

children of *acedia*, is despair, which amounts to saying that despair and the incapacity for leisure are twins—a revealing thought that explains, among other things, the hidden meaning of that very questionable saying, “work and don’t despair.”

Idleness, in the old sense of the word, so far from being synonymous with leisure, is more nearly the inner prerequisite which renders leisure impossible: it might be described as the utter absence of leisure, or the very opposite of leisure.

Leisure is only possible when a man is at one with himself, when he acquiesces in his own being, whereas the essence of *acedia* is the refusal to acquiesce in one’s own being. Idleness and the incapacity for leisure correspond with one another. Leisure is the contrary of both.

Leisure, it must be clearly understood, is a *mental* and *spiritual* attitude—it is not simply the result of external factors, it is not the inevitable result of spare time, a holiday, a weekend or a vacation. It is, in the first place, an attitude of mind, a condition of the soul, and as such utterly contrary to the ideal of “worker” in each and every one of the three aspects under which it was analyzed: work as activity, as toil, as a social function.

Compared with the exclusive ideal of work as activity, leisure implies (in the first place) an attitude of non-activity, of inward calm, of *silence*; it means not being “busy”, but *letting things happen*.

Leisure is a form of silence, of that silence which is the prerequisite of the apprehension of reality: *only the silent hear and those who do not remain silent do not hear*. Silence, as it is used in this context, does not mean “dumbness” or “noiselessness”; it means more nearly that the soul’s power to “answer” to the reality of the world is left undisturbed. For leisure is a receptive attitude of mind, a contemplative

attitude, and it is not only the occasion but also the capacity for steeping oneself in the whole of creation.

Furthermore, there is also a certain *serenity* in leisure. That serenity springs precisely from our inability to understand, from our recognition of the mysterious nature of the universe; it springs from the courage of deep confidence, so that we are content to let things take their course; and there is something about it which Konrad Weiss, the poet, called “confidence in the fragmentariness of life and history.” In the same entry in his Journal he refers to the characteristically precise style and thought of Ernst Jünger, with his fanaticism for the truth¹⁰—Jünger, who really seems to tear the mystery out of a thing, coldly and boldly, and then lay it out, neatly dissected, all ready to view. His passion for tidy formulae “is surely the very reverse of contemplative, and yet there is something idle in it, idleness concealed within the sublime exactitude of thought—as opposed to the true idleness which lets God and the world and things go, and gives them time . . . !

Leisure is not the attitude of mind of those who actively intervene, but of those who are *open to everything*; not of those who *grab* and *grab hold*, but of those who leave the reins loose and who are free and easy themselves—almost like a man falling asleep, for one can only fall asleep by “letting oneself go.” (*Sleeplessness* and the *incapacity for leisure* are really related to one another in a special sense, and a man at leisure is not unlike a man asleep. Heraclitus the Obscure observed of men who were asleep that they too “were busy and active in the happenings of the world.”¹¹ When we really let our minds rest contemplatively on a rose in bud,

¹⁰ In the entry dated Sept. 12, 1939.

¹¹ Fragment 75 (Diels).

so hard for the restless!

leisure is that of those people who live free

acedia is however the same as leisure

both mental and spiritual

quietness

silence

on a child at play, on a divine mystery, we are rested and quickened as though by a dreamless sleep. Or as the Book of Job says, "God giveth songs in the night" (Job 35:10). Moreover, it has always been a pious belief that God sends his good gifts and his blessings in sleep. And in the same way his great, imperishable intuitions visit a man in his moments of leisure. It is in these silent and receptive moments that the soul of man is sometimes visited by an awareness of what holds the world together:

was die Welt
Im innersten zusammenhält

only for a moment perhaps, and the lightning vision of his intuition has to be recaptured and rediscovered in hard work.

Compared with the exclusive ideal of work as toil, leisure appears (*secondly*) in its character as an attitude of contemplative "celebration", a word that, properly understood, goes to the very heart of what we mean by leisure. Leisure is possible only on the premise that man consents to his own true nature and abides in concord with the meaning of the universe (whereas idleness, as we have said, is the refusal of such consent). Leisure draws its vitality from affirmation. It is not the same as non-activity, nor is it identical with tranquility; it is not even the same as inward tranquility. Rather, it is like the tranquil silence of lovers, which draws its strength from concord.

In his fragment *Leisure* Hölderlin writes:

I stand in the peaceful mowing
Like a loving elm tree, while sweetly life plays
And twines around me like vines and clusters of grapes.

And we may read in the first chapter of Genesis that God "ended his work which he had made" and "behold, it was

very good." In leisure, man too celebrates the end of his work by allowing his inner eye to dwell for a while upon the reality of the Creation. He looks and he affirms: it is good.

Now the highest form of affirmation is the festival; among its characteristics, Karl Kerényi tells us, is "the union of tranquility, contemplation, and intensity of life."¹² To hold a celebration means to affirm the basic meaningfulness of the universe and a sense of oneness with it, of inclusion within it. In celebrating, in holding festivals upon occasion, man experiences the world in an aspect other than the everyday one.

The festival is the origin of leisure, and the inward and ever-present meaning of leisure. And because leisure is thus by its nature a celebration, it is more than effortless; it is the direct opposite of effort. - not trying to get drunk.

And *thirdly*, leisure stands opposed to the exclusive ideal of work *qua* social function. A break in one's work, whether of an hour, a day or a week, is still part of the world of work. It is a link in the chain of utilitarian functions. The pause is made for the sake of work and in order to work, and a man is not only refreshed *from* work but *for* work. Leisure is an altogether different matter; it is no longer on the same plane; it runs at right angles to work—just as it could be said that intuition is not the prolongation or continuation, as it were, of the work of the *ratio*, but cuts right across it, vertically. Ratio, in point of fact, used to be compared to time, whereas intellectus was compared to eternity, to the eternal now.¹³ And therefore leisure does not exist for the sake of work—however much strength it may give a man to

¹² Karl Kerényi, *Die antike Religion*, p. 66 (1940).

¹³ *Summa contra Gentes*, II, 96.

work; the point of leisure is not to be a restorative, a pick-me-up, whether mental or physical; and though it gives new strength, mentally and physically, and spiritually too, that is not the point. ✓

Leisure, like contemplation, is of a higher order than the *vita activa* (although the active life is the proper human life in a more special sense). And order, in this sense, cannot be overturned or reversed. Thus, however true it may be that the man who says his nightly prayers sleeps the better for it, nevertheless no one could say his nightly prayers with that in mind. In the same way, no one who looks to leisure simply to restore his working powers will ever discover the fruit of leisure; he will never know the quickening that follows, almost as though from some deep sleep.

The point and the justification of leisure are not that the functionary should function faultlessly and without a breakdown, but that the functionary should continue to be a man—and that means that he should not be wholly absorbed in the clear-cut milieu of his strictly limited function; the point is also that he should retain the faculty of grasping the world as a whole and realizing his full potentialities as an entity meant to reach Wholeness.¹⁴

Because Wholeness is what man strives for, the power to achieve leisure is one of the fundamental powers of the human soul. Like the gift for contemplative absorption in the things that are, and like the capacity of the spirit to soar in festive celebration, the power to know leisure is the power

¹⁴ "As God, who made all things, did not rest *in* those things . . . but rested *in himself from* the created works . . . so we too should learn not to regard the works as the goal, but to rest *from* the works in God himself, in whom our felicity lies. That is the reason that man is supposed to work for six days on his own works, but on the seventh day to rest and be free for the worship of God. But this resting has been pledged to the Christian not for a time, but for ever." Aquinas, Commentary on the *Sentences*, 2d. 15, 3, 3.

to overstep the boundaries of the workaday world and reach out to superhuman, life-giving existential forces that refresh and renew us before we turn back to our daily work. Only in genuine leisure does a "gate to freedom" open. Through that gate man may escape from the "restricted area" of that "latent anxiety" which a keen observer has perceived to be the mark of the world of work, where "work and unemployment are the two inescapable poles of existence."¹⁵

In leisure—not of course exclusively in leisure, but always in leisure—the truly human values are saved and preserved *because* leisure is the means whereby the sphere of the "specifically human" can, over and again, be left behind—not as a result of any violent effort to reach out, but as in an ecstasy (the ecstasy is indeed more "difficult" than the most violent exertion, more "difficult" because not invariably at our beck and call; a state of extreme tension is more easily induced than a state of relaxation and ease *although* the latter is effortless); the full enjoyment of leisure is hedged in by paradoxes of this kind, and it is itself a state at once very human and superhuman. Aristotle says of leisure, "A man will live thus, not to the extent that he is a man, but to the extent that a divine principle dwells within him."¹⁶

¹⁵ Richard Wright in *Die Umschau*, Vol. I, Heft 2, pp. 214-16.

¹⁶ *Nicomachean Ethics*, 10, 7 (1177b).