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## **Recovering and Receiving the Lost Virtue of Leisure**

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# Recovering and Receiving the Lost Virtue of Leisure

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## Introduction

“This time however the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers; they have already been governing us for quite some time. And it is our lack of consciousness of this that constitutes part of our predicament. We are waiting not for a Godot, but for another—doubtless very different—St. Benedict.” —*After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre<sup>1</sup>

Alasdair’s MacIntyre’s conclusion to *After Virtue* is both hopeful and pessimistic. Hopeful, in that he references an historical example of how the tradition of the virtues fell dormant and was later restored. Pessimistic, in that his account details how this tradition has all but vanished today. The barbarians, he notes, have been ruling us for quite some time now. More troubling, though, is his diagnosis of our lack consciousness of this fact. Yet *After Virtue*, if it is anything, is an attempt to provoke consciousness. With a compelling blend of historical, philosophical, sociological, and literary analysis MacIntyre offers a powerful account of virtues lost and found, concluding with a glimmer of hope, as he alludes to a new St. Benedict.

Just a few lines before his the closing, MacIntyre recounts a “crucial turning point” when “men and women of good will turned aside from the task of shoring up the Roman *imperium* and ceased to identify the continuation of civility and moral community with the maintenance of that *imperium*”(AV, 245). What is clear, in MacIntyre’s view, is that there is a new *imperium*, and it is entrenched—both theoretically and practically.<sup>2</sup> However, what is not as clear is what the next Benedict should look like. “We are challenged,” notes sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, “with [the] unprecedented task of [developing the] art of living with permanent uncertainty.”<sup>3</sup> Given what Bauman describes as our “liquid modernity,” the old Benedictine solution—a cultural retreat, purging, and recreation in the desert—seems implausible to imagine and execute.<sup>4</sup>

For guidance on this front, I turn to the writings of Josef Pieper and Abraham Heschel. Similar to MacIntyre, Pieper and Heschel diagnose a contemporary *imperium* that is hostile to virtue. Yet while their diagnosis resonates with MacIntyre’s, it goes further. With Benedict (or the contemplative tradition in hand), Pieper and Heschel explicitly and implicitly illuminate how the contemplative tradition of virtue diagnoses and addresses our current *imperium*.

In so doing they illuminate the conditions that sustain leisure, underscoring how fragile it is. For added insight, I turn to the writings of David Foster Wallace, who reveals the interior dynamics of a contemporary desire for a distorted version of leisure embodied the contemporary vacation. Wallace’s literary analysis is valuable because it reveals how even the precious time we might have for authentic leisure is co-opted by forces from within and without. Finally, I conclude with a preliminary sketch of what constitutes an education for leisure, noting some exemplars along the way, Dostoevsky’s Zossima from *The Brothers Karamazov* and the diaries of Etty Hillesum.

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<sup>1</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 245. Henceforth this text will be cited as AV within the body of the essay.

<sup>2</sup> There is much scholarship on this point. For a particularly engaging account I recommend William Cavanaugh’s *Theopolitical Imagination: Christian Practices of Space and Time*, (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, retrieved from Bauman Institute at: <http://baumaninstitute.leeds.ac.uk/video/>

<sup>4</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 2000).

## Demarcating the Cultural Landscape

Considering our contemporary context—the present *imperium*—MacIntyre observes a cacophony of voices. If and when such disparate voices do encounter and engage with each other, they speak past one another other, from incommensurable premises. Contemporary discourse is a polemic wherein a multitude of voices jockey for position and power. Beneath this disarray MacIntyre diagnoses an emotivist sensibility through and through, which subscribes to the view that morality is ultimately grounded in the personal preferences or values of the subject, which are beyond rational arbitration.

Emotivism rests “upon a claim that every attempt, whether past or present, to provide a rational justification for an objective morality has in fact failed”(AV, 24). The “apparent assertion of principles [or rationales] functions as a mask for expressions of personal preference”(AV, 24). Evaluative “utterance can in the end have no point or use but the expression of my own feelings or attitudes and the transformation of the feelings and attitudes of others”(AV, 24). Instead of virtues (habits that aim towards and are constitutive of an objective standard of human flourishing), we have values (personal priorities that deem flourishing to be a subjective, multifarious affair).

More significant than its theoretical underpinnings, however, is how emotivism is embodied. We have “not yet fully understood the claims of any moral philosophy,” MacIntyre contends, “until we have spelled out what its social embodiment is”(AV, 23). Philosophers, with a penchant towards theory and abstraction, often neglect this task. Given that, “we must,” observes MacIntyre, “perform it for them”(AV, 23). In a characteristically Kierkegaardian move, MacIntyre does philosophy by way of examples, noting the literary characters that comprise the social landscape of our current *imperium*.<sup>5</sup> What is distinctive and specific to each culture, MacIntyre contends, is “in large and central part what is specific to its stock of characters” (AV, 28). More than social roles, characters are personality default settings. As such, they are powerfully seductive, limiting the horizon of human possibilities, especially the possibility of living a virtuous life.

The three major characters that inhabit the emotivist landscape include the aesthete, the manager, and the therapist. MacIntyre’s characterization of the aesthete draws primarily from Kierkegaard’s *Either/Or*. Aesthetes are characterized by their preoccupation with pleasure. More than anything aesthetes despise boredom, craving constant amusement and distraction. This pursuit of pleasure and ease relativizes and/or obscures moral considerations. The aesthetic pursuits are, no doubt, a coping mechanism, as living with the ethical strain of infinite responsibility for the Other is too much to bear 24/7. Yet for the aesthete this evasion, this flight from the self and moral responsibility, becomes a lifestyle.

In this tendency Kierkegaard notes a way of living—a common default setting—that he describes as the aesthetic sphere or modality, contrasting this with the ethical and religious sphere. While Kierkegaard’s ethicist and religious person takes on, with eyes wide open, the task of self-hood, aesthetes—often with eyes wide shut—shirk this task. Aesthetes, explains MacIntyre, “interpret reality as a series of opportunities for their enjoyment and for whom the last enemy is boredom”(AV, 25).

Aesthetic endeavors, however, require a certain degree of material wealth and security. Thus, our aesthetic proclivities are kept in check by our need to find and secure work. Hence the emergence of the second character: the manager. Managers are adept at functioning within the institutions of work where they find themselves. Treating “ends as given,” as “outside [their] scope, managers are concerned “with technique, with effectiveness in transforming raw materials into final products, unskilled labor into skilled labor, investment into profits”(AV, 25). In short, the manager accepts the system as is and learns to efficiently navigate within it. With purposes given, the manager curtails his or her aesthetic impulses, until the weekend that is, when the aesthete can reemerge.

This toggling back and forth from aesthetic diversion to managerial focus takes a toll. Moreover, we are often not well-suited to the systems or institutions we find ourselves in. Thus,

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<sup>5</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, by the way, is later positioned as one of key culprits in MacIntyre’s declension narrative.

arises the third character on the emotivist stage, the therapist. The therapist aims to shape and guide “maladjusted individuals into well-adjusted ones,” transforming “neurotic symptoms into directed energy”(AV, 25). Rather than change the system or institution to suit the person, the therapist changes or adapts the person to suit the system.

All three characters are incapable, by their limited vision, of exercising the practical wisdom that might prompt and guide habituation into the virtues. The aesthete is simply not interested, but rather focused on satiating desires through various and sundry pleasures; while the manager and the therapist, “in their roles as manager and therapist” are defined by the working-process itself; meaningful action outside of this purview is therefore not imaginable. Consequently, they are not cable, observes MacIntyre, of engaging “in moral debate”(AV, 25). While they may be clever about means, they not able to interrogate the ends of life.

Of course, there are exceptions to the characters noted, but these three, MacIntyre observes, predominate and exert an exceptional gravitational pull, placing constraints on “the personality of those who inhabit them”(AV, 26). In the case of characters, as distinct from social roles, “the possibilities of action are defined in a more limited way than in general”(AV, 25).

Given this horizon, how might culture be transformed? MacIntyre’s understanding of culture as reducible to its major stock of characters is particularly striking. This claim begs the question of how might a new and different character grace the stage. For an answer to this question I now turn to the writings of Pieper and Heschel, who offer a similar diagnosis yet discern a way out—a way to expand the cultural possibilities foreclosed by the default settings of imperial ways of seeing and living.

#### Leisure the Basis of Culture

According to Pieper, the basis of authentic culture is rooted in the contemplative practice of leisure. Today, leisure is largely and reductively misconstrued as vacation or time off from work. This misconception, Pieper notes, is more than a mere linguistic evolution. It is an intellectual and practical narrowing of human experience—a willful forgetting of the human need for leisure.

For a new character to emerge on the emotivist landscape, they must, according to Pieper, be exercised in the virtues of leisure. The lack of consciousness that MacIntyre references, is not merely intellectual blindness, but practical as well. More than intellectual incoherence we have lost the contemplative habits that undergird genuine leisure. This decay is most apparent in the world of work, but it also, notes Pieper, has infected the academy for some time.

According to Pieper, Immanuel Kant’s epistemology struck a fatal blow to leisure. Kant’s influential epistemology defined the human act of knowing as exclusively discursive: a busy, active capacity that sizes up, compares, abstracts, proves, and investigates to produce knowledge. All knowing, according to Kant, is the result of discursive mental activity, requiring active mental effort.

Prior to Kant, Pieper notes, ancient and medieval philosophy held a very different view of the human act of knowing. The human intellect included Kant’s discursive capacity, referred to as *ratio*, but also included the *intellectus*, the ability of simply beholding, wherein the truth presents itself to the eye as a landscape does. Heschel, in a parallel description, refers to these faculties as reason and wonder. Through the first “we try to explain or to adapt the world to our concepts, through the second we seek to adapt our minds to the world.”<sup>6</sup> In an *intellectus*, or wondrous, approach to learning,

persons meet the world, not with the tools [they have] made but with the soul with which [they were] born; .[The world] is not an object, a thing that is given to [the senses], but a state of fellowship that embraces [the person] and all things; not a particular fact but the startling situation that there are facts at all; being; the presence of a universe; the unfolding of time (MA, 22).

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<sup>6</sup> Abraham Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1977), 11. Henceforth cited as MA.

While the discursive mind is busy and active, the *intellectus* mind is passive or, more accurately, receptive. While the discursive mind questions the nature of being, the receptive mind savors, appreciates, and is gifted by being. *Ratio* is obtained through human effort, while the vision of *intellectus* is a gift that surpasses human limits. The one calls us to action, the other to contemplation.

The receptivity that wonder involves, however, does not imply that leisure or the vision of *intellectus* comes easy. Because this leisured condition is less at one's disposal—there is something gifted about it, as experiences of awe and wonder suggest—it is, paradoxically, more difficult to attain. It takes work not to work—as perhaps a workaholic might attest.

Ideally, there should be a balance between the *intellectus* and *ratio*, but an exclusively discursive epistemology has prevailed; one that conceives the act of knowing entirely as the result of strenuous human effort. This emphasis, notes Pieper, leads to a mistrust of “everything that is without effort; that in good conscience [one] can own only what he himself has reached through painful effort; he refuses to let himself be given anything” (*LBC*, 19). Moreover, this Pelagian-style epistemology, asserting as it does a will to knowledge, detracts from the humility and receptivity that inspires leisure. More detrimentally, though, as Pieper observes, this conception relegates the life of the intellect to a functionary status:

the intellectual worker is bound to his function; he too is a functionary in the total world of work, he may be a “specialist,” he is still a functionary. Nobody is granted a “free zone” of intellectual activity, “free” meaning not being subordinated to a duty to fulfill some function (*LBC*, 21).

Accordingly, work becomes idolized, and leisure, rather than an end in itself, is simply a break from work, a time to recharge so that efficient work can be resumed. The person thereby is defined by work and only becomes him or herself through work.

The market though does offer respite from this treadmill, with a distorted view of leisure, understood as vacation. Vacation (from the Latin root word *vacare*—meaning empty) promises to relieve us of anxiety. David Foster Wallace, in his essay, “Shipping Out: on the Nearly Lethal Comforts of a Luxury Cruise,” recounts in exquisite detail, how vacations (in this case a vacation cruise) cast their spell.<sup>7</sup> The Cruise brochure explicitly states how it all works:

Just standing at the ship's rail looking out to sea has a profoundly soothing effect. As you drift along like a cloud on water, the weight of everyday life is magically lifted away, and you seem to be floating on a sea of smiles. Not just among your fellow guests but on the faces of the ship's staff as well. As a steward cheerfully delivers your drinks, you mention all of the smiles among the crew. He explains that every Celebrity [Cruise] staff member takes pleasure in making your cruise a completely carefree experience and treating you as an honored guest. Besides, he adds, there's no place else they'd rather be. Looking back out to sea, you couldn't agree more (*SF*, 36).

This is, notes Wallace, “advertising” or “fantasy-enablement,” “but with a disturbingly authoritarian twist.” “Note,” Wallace points out, “the imperative use of the second person and a specificity out of detail that extends even to what you ‘will say (you will say ‘I couldn't agree more’ . . . .” Wallace elaborates:

You are excused from even the work of constructing the fantasy, because the ads do it for you. And this near-parental type of advertising makes a very special promise, a diabolically seductive promise that's actually kind of honest, because it's a promise that the Luxury

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<sup>7</sup> Wallace, David Foster. “A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never Do Again,” *Harpers Magazine*, January, 1996. Henceforth cited in the text as *SF*.

Cruise itself is all about honoring. The promise is not that you can experience great pleasure but that you will. They'll make certain of it. They'll micromanage every iota of every pleasure-option so that not even the dreadful corrosive action of your adult consciousness and agency and dread can fuck up your fun. Your troublesome capacities for choice, error, regret, dissatisfaction, and despair will be removed from the equation. You will be able—finally, for once to relax, the ads promise, because you will have no choice. Your pleasure will, for 7 nights and 6.5 days, be wisely and efficiently managed. Aboard the Nadir, as is ringingly foretold in the brochure, you will get to do ‘something you haven't done in a long, long time: Absolutely Nothing’ (SF, 37).

Anxiety, in this account, is completely overcome. First, the anxiety of finitude (pestering actualities, like when will dinner be served, where is the bathroom, what's that smell) is totally satiated, as all bodily cares are anticipated and pacified. Second, the anxiety of possibility (our capacity for choice, error, regret, dissatisfaction, and despair—our capacity to envision and imagine all manner of things, good and bad) is also overcome—actually it is inoculated.<sup>8</sup> This kind of leisure, however, comes at a cost—that of being anesthetized.

For the specially afflicted souls like Wallace, however, this kind of escape is not an option and is recognized as short-lived and fleeting and therefore cause for greater anxiety. Wallace sees through the hollow smiles and forced hellos not with cynicism, but with a penetrating realism. For him, the constructed possibilities will not satisfy. Scrutinizing the ship he sees a futile attempt to escape death:

The ocean itself turns out to be one enormous engine of decay. Seawater corrodes vessels, with amazing speed—rusts them, exfoliates paint, strips varnish, dulls shine, coats ships' hulls with barnacles and kelp and a vague and ubiquitous nautical snot that seems like death incarnate. We saw some real horrors in port, local boats that looked as if they had been dipped in a mixture of acid and shit, scabbed with rust and goo, ravaged by what they float in (SF, 36).

However, even the passengers who fully surrender themselves to the intoxications and distractions offered by the Carnival Cruise's must come down—lest they overdose. The hangover will soon follow and anxiety will return—often with greater force than before.

Wallace's caricature of a vacation, while extreme, does reveal the *telos* of this distorted understanding and practice of leisure, which is ultimately, an escape from the self. By contrast, the ideal of leisure that Heschel and Pieper hold up, which springs from Aristotelian, Hebraic, and monastic sources, aims to restore the self. Today, leisure means free time—a pause from work—vacation or vacating—setting aside an empty space with which to fill or kill time. The ancient ideal of leisure meant more than time set apart or a break from work—it referred to the quality or condition of one's soul. Thought distinctly different, both ancient and contemporary understandings of leisure are contending with the same fundamental problem: the anxious self.

So much of our modern work and vacation, Pieper contends, is driven by a desire to escape from oneself... from an idleness or despair of being oneself:

The metaphysical-theological concept of idleness means, then, that man [sic] finally does not agree with his own existence; that behind all his energetic activity, he is not at one with himself; that, as the Middle Ages expressed it, sadness has seized him in the face of the divine Goodness that lives within him. The opposite of *acedia* is not the industrious spirit of the daily effort to make a living, but rather the cheerful affirmation by man of his own existence, of the world as a whole, and of the God-of-Love, that is,

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<sup>8</sup> On the two types of anxiety see Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

which arises from that special freshness of action, which would never be confused by anyone with any experience with the narrow activity of the ‘workaholic.’ (*LBC*, 28–29)

The total claim made by the world of work is bolstered by this inner poverty—the sense that one’s worth is conditioned by one’s function or role in society. This inner poverty (or despair) Pieper views as the greatest challenge to a leisure that regards the self and its free activity apart from a utilitarian means-end calculus.

### Recovering Leisure

Is it possible in this current *imperium*, Pieper asks, to keep the human being from becoming a complete functionary or proletarian “whose life is fully satisfied by the working-process itself because this space has been shrunken from within, and because meaningful action that is not work is no longer possible or even imaginable.” To safeguard a space of freedom from the hegemonic world of work, there should be a balance in education that involves the interplay of both *ratio* and *intellectus*.

Philosophy born of leisure greets the world receptively, with an awareness of its mystery, rather than as something to be mastered. This mysterious encounter is negative but also positive. It is negative in the sense that the person senses there is something more to know, something they cannot grasp—“the sense that the world is a deeper, wider, more mysterious thing than appeared to the day-to-day understanding” (*LBC*, 105). This “not-knowing” is not the same as doubting, which risks resignation, but rather is accompanied by an “active longing to know” (*LBC*, 107). It is positive in the sense that the experience of wonder is inspired by hope that sets one on a journey.

Wonder causes one to pause and ponder over the mystery of being. Heschel elaborates: “while the ineffable is a term of negation indicating limitation of expression, its content is intensely affirmative, denoting an allusiveness to something meaningful, for which we possess no means of expression” (*MA*, 23). A person capable of wonder, contends Pieper, is not in need of constant new and different or sensationalized experiences. Such a need is a sure sign that one has lost the capacity for wonder. Rather, the wondrous or astonishing is experienced in the ordinary. It does indeed disturb or shake up the taken-for-granted or workaday world, but it does not remove one from the things of the world; instead, it disrupts “the usual meanings, the accustomed evaluations of these things” (*LBC*, 100). Most important, this leisured way cultivates a freedom that resists the restive world of work that defines and appraises one’s value exclusively in terms of one’s doing.

Though far from passive, leisure can be misconstrued as a form of quietism. A Deweyan or Marxist critic might contend that leisure, in cultivating passivity, maintains the status quo and thus fails to address or embolden the free agency required to promote social change. This criticism is specious. Rather than passivity, the leisure that Pieper and Heschel call forth involves an intense practice of self-examination that cultivates true freedom by guarding against idleness, compulsive busyness, and pointless desires.

Fyodor Dostoevsky’s Elder Zossima in *The Brothers Karamazov* illuminates this point when he contrasts worldly freedom with the freedom cultivated by monks. Worldly freedom, Zossima argues, is more often than not a form of slavery to countless unnecessary desires. Accordingly, worldly freedom is externally understood as the ability to satisfy desires. What this means for the rich, he says, is “isolation and spiritual suicide; for the poor, envy and murder, for they have been given rights, but have not yet been shown any way of satisfying their needs.”<sup>9</sup> Such a person is not free but a slave “to satisfying the innumerable needs they have invented for themselves.”<sup>10</sup>

Zossima contrasts worldly freedom against monastic freedom, characterized as it is by obedience, fasting, and prayer. These practices, he notes, are balked at, but it is only through them that one is able to cut away superfluous needs, humble oneself, and thereby attain true interior freedom. The monk’s freedom, while seemingly passive, is in truth a deeper, more vigilant pursuit of freedom.

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<sup>9</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 313–314.

<sup>10</sup> Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 313–314.

But how does leisure become available at all, at the deepest, innermost level, and what is its ultimate justification? Pieper doubts recourse to humanism is enough. Given the intrinsic value of leisure, what would an education dedicated to leisure consist of today? How might an emphasis on leisure change the curriculum and educational practice? In attempting to answer these questions, it is helpful first to examine the discursive approach to learning, exploring how it informs contemporary education.

The discursive approach is perhaps best exemplified in the scientific method that discovers a problem, formulates a hypothesis, and then conducts experiments to measure or assess the validity of that hypothesis. Discursive thinking is also a central part of the Socratic method, wherein a thesis or point of view is offered, followed by a counterpoint, culminating in a rigorous dialectic that seeks to discover a new and better conclusion. The outcomes reached by both scientists and dialecticians are always tentative, continually subject to further questioning. The provisional nature of such inquiry lends itself to a critical mind-set, prone to doubting, problematizing, and questioning.

This discursive mind-set is pervasive, seemingly touching every aspect of present-day education: in math classes, students are presented with problems; in literature and history classes, questions are entertained; in chemistry and biology classes, labs are designed to provide students with opportunities to experiment and test theories. Moreover, the annual battery of standardized tests seeks to quantify students' abilities to think critically.

Given the dominance of discursive thinking, it is hard to imagine a place for leisure in today's curriculum. It is not my intention to displace or overturn discursive thinking; its value is well established, but such thinking is vulnerable to abuse. The concern of medieval monks about dialectics being driven more by a love of winning than a desire for wisdom is still valid today. To consider a place for leisure, it is helpful to further compare and contrast leisurely versus discursive approaches to learning. Leisure, as noted, is a form of beholding. It is the step prior to the discursive *ratio*. Before doubting or questioning can occur, something must have been seen and observed. Thus *ratio* and *intellectus* need not be in conflict. The problem, though, is the rush to exploit or problematize that which is seen.

For instance, consider a person walking in the woods who suddenly stumbles upon a beautiful field of grass. Such a person, rather than encountering the field in all its grandeur, might quickly jump to considerations of what practical good can be made of it. Perhaps to one person such a field is a valuable piece of real estate for a housing development, to another it is a perfect place to walk a dog, and to yet another it is an ideal place to play football. Or perhaps another person inclined toward scientific scrutiny might ask how, amid a vast forest with trees pollinating every spring, did such a field come to exist? Often one's interest or agenda can determine and limit how and what one sees.

Leisurely learning is optimistic in assuming that seeing can transcend particular interests of the moment. To pursue leisure is to put on hold vested considerations so as to experience wonder at the mere presence of something. Such a process, of course, is easier said than done. In seeking to keep in check one's interests or agendas (well-intentioned though they may be), one begins a difficult process of self-examination. The desire to pursue our interests and satiate our desires often outweighs the desire for self-knowledge or even liberation from needless desires. Preparing for leisure is thus an arduous journey of self-examination that requires patience and abstinence in the face of questions or desires that demand immediate resolution. Hence the ascetic practices of monks that were practiced not as masochistic ends in themselves but always as means to self-understanding, self-control, and ultimately self-surrender to the beholding that is leisure.

Cultivation of humility in the face of that which we think we know is essential. It entails the abiding and practiced awareness that there is always more to see. Such humility, as Jean Leclercq says, is "not the acquisition of a scientific principle," but "an experience, a personal growth in real awareness."<sup>11</sup> Leclercq's distinction here is significant. Grasping a principle involves attaining

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<sup>11</sup> Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), 33.



power or control over some aspect of reality. Cultivation of leisure, by contrast, involves surrender and humility in the face of reality so as to receive the vision of *intellectus*.

Thus an education for leisure would no doubt involve rigorous self-examination. Leclercq's metaphor of growth suggests some direction. We have a natural propensity for leisure but this growth, like the growth of our own bodies, is not reached through personal will power. Leisure can be cultivated but not achieved.

Education for leisure would not employ outcomes or objectives (or grading) in the usual sense, wherein a teacher using a variety of pedagogical strategies can expect a certain degree of success among students, qualitatively or quantitatively measured. It is doubtful that leisure can be directed in the way that a biology teacher can direct students through the dissection of a frog or a grammar teacher in diagramming sentences. Unlike discursive methods, leisure is difficult if not impossible to quantify. Rather, in aiming for leisure, we as educators may only be able to model and invite by creating space in our *ratio*-dominated days for the experience of leisure. However, we cannot force leisure, either with the threat of a failing grade or the promise of a reward, for leisure is an intensely personal endeavor— intangible but real.

In addition to creating space for savoring the wonders of the world, educators who aim to cultivate leisure can hold up exemplars, such as Abraham Heschel, who embody a practice of leisure. One especially compelling exemplar is Etty Hillesum. Hillesum, though Jewish by birth, did not practice organized religion. Yet, through carefully attending to her own experience, she reveals in her diaries the rigorous self-examination as well as self-surrender that characterize the practice of leisure:

And here I have hit upon something essential. [In the past] Whenever I saw a beautiful flower, what I longed to do with it was press it to my heart, or eat it all up. It was more difficult with a piece of beautiful scenery, but the feeling was the same. I was too sensual, I might also write too greedy. I yearned physically for all I thought was beautiful, wanted to own it. Hence that painful longing that could never be satisfied, the pining for something I thought unattainable....<sup>12</sup>

Eventually, a change occurs inside of Hillesum — a change she could not account for. She describes a walk outside as follows:

It was dusk, soft hues in the sky, mysterious silhouettes of houses, trees alive with the light through the tracery of their branches, in short, enchanting. And then I knew precisely how I had felt in the past. Then all the beauty would have gone like a stab to my heart and I would not have known what to do with the pain. Then I would have felt the need to write, to compose verses, but the words would still have refused to come. I would have felt utterly miserable, wallowed in the pain and exhausted myself as a result. The experience would have sapped all my energy. Now I know it for what it was: mental masturbation .. But that night . I reacted quite differently .. I was just as deeply moved by that mysterious, still landscape in the dusk as I might have been before, but somehow I no longer wanted to own it. I went home invigorated and got to work. And the scenery stayed with me, in the background, as a cloak about my soul, to put it poetically for once, but no longer held me back: I no longer 'masturbated' with it.<sup>13</sup>

Free from her old desires, Hillesum experiences a vision of *intellectus* — an experience of delighting in things as they are, without a desire to own or exploit them. Hillesum's journal entries reveal an intense self-awareness born of careful self-examination. They offer an exemplary case of

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<sup>12</sup> Etty Hillesum, *An Interrupted Life: The Diaries of Etty Hillesum, 1941–1943* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 10.

<sup>13</sup> Hillesum, *An Interrupted Life*, 11.

what an education for leisure consists of — a humble, thoroughgoing process of self-examination that seeks to create space for the gift of *intellectus*.

Though leisure is fundamentally a personal endeavor, it is difficult to maintain on one's own. It is best sustained and cultivated within a community, as monastic leisure suggests. To sustain a practice of leisure, monks created communities completely dedicated to it. Without a communal commitment to leisure, it is difficult to ensure the requisite time and space for savory and wonder, as well as an awareness of the discipline and sacrifice that leisure involves. Nevertheless, I believe educators can make inroads by establishing classroom communities that make some space for leisure.

Though leisure came to fruition in a monastic religious context, a commitment to leisure today does not require a commitment to a sectarian religious tradition. Instead, leisure, understood as a profound way of seeing, is an intrinsic good available to anyone. This leisured way cultivates a true freedom that resists the restive world of work, which defines and appraises one's value exclusively in terms of what one does. Ultimately, it develops the kind of consciousness and practices that are necessary to diagnose and turn away from our current *imperium*.