, and say that when he was "at work" on his journal he was "working." His intellectual pursuits we would also call work, for a professor works, so does a scientist. Boswell was seeking a commission in the Royal Footguards. Does an officer work? Here once more we come up against the fact that however much work may have become the touchstone of modern life, there is gold left that cannot be corrupted. It is true that we speak of a soldier or a clergyman as working, an artist, diplomat or physician too, yet would we call them job holders? We might, but with some uneasiness. These occupations somehow have too shady a past to have a clear work status.

To the job each person gives what he is paid to give. What comes out of it depends more or less on his own effort. Up to the diminishing returns of fatigue, the more one works the more one measurably produces. In the liberal pursuits or professions, a responsibility exists that goes beyond the money paid for the job, and though it may not go as far as claiming one's life, as Ruskin pointed out forcefully, at least it goes by the honorable name of duty. A soldier may have to die for his country no matter how poorly he is paid. How much money an artist gets will not make his effort a greater or lesser work of art. A physician or lawyer should fight for his patient's or client's life even if he is paid but two cents. A professor cannot teach what he does not himself profess; nor, paid more, teach better.

Besides the sense of responsibility in these pursuits there is another element that distinguishes them from mere job holding. What they do does not depend on themselves entirely. The scholar who works steadily is not necessarily better than the one who applies himself spasmodically. Hard work may be necessary in both cases but the touch that makes one a good scholar and the other a drone comes from another source than work. In the physician's case it may not usually be so simple as the view expressed in the pr fees, yet entirely on with the painter. Why then discernible compensation, and later. But nor get so of art. Th rarium. H. to souls? S: nally being now the or the clerical with the onc signs on

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in the proverb, God cures the patient, and the doctor collects the fees, yet the “something” in a good doctor does not depend entirely on his assiduousness in medical school—as particularly with the internist. Even clearer is the case of the playwright or painter. Hard work undoubtedly, but are the Muses a fiction? Why then speak of inspiration? Traces of these things are still discernible in word usage. The professions or liberal pursuits are compensated differently. Some would say they are compensated less, and this may often be the case, for reasons to be gone into later. But the doctor collects a fee; he does not work for wages nor get so much a piece. The artist is commissioned to do a work of art. The clergyman really receives living expenses, an honorarium. How much should he be worth in wages for ministering to souls? Salary, too, is a word that has honorific vestiges, originally being used to designate the Roman soldier’s salt. Salary is now the ordinary remuneration of diplomat or professor, and of the clerical occupations, also, in a reflection of their historic link with the once rare skill of the scribe, the understanding of cryptic signs on flat surfaces.

**MONKS IN THE FACTORY**

If, then, in word usage, in the moral and legal restraints on work conditions, and in the actual composition of the labor force, we find opposition to the thesis that work towers over all else of value in the modern world, perhaps we should re-examine the work ethic to see just how pervasive it ever was or really is. Did it, as Max Weber once claimed, make every man a monk? That monks in general were model workers seems to be a fairly late Protestant notion. The Council of Trent debated how to correct their high and easy living, not their excessive industry. The mere mention of the *fabliaux* and the *Decameron* recalls what opinions circulated in Catholic countries, as far back as the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance, about monkish work habits.
Of Time, Work, and Leisure

A phrase yet current in Italy describes the monk as a cowled idler. To rephrase the question, then: Did the work ethic at any time ever permeate the working class?

Any question whatever about the sentiment of the working or poorer class at any time in history is difficult to answer. Until recently, a serious portrait of the poor, even in literature, was unheard of. As in Shakespeare's plays, they were usually put in to inject a note of levity or buffoonery. Today, with all the presumed improvements in methods of social investigation and research, the workers somehow defy detection and examination. In public opinion polls they are usually underestimated; in political studies they vanish into apathy; in sociological studies they prefer silence or evasion, leaving the stage to others more practiced in reading and writing. Like the slaves of antiquity, workers stay in the shadow of the public realm.

For this reason I regard with suspicion the contention that the gospel of work absorbed the working class. Its aim was to do that, of course, and, since it was expounded by persons of influence and position, no doubt many on the lower rungs paid it lip service. We can assert with greater certainty that a pious attitude toward work existed among the proprietors and the clerical classes. In attenuated form it exists among such classes today. The chapter to follow reveals this in its account of the length of the working day they put in. The worker probably never lost the idea of work as a means to a livelihood, though the work ethic may have infiltrated his class in the encouragement of regularity, honesty, application, and, certainly, respect for the clock. In 1848 when Charles A. Dana was in Paris as the Tribune's correspondent the workers told him, "All we want is bread." He was a good reporter, fresh from another land, and although favoring the workers — "I had gone among the workers and ascertained the sentiments that animated them" — he had not gone overboard for them. Anyone who has punched a clock in a present-day factory can adduce current evidence to show that while there is more than a

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more than bread on the workers' mind, there is little of the gospel of work.

In the factory, an underground life is lived under the noses of foremen, supervisors and time-study men. They may smell it but they find it hard to see or touch. The workers live in a world apart, on its negative side slow, restrictive, inimical to supervisors, management, and other outsiders; on its positive side inventive, ingenious, and loyal to co-workers. The experienced worker does everything possible, including purposely springing frames and burning up drills to put time-study men off their calculations and set a slower time estimate for the job. No mean dramatic ability comes to the fore in the effort: the worker jumps around the machine, steaming and sweating at every pore. Once management's man is out of range, the job goes back to the pace the workers themselves have decided to keep. They set a job at a certain pace, or fix an output quota, not only to keep from being speeded up but to avoid having their pay rates lowered. They often devise their own mechanical inventions and gimmicks which they apply to their machines once the cat is away. Anyone who tries to work faster than the informally set pace soon finds himself in Coventry — or even loses his job.

If the work ethic ever possessed such men, it has by now oozed away. No one maintains that this attitude characterizes every American worker: there are also the rate-busters. Great variations exist among workers, as any experienced foreman knows. Even their point of origin has importance — workers in a town full of Scotch-Irish descendants will work differently from those in a town with mixed nationalities. Workers newly arrived from the South or rural areas perform their job differently from those from other sections or the cities. The interesting thing at the moment is that to a surface observer these men, goldbrickers and ratebusters alike, might all seem to be hard at work, imbued with the zeal of missionary monks or Protestant reformers. Underneath the surface, there may be nothing of the sort. They may
be plotting — all in the spirit of fun and fellowship — where to hide one another’s wrenches or when to cut off the gas to the welder’s line. This point will be returned to again when the history of modern work is considered in greater detail, and it will be seen that even the surface activity has a significance all its own.

For now, the question is why the job has such psychological significance. It is not uncommon today to expect a man at retirement to have problems so grave they may even lead to suicide. This does not seem consistent with the portrait of workers given above. In seeking an explanation we should first of all separate the job holder from those who are self-employed. Not only is the man who works his own business a property owner in many cases, he also sets his own pace and usually sees a direct relation between his effort and his gain. Moreover (this now is the important distinction), he sees his own operations as a whole quite clearly. Even if he employs others to work for him, their efforts lead toward an end, and this end the employer has well in mind. The job holder’s situation is different. His knowledge of the end is limited. His work by its very title is a work in pieces. The origin of the word is still lost but “job” appears to come from the Middle English *jobbe* meaning a piece or a lump. In any case its early usage was to signify a piece of work, and our meaning — an employment — is so recent that Webster’s dictionary still considers it colloquial. A job, then, is only a piece of work. The classic example in a classical text is Adam Smith’s description of jobs in a pin factory. “One man draws out the wire, another straightens it, and a third cuts it, a fourth points it, a fifth grinds it.” Pinmaking introduces the reader to *The Wealth of Nations*.

Dividing work up into pieces has led to specialization and the division of labor. This last should be distinguished from cooperation. In cooperation one cannot help seeing the end one is working for, even though one works only on a minor part of it. The description in Cellini’s *Autobiography* of the casting of the statue of Perseus is worth recalling for its picture of cooperation in the fifteenth-century shop of a fine artisan. By means of cables, pulleys,
pulleys, and levers Cellini had his men raise the mold and suspend it about a meter above the mouth of the furnace. He then set it down carefully in the bottom of the hole. Having seen that his journeymen could take it from there, he got other men to lay pine wood on the furnace. The shop caught fire, however, and spread until everyone was afraid the roof would fall in. The fire put out, Cellini who had been suffering all the time from fever, had to take to bed. He called together his assistants, about ten in all, including masters who melted bronze, helpers, men from the country, and his regular journeymen, and, putting them under the orders of one of these last, gave them instructions. There were too many difficulties, though; Cellini had to get out of bed again. He called out the remedy for each problem as it arose, and each man responded with the work of three men. This time an explosion hit the shop, throwing fire everywhere. Terrified, they saw that the cover of the furnace had blown off. The bronze was beginning to run. But everyone could see that it was running well and the mold was filling up. Cellini jumped here and there ordering, assisting, and praying. Prayers over, the mold a-cooling, he drank with them all and went joyfully back to bed—"for there were still two hours left to the night"—and got up next day at noon.

In the United States the great majority are employed by others. The percentage of self-employed has shrunk steadily, dropped from probably over one-fifth to under one-seventh of all the employed in just the twenty years from 1940 to 1960. It is not the moment yet to ask by whom employees are employed. We say, "employed by others," but these others are not necessarily either living or individual persons. Employees are hired by people who are themselves employees hired by other employees. This progression can go on indefinitely until finally a group of prime employers is reached. Even these are not employers but a board acting in name of a corporation. So, just as almost everyone works in the United States, almost everyone is a job holder.
THE JOB: TECHNICAL AND SOCIAL

Since a job entails working on a piece of a process or product for wages, the satisfaction of producing a whole object is lacking. For centuries this has been an argument against specialization. We should not expect the worker normally to get real satisfaction from a job on which he does a piece of the work, a task chosen and organized by others, under watchful eyes, at a pace not his own, at a time and place not his to say. This, one would venture, is the disagreeable part of the job—effort or exertion or exercise, physical or mental, under orders and supervision, constrained in time and place. Yet technically speaking this is the job. A job description with all its headings would be too long to quote and tedious to read. If I pick up the Dictionary of Occupational Titles and open at random, I learn that the “Sandblaster” cleans paint, scale, grease, tar, rust, and dirt from the surface of metal or hard-composition objects usually preparatory to machining, painting, polishing or plating, by directing a stream of sand, grit or steel shot and compressed air from a nozzle against the surface of the objects, and, further, that he wears heavy gloves to protect hands when holding objects in sandblast stream, and a helmet or hood as protection against breathing sand-laden air and to protect his eyes. The job description does have some relation to what goes on in the shop for eight hours a day but is by no means the full story, and for many purposes is the irrelevant story.

Apart from the worker’s underground life of movement, adventure and cold war, there is an aboveboard life worth living too. In modern industry, where all men and many women work, no room is admitted for fellowship and leadership, and the play of a whole field of emotions. “Work is no place for courtship.”

This statement is no more observed than the one in the old days about flirting at Mass. “So the sermon ended, and the church broke up, and my amours ended also,” confided Pepys to his diary. Love, matches, games, challenges, lunches, petty tyrannies, visits, altogether this and the man he’s alone. He has been life. His other needs.

For the technical, the social and may be of intercourse was done smaller. C

well-travelled central square and children. Order one to assemble-line machine, so fuel require attendance. Table, or out afterwards to drink. Work few days. T

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visits, are all managed on the job. This part of the job—together with the pay—is the agreeable part. Undoubtedly it is this and his basic status in society (which the job provides) that the man in retirement misses. When he is no longer on the job, he’s alone. Everybody is at work except women and their babies. He has been put outside the network of both a useful and a social life. His only chance is to locate or slowly build for himself another necessarily minor network.

For clarity’s sake this part of a job, the facility it offers for intercourse, should be separated from its technical element of work. Most studies that condemn the job have seen only the technical work aspects; studies that laud it have concentrated on the social rewards. Whether a job has the first and lacks the second may determine whether workers are satisfied with their lot.

With the introduction of the factory system, the old channels of intercourse were weakened. Previously, nonagricultural work was done at home or near home. Cities were small and towns smaller. Outside of artisans’ shops, most of which gave onto well-traversed streets, intercourse took place in the market, the central square, and the home. The factory took men, women, and children out of the workshops and homes and put them under one roof and timed their movements to machines. The assembly-line process further geared the movements of man to machine, so that the expense, vulnerability to obsolescence, and fuel requirements of the factory dictated a regularity of human attendance. The artisan in his workshop could leave his bench, table, or lathe to go to the door to watch a passing procession, and afterwards perhaps take up with a friend to go to the tavern for a drink. Work waited until evening or the next day or the next few days. The machine can not be shut off so easily, and even when shut off, obsolescence gnaws away at it. The assembly line further meshed a man with gears so that if he left it for a moment, provision had to be made. Rigidity and interdependence are not so great as that lampooned by Chaplin in Modern Times or René Clair in A Nous la Liberté. But the gearing of men to
machines and of machines to all other machines, and then nestling all machines and all men under one roof, obviously brought an unheard of degree of synchronizing and inflexibility of schedule.

For anyone in a factory to run to the window to see a parade pass is dangerous, for the machines do not wait. Even after 5:00 p.m. they wait impatiently for morning, silently depreciating away. Nor can wife or children be around in the work day. They would get in the way. If the worker sees a friend — and he does — he can’t clap him on the shoulder and hale him off to the nearest pub. The walls would come tumbling down. The factory system and machinery brought the blessing of lighter labor, but also the curse of greater attentiveness over fixed stretches of time. In being paced by machines work took on a new concentration.

Work concentration usually lessens the chance for social relations on the job. By doing so, it deprives industrial work of perhaps its chief satisfaction. Studies of the origin of the gospel of work were themselves a query about the utility or naturalness or ethics of modern work. It should be noted that these studies began in Europe, where the classic views of work and leisure had tougher roots. The modern form of work had less resistance to overcome in the United States. Yet if it were unpleasant, doubts would be felt there too. In fact, in the second quarter of this century, a number of studies began which showed an increasing concern for the social side of work. Usually they overlooked that what they were studying was not the technical job so much (such study they now dubbed with the bad name “Taylorism,” after the father of modern factory efficiency) as the collective life that the factory system brought with it by its very nature. As long as you bring people together under one roof, how can you keep them from a social life except by measures that will be felt as deprivation? As the old rule of etiquette goes, under the same roof no introduction is needed. The American studies concentrated on what grew to be called the “human relations” of the job. Studies of this kind spread out all over the world and espe-
cially in Europe, emigrating from American universities and
publishing houses. To such an extent did these researches con-
fuse the technical aspects of the job, that is, the piece of work it-
self, with its increment of social life, that it began to appear that
persons were assembled in the factory as in the old public square,
namely for reasons of society. Instead they are assembled for the
job, and “the job must be done.”
These various studies — those on the origin of the work ethic
and those on the job’s human relations — reflected questions, as
we have already intimated, about the desirability of work, not so
much in itself, but as it was organized and conceived. Did work
have to be of such intense tediousness? Was there anything be-
sides the job? The UNESCO Universal Declaration of Human
Rights says that everyone has a right to work. It also says that
everyone has a right to leisure.