



Leisure, Virtue and Flourishing

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Introduction

For Aristotle, *scholē* is essential to both *arete* and *eudaimonia* as leisure is instrumentally necessary for the proper development of the virtues, and leisure is also the ultimate goal of a flourishing life. However, modern virtue ethics has largely ignored the concept of leisure even though it is a theme vitally important to Aristotle (Broadie, 2006). Conversely, the field of leisure studies has paid little attention to contemporary virtue ethics and how it might inform leisure research and improve the delivery leisure services (McLean, 2017). This reciprocal disregard for the connections of leisure and virtue is unfortunate as the pursuit of flourishing could greatly benefit from a cross-disciplinary approach in which the study of leisure is integrated into virtue ethics and modern virtue ethics likewise is utilized in leisure studies.

The purpose of this paper is two-fold. First, I offer an analysis to explain why the ancient connection of leisure to virtue and flourishing has been split apart in modern intellectual thought. Second, I propose a model for how leisure can be reunited with virtue and flourishing. The analysis is therefore structured into two parts that reflect these goals. It is my hope that the discussion of these issues will re-invigorate interest in the connection between leisure, virtue and flourishing for both virtue ethicists and students of leisure.

PART I – Leisure, Virtue and Flourishing Separated

Virtue Ethics Forgets Leisure

Leisure appears to have gone on a holiday in the modern virtue ethics literature. Contemporary virtue ethics is primarily neo-Aristotelian in orientation, utilizing key concepts such as *arete*, *phronesis*, and *eudaimonia* that are foundational to Aristotle's moral philosophy. However, *scholē* has not migrated into modern virtue ethics discourse. When leisure is addressed in the Aristotelian literature, it is typically approached from a historical standpoint. A prime example of the historical treatment of leisure is the ongoing inclusivist/intellectualist attempts to reconcile Aristotle's position on the happiness of a life of virtuous action versus the life of contemplative leisure. As Broadie (2006) notes, despite the importance of leisure to Aristotle's ethics, "there has been practically no modern ethical discussion of leisure" (p. 357). In other words, the current virtue ethics literature does not address flourishing in terms of leisure, a curious irony as leisure is commonly held to be an important component of the good life. Broadie (2006) speculates that possible reasons for leisure's absence in contemporary normative thought include: 1) the assumption that leisure is too simple a topic to merit philosophical analysis; 2) the religious undertones of Aristotle's contemplative leisure; 3) the suspicion that evaluating people's leisure in terms of its proper use may encourage legislation and control of people's free time. It is Broadie's position that these negative attitudes toward leisure have little merit. She counters that the humanities can have plenty to say about leisure, that one can only determine the complexity of

leisure through engaging in inquiry about it, and that determining the purpose of leisure poses no more of a threat than inquiring about the purpose of art or morality.

While Broadie (2006) may be correct that the topic of leisure has been too easily dismissed by philosophers, I have argued (McLean, 2017) that leisure’s absence from contemporary virtue ethics discourse is based on deeper reasons than prejudicial assumptions about leisure’s academic pedigree and/or political ramifications. Instead, a comparison of how Aristotle conceived of the relationship of leisure to virtue and happiness (i.e., flourishing) versus how contemporary virtue ethicists view that relationship reveals that leisure is no longer regarded as a necessary condition for virtue and happiness. Figure 1 illustrates the Aristotelian leisure/virtue/happiness relationship.

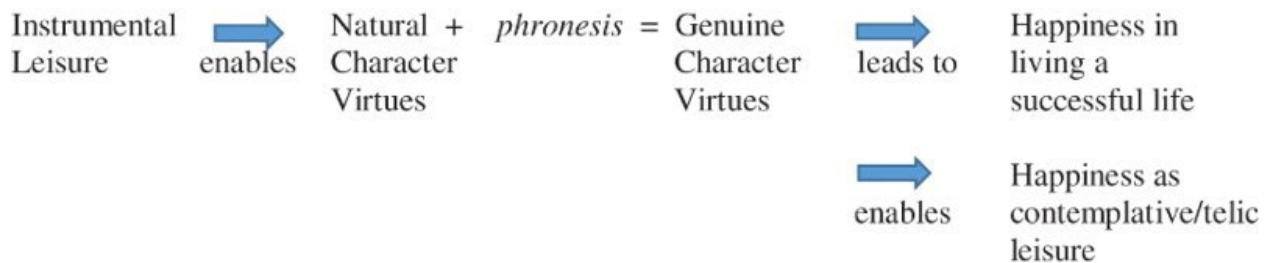


Figure 1: Instrumental and telic leisure in relation to virtue and happiness (Permission granted by Taylor & Francis for the use of this image)

Key to understanding this model is the fact that Aristotelian leisure functions both instrumentally as a means and also as a final end. Instrumental leisure provides the freedom from the burdens of life to engage in the cultivation of the virtues, leading to happiness. For Aristotle, instrumental leisure was reserved for an elite and was furnished through the labour of menials. Cultivation of the natural virtues by the proper use of instrumental leisure as guided by phronesis resulted in genuine virtues leading, in turn, to happiness from living a successful life (assuming one had sufficient external goods and did not encounter catastrophic misfortune). However, as well as instrumentally providing the freedom for the development of the virtues needed to live a good life, Aristotle also maintained that contemplative leisure was the ultimate goal of a happy life. Now, rather than conceiving of leisure instrumentally as an opportunity for development of the virtues, leisure was additionally treated by Aristotle as the highest sort of human activity in which one can engage, and therefore constituting the happiest life.

The arrows pointing rightward in the diagram indicate that leisure is the foundation for Aristotle’s ethics. However, following from Simpson’s (1992) argument that contemporary virtue ethics treats happiness as being prior to virtue, I argued that modern virtue ethics obviates the role of instrumental leisure in providing the freedom and resources for the refinement of the natural virtues into genuine virtues (McLean, 2017). Instead, the virtues are now treated as efficient means to various predetermined conceptions of happiness, rather than happiness arising from the virtuous use of leisure. As well, in the contemporary virtue ethics framework contemplative leisure becomes simply one instantiation of a plurality of conceptions of happiness rather than Aristotle’s ultimate form of contemplative happiness that is supported by the living of a successful life.

Thus, aside from the various negative attitudes contemporary virtue ethicists may harbor toward the subject of leisure, there are also theoretic reasons for why leisure is not part of modern

virtue ethics discourse. Whereas Aristotle saw the flourishing life in teleological terms as arising from leisure and virtue, as moderns we tend to view the relationship between happiness and virtue in the opposite direction: we look to virtues as the efficient means to achieve various conceptions of happiness. Leisure in the modern view has become irrelevant both as the foundation, and as the ultimate goal, of a virtuous, flourishing life. Hence, leisure has been forgotten in contemporary virtue ethics.

Leisure Studies Turns Away from Virtue

While modern virtue ethics has forgotten leisure, contemporary leisure studies has distanced itself from Aristotelian virtue. As an area of scholarship, leisure studies constitutes more of a twig than a branch on the academic tree. It is one of the many interdisciplinary fields that have arisen in the latter half of the 20th century, such as museum studies, women's studies, and African American studies. Leisure studies sub-divides into the theoretical study of the phenomena of leisure and the practical training of leisure service providers. The theoretic study of leisure has a strong social science orientation, drawing on established academic disciplines like psychology, sociology, and geography, while professional preparation of leisure practitioners pulls heavily from the management and marketing principles of business curricula. Thus, much of the theoretical and practical knowledge in the field of leisure studies sprouts from more mainstream academic disciplines.

Aristotle occupies a place of honour in the study of leisure. Modern leisure theory and practice often claim an Aristotelian heritage, though the way the connections to Aristotle have been made are in some instances rather tenuous. Both Sylvester (1991) and Hemmingway (1996) argue that the leisure studies literature often misconstrues Aristotle's views about leisure. Perhaps it is understandable that many contemporary leisure researchers have a less than perspicacious grasp of Aristotelian leisure given the distance between life in the 21st century and that of Aristotle's time. Modern perspectives on leisure are based on many egalitarian assumptions to which the ancients did not subscribe. For example, Article 24 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that the freedom and resources for leisure should be guaranteed to all human beings (<https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html>). However, it would surely strike Aristotle as absurd that slaves and other menials should be afforded leisure, being that he thought they had neither the intellectual capacity nor good character to use it appropriately. As well, modern conceptions of leisure emphasize the psychological subjectivity of the leisure experience, while ancient views are more objectively grounded in the ethics of the good life. Contemporary approaches to leisure that draw upon Aristotle's thought typically are neo-Aristotelian in that they weed out Aristotle's more objectionable views, such as the unsuitability of leisure for women and slaves, while retaining the positive aspects that virtuous leisure can lead to a flourishing life.

A prominent example of neo-Aristotelian leisure is the rational recreation movement of the Victorian era which had its origins in the economic and social disruption caused by industrialization and urbanization. Untethered from the traditional leisure forms of the rural village, the "problem" of working-class leisure became an important driver of 19th century civic works, programs and organizations that sought to improve the leisure habits of urban labourers. As Cross (1990) remarks, "the Victorian elite feared that, with higher income and increased leisure,

the masses would be unworthy of their new freedom” (p. 89). Rojek (2010) identifies four broad themes that guided the rational recreation movement in its quest to improve the leisure of the working classes: 1) personal growth and enrichment; 2) the beautification of life; 3) moral reform; 4) health and crime. Each of these four themes addressed perceived difficulties with working class leisure, and advocated for associated leisure programs, organizations, and facilities to help deal with these problems. For example, in response to the perception that urban life was sapping the vitality of youth, the theme of personal growth and enrichment emphasized physical robustness and promoted strenuous outdoor activity through Scouting and the ideals of Muscular Christianity. Similarly, the concern that squalid neighborhoods offered workers raucous leisure vices such as drinking, blood sports, gambling, and prostitution, helped give rise to the beautification of life theme. The creation of public green spaces such as New York’s Central Park provided workers an escape from the urban jungle where they could sedately experience nature in carefully designed pastoral settings. Similarly, concerns with moral reform, and health and crime were reflected in wholesome recreation programs and playgrounds for youth and “uplifting” cultural institutions such as museums and public libraries for adults.

Rojek (2010) maintains that the rational recreation movement provides the foundation for the modern academic study of leisure. He argues that leisure studies scholars originally divided into what he terms Visionaries and Pragmatists. Both view leisure in neo-Aristotelian terms, however, they differ in emphasis. Visionaries conceptualize leisure primarily in terms of contemplative thought (i.e., telic leisure in Figure 1). Key figures that Rojek points to in this tradition are Josef Pieper who interprets contemplation in terms of divine worship and Sabastian de Grazia whose conception of contemplative leisure is secular.

In contrast to the Visionaries, Rojek (2010) says that while Pragmatists also subscribe to Aristotelian leisure, they emphasize “the value that leisure contributes to evidence-based issues of health, crime control, urban renewal and civic virtue” (p. 95). The Pragmatist vision of leisure resembles instrumental leisure represented in Figure 1. Leisure is not an end in itself, but rather is valued for creating a balanced, optimal lifestyle through the provision of leisure services that, among other things, promote “knowledge and skills acquisition, attitude and character formation” (p. 96). Rojek (2010) identifies John Dewey as a leading figure in the Pragmatist tradition of leisure who “takes over many of the features of the classical Greek perspective on leisure, but pits them against the strengths, weaknesses, opportunity and threats presented by industrial, urban, and democratic society” (p. 95). Leisure is not sought for the purpose of contemplation, but instead valued for its practical utility in helping people successfully adapt to the challenges of modern life.

However, both the Visionaries and Pragmatists traditions of leisure scholarship have come under severe criticism. The equating of Aristotelian leisure with contemplation by the Visionaries is thought to be out of sync with contemporary lifestyles. Rojek (2010) sees both Pieper’s and de Grazia’s views about leisure as elitist and irrelevant:

The conflation of leisure with contemplation in the writings of Pieper and de Grazia now seems rather lofty. We have become accustomed in industrial society to equating leisure with acting, doing, and having, so to think of it in terms of a lifetime of repose and meditation seems eccentric. When we have free time the last thing that most of us want to do is observe or contemplate. (p. 94).

And the assumptions about Aristotelian leisure that undergird the work/life balance of the Pragmatists agenda has similarly come under fire. Hemingway (1996) argues that the primary feature of contemporary leisure is that it has been subject to commodification and consumerization. Leisure, he says, has been deformed by placing it in an instrumental relationship to work that “undermines the discursive, civic foundation of Aristotle’s original association of freedom and leisure” (p. 28). Hemingway sees Aristotelian leisure as emancipating as it is conducive to the “expansion of human capacities which is the core of the very idea of freedom” (p. 27). In antiquity the focus of Aristotelian leisure was on citizenship, while that of modern leisure is on production and consumption. Hemingway argues that we need to emancipate modern leisure from its current instrumental role of supporting production and consumption, and return it to the Aristotelian ideal of having the freedom to communally develop our human capacities.

However, Hemingway’s (1996) call for the emancipation of leisure by reviving its genuine Aristotelian features has gone largely unanswered. Instead, leisure service provision has moved farther away from Aristotelian leisure towards commodified leisure. Since the 1980’s, marketing philosophy has made deep inroads into the programming and delivery of leisure services, particularly in the public and non-profit sectors. According to the marketing approach, leisure services should be driven by individual consumer preference, rather than being guided by leisure service providers’ notions of what sorts of leisure opportunities might be good for participants. As well, the academic study of leisure has moved away from conceptualizing leisure in Aristotelian terms. Postmodernism and poststructuralism have left a heavy imprint on contemporary leisure theory, highlighting the contingent nature of time-honored leisure practices. For example, the emphasis in leisure service provision is currently shifting from activity-based programming focused on the assumed authentic qualities of objects to experience-based programming models in which leisure activities are replaced with staged experiences engineered to maximize sensory impact. Quoting Eagleton, Blackshaw and Crawford (2009) note the shift toward the “experience economy” that has overtaken tourism:

Instead of wandering along Hadrian’s Wall, we have the Hadrian’s Wall Experience: instead of the Giant’s Causeway, the Giant’s Causeway Experience. What we consume now is not objects but our sensations of them...In an ultimate postmodern irony, a commodified experience compensates for the commodity’s impoverishment of experience. (Eagleton, as quoted by Blackshaw & Crawford, p. 168.)

Leisure, from the postmodern perspective, consists of shifting “liquid” experiences that are contingent as opposed to the presumption of unchanging physical and social realities on which traditional leisure theory has been based. As well, other alternative frameworks, such as feminist leisure studies and the study of racism in leisure, have raised issues of social and environmental justice in the provision of leisure services. Thus, both leisure studies and leisure service provision have thus seen pronounced diversification in the various conceptual frameworks that go well beyond the neo-Aristotelianism of the Visionaries and Pragmatists.

While critics such as Hemingway may lament the current condition of neo-Aristotelian leisure, the turn away from traditional leisure theory and practice is understandable, and in some respects justified. To wit, the marketing approach, while it has been criticized as a threat to the

worthiness of leisure offerings, nonetheless properly recognizes and respects individual choice. As Crompton (1991) argues, even highly laudable leisure programs are not of much practical value and benefit if people do not wish to engage in them. Similarly, the skepticism of postmodern/poststructuralist “decentering” attitude toward leisure has led to questioning the Pragmatist and Visionary assumption that leisure is an unalloyed good for both individuals and society. Instead, Rojek (2000) points out that much leisure is actually deviant, involving such forms of abnormality as the mephitic (i.e., leisure that is harmful to others) the invasive (i.e., leisure that is harmful to oneself) and the wild (i.e., leisure that is reckless.). Neo-Aristotelian leisure, with its emphasis on virtue, appears out of step with people’s actual leisure needs and habits. And concerns with social and environmental justice help to address systemic inequities that neo-Aristotelian leisure overlooks. Compared to this diverse milieu of current leisure thought and practice, contemporary neo-Aristotelian leisure with its links to 19th century rational recreation can come across as distinctly “old hat.”

PART II-Leisure, Virtue and Flourishing Reunited: A Neo-Aristotelian Model

The forgoing account of the mutual disregard of virtue and leisure by contemporary virtue ethics and leisure studies respectively appears to provide good reason for thinking the Aristotelian connection of leisure to virtue and flourishing is no longer of interest or use to either discipline in the 21st century. Modern virtue ethics treats leisure as a forgotten relic of Aristotelian thought, while leisure studies rejects virtue as an outmoded concept for contemporary leisure theory and practice. Thus, one might ask whether the links between leisure, virtue and flourishing have been irreparably broken. However, it may be too quick to declare neo-Aristotelian leisure kaput. To rejoin leisure, virtue and flourishing the following model is proposed as a way to re-conceptualize Aristotelian leisure so that it can function as a 21st century guide to the good life.

The model of revised Aristotelian leisure outlined below derives from the interpretation of the relationship between leisure, virtue and flourishing that was presented earlier in Figure 1. It was noted in Figure 1 that leisure has both an instrumental and telic function. Instrumentally, leisure provides the freedom to develop natural virtues into genuine virtues through the application of *phronesis*. The genuine virtues in turn, are propitious to the living a successful, flourishing life. As well as promoting the living of a flourishing life in practical terms, leisure also allows for the possibility of living the best sort of life, which Aristotle argues is the contemplative life of the philosopher (which I have termed telic leisure as an end in itself). Leisure thus functions in two distinct senses relating to two versions of the flourishing life. Leisure is instrumental to the flourishing in terms of navigating the challenges of living a successful practical life, and it can also constitute the best sort of life that a human being can live.

The revised model of Aristotelian leisure I am proposing also makes use of the distinction of leisure being instrumental and leisure being an end in itself. However, instead of making leisure a necessary condition for virtue and flourishing, the model utilizes a descriptive approach of assessing various life activities on a constraint/leisure continuum.

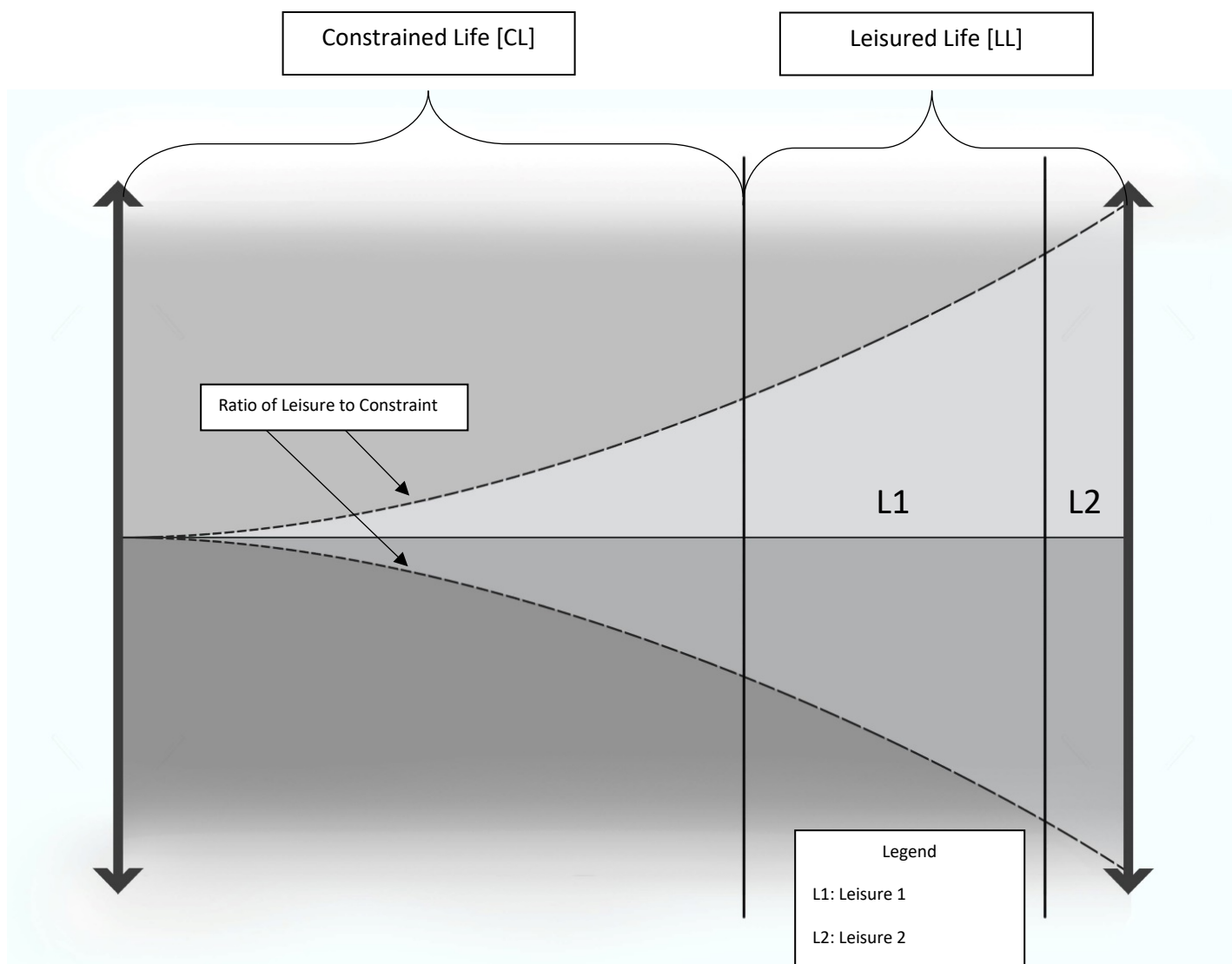
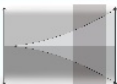


Figure 2: The Constrained Life versus the Leisured Life (© 2019 Donald J. McLean)

Figure 2 diagrams two basic domains of life which are label as the Constrained Life (CL), and the Leisured Life (LL) which subdivides into Leisure 1 (L1) and Leisure 2 (L2). This continuum is based on the broadly accepted modern view that leisure, as Broadie (2006) notes, is intimately connected to the notion of freedom, and it is reflective of Neulinger’s (1981) Paradigm of Leisure that theorizes leisure primarily in terms of freedom and secondarily by motivation. Neulinger (1981) treats leisure as a state of mind which ranges from pure leisure, where one perceives oneself to be freely engaged in activities that are intrinsically motivated, to pure job which one is compelled to do for solely extrinsic reasons such as a “job that one must do to earn a living and that provides no satisfaction other than the paycheck” (p. 20.). Of course, commentators have noted that a purely subjective interpretation of freedom such as what Neulinger proposes ignores the fact that there are many factors, such as one’s upbringing, economic resources, and gender that can influence perceived freedom (Kelly, 1987; Smith, 1987). It might therefore be the case that one’s leisure choices are not as free as one perceives them to be. However, the continuum in Figure 2 should be able to accommodate composite measures of freedom that include both subjective and objective variables to situate the degree of leisureliness of various activities. The

dotted asymptotic-looking curved lines represent the ratio of constraint to leisure that we can experience in the various aspects and activities of life. The shape of the curve is not empirically plotted, but is reflective of the reality that the majority of our existence is constrained by the demands of life. There is both upward and downward curving ratio lines in recognition that life activities can be subject to normative evaluations of various positive and negative valences.

The division between the Constrained Life and the Leisured Life is not intended to be quantitatively precise, though I have used the 50/50 constraint/leisure ratio point for illustrative convenience. While it is very challenging to formally define leisure for academic purposes, in our everyday lives the difference between leisure and non-leisure is more apparent. As Neulinger (1981) states, “everyone knows the difference between doing something one has to and doing something that one wants to” (p. 15). However, less intuitive is the division of the Leisured Life (LL) into Leisure 1 (L1) and Leisure 2 (L2), so the following analysis of these two types of leisure will attempt to clarify this distinction.

Leisure 1 is  for Ants

Leisure 1 derives from instrumental Aristotelian leisure represented in Figure 1. It is leisure that serves as a means to other ends. It is leisure that is partially constrained by, and responsive to the demands of life. It is leisure that we are very familiar with in our personal lives. We workout at the gym not because we really enjoy physical activity, but to keep healthy. We attend social events when we would rather be relaxing at home. We find ourselves being voluntold to help fundraise for a noble cause. Our leisure time may not feel completely free as it is partly being used as a means to other non-leisure goals and objectives.

But it is not only at the level of our personal lives that Leisure 1 is present. Traditional leisure service provision also deals in Leisure 1 by creating opportunities for people to participate in instrumental leisure. In his ironically titled book *The Labour of Leisure* Rojek (2010) associates such formal leisure services with what he terms the “leisure society thesis”. Rojek (2010) is critical of this thesis as he says it exaggerates the individual and societal benefits of leisure while ignoring and/or minimizing the negative impacts of these same leisure forms and practices. Rojek (2010) identifies four players who operate in the traditional framework of the leisure society thesis: States, Corporations, Consumers and Academics (SCCA). Rojek (2010) maintains that the providers of leisure, the State, Corporations and Academics work together to control the types of leisure opportunities available to Consumers. While the leisure society thesis is premised on the idea of leisure as individual freedom and choice, it also seeks to constrain that choice in ways that are thought to be “beneficial.” This results in the paradox of leisure programming whereby apparently freely chosen leisure opportunities manipulate and control leisure participants.

An example of the programming paradox that is of personal interest is a class I teach for budding interpreters (e.g., museum docents, park rangers, tour guides) in which they can receive a professional certificate. This training deals with techniques for influencing visitor knowledge, attitudes, and behavior toward the natural environment and cultural resources. Students are required to identify specific, quantifiable outcomes for the interpretive programming they create. They follow a logic-model format of inputs-processes-outputs-outcomes that determines whether or not programs are successful in terms of how many visitors comply with the intended outcomes.

Of course, the impacts that the students desire for the visitors are assumed to be good for the visitors themselves, the natural and cultural resources, and even the agency or institution in charge of those resources. And, as the visitors choose to use their leisure time to participate (they are what the interpretation literature refers to as a “non-captive audience”) they are not being coerced. Nonetheless, despite the noble motivations of the providers and the voluntary status of the participants, the interpretive programs are designed to use a variety of techniques to subtly manipulate the visitors. The interpretive experience therefore is not pure leisure (e.g., experiencing wonder and perhaps awe of the natural and cultural resources) as it also instrumentally seeks other non-leisure goals and objectives.

The instrumentalism of Leisure 1 is not restricted to only leisure providers. Leisure participants (i.e., Consumers) can also choose to engage in leisure activities for instrumental purposes. Rojek (2010) argues that successful people choose to use leisure to develop their capacities for emotional intelligence and emotional labour so that they will “be recognized as competent, credible and relevant actors in the plethora of social, cultural and economic situations that [they] encounter (p. 3). Harkening back to the Aristotelian notion of leisure as *schole*, Rojek (2010) rejects the modern notion of leisure being equated with individual freedom of choice (which he characterizes as flighty) and instead sees leisure as the training ground for successful living:

The Ancient Greek word for leisure is *schole*. Etymologically speaking, it is the root of our word for school.... Leisure is a school for life. The end of schooling is to maintain and enhance competence, relevance and credibility. The successful attainment of this end requires perpetual emotional intelligence and emotional labour. Freedom is for the birds. (p. 189).

By evoking the notion of leisure as *schole*, Rojek’s (2010) vision of twenty-first century leisure draws unmistakable parallels to Aristotelian leisure. However, he does not explicitly appeal to the virtues or refer to the contemporary virtue ethics literature (McLean, 2017). And in a very un-Aristotelian fashion Rojek (2010) highlights the usefulness of illicit leisure in living a successful life. For Aristotle, opportunity for leisure also brings with it the threat of misuse; leisure for Aristotle should aim at virtue. Rojek (2010), however, sees illicit leisure as an antidote to the utopic ambitions of the leisure society thesis. Instead of leisure supporting the institutions of society (i.e., the SCCA framework), the ludic freedom of leisure can be used to undermine these very same institutions. Drawing from the work of anthropologist Victor Turner, Rojek (2010) points to the Janus-like nature of leisure. On the one hand, leisure “is the primary normative institution in society popularly associated with freedom and choice” while on the other hand as a “normative institution which is organized around freedom it permits individuals and groups to enter into and generate relationships that resist, challenge and transcend normative structure” (p. 60). As Rojek (2010) notes, when leisure opposes normative structures it “ceases to be a matter of play” (p. 59) and becomes a tool for political resistance. Leisure that is illicit therefore may be used to “fight the good fight” *against* the institutions of the SCAA framework. And by engaging in such struggles, Rojek (2010) also suggests that the use of illicit leisure for political purposes may help with the development of emotional intelligence and emotional labour.

The role which Rojek casts for leisure is very demanding. This is leisure that has significant work to do. It provides the space for the development of emotional intelligence and emotional labour. It is where we can demonstrate our competence, relevance, and credibility. And even our forays into illicit leisure are not mere dalliances with deviance, but can have serious political

import. There are no hints of enjoyment, pleasure, or release with this type of leisure. This is leisure that helps us adapt to the demands of life. In Aesop's fable of *The Ant and the Grasshopper* Rojek's leisure as a guide to the good life would surely be suited to ants.

However, while Rojek's (2010) take on contemporary leisure may be excessively instrumental, it is still generally reflective of the philosophy and practice of traditional leisure services. Leisure 1 always has instrumental aspects accompanying the leisure activity. Leisure 1 is never done simply for its own sake.

Leisure 2 is for  Grasshoppers

It has been argued that Leisure 1 is important to flourishing as it can help us adapt to the demands of life via Aristotelian or neo-Aristotelian leisure. But using leisure instrumentally to improve oneself does not exhaust how leisure can contribute to flourishing. Indeed, critics have taken Aristotle's moral philosophy to task for presenting an uninspiring vision of the good life. Bertrand Russell (1961) declares the *Nicomachean Ethics* to lack intrinsic merit because of its vapidness:

...there is an emotional poverty in the *Ethics*, which is not found in the earlier philosophers. There is something unduly smug and comfortable about Aristotle's speculations on human affairs; everything that makes men feel a passionate interest in each other seems forgotten...He shows no sign of having had any of those experiences which make it difficult to preserve sanity; all the more profound aspects of the moral life are apparently unknown to him...What he has to say will be useful to comfortable men of weak passions; but he has nothing to say to those who are possessed by a god or devil, or whom outward misfortune drive to despair. (p. 195).

Similarly, Kristjansson (2020) points to a "flatness" in Aristotle's account of flourishing that has been noted by otherwise friendly commentators such as Sarah Broadie and Charles Taylor. Their complaints echo Russell's view that Aristotle's ethics excessively focuses on rationally addressing the practical aspects of everyday life, leaving out the more inspirational factors such as beauty, creativity, joy, and meaningfulness that also make life worth living. In other words, all instrumental leisure can make Aristotle a dull boy!

A comparable charge of flatness is equally applicable to Rojek's neo-Aristotelian *scholē* account of leisure. As Blackshaw (2017) argues, *scholē* must amount to something more than adapting to the demands of life. Rather, Blackshaw (2010) believes that the problem with Rojek's thesis "is it does not pay sufficient attention to the fact that the true terrain of leisure is the human imagination, that special way of feeling and seeing, an outlook turned outside of itself rather than simply reflecting it, which provides us with our own unique window on the world" (p. 124). What is needed, according to Blackshaw (2010), is what he refers to as devotional leisure, a type of leisure that "is for many people a kind of spiritual practice or source of enchantment, which enables them to render their lives meaningful, as well as put them on the road to authenticity." (p. 91).

The account of devotional leisure which Blackshaw (2017) presents in his book *Re-imagining Leisure Studies* is complex, drawing on the thought of philosophers and sociologists such as Sloterdijk, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida, Weber, Bauman, Heller, Goffman,

and Giddens, among others. So, in the interest of brevity, I will focus on what I take to be the kernel of his thesis rather than attempt a comprehensive interpretation of his thought. Contrary to Rojek, Blackshaw (2017) believes that the most dominant quality of 21st century leisure is the freedom people have to define their own lifestyles. Rather than serving the demands of life, leisure affords us the opportunity to *create* our lives. Blackshaw (2017) argues that devotional leisure is the main pathway to the art of living since leisure, “just like art, is constrained only by the laws of nature on the one hand, and moral laws on the other” (p. 159). Devotional leisure is therefore leisure of the freest sort. According to Blackshaw (2017), devotional leisure is where we find ourselves at “home” in the world. This is leisure that pulls us towards it rather than pushes us to do it. It is leisure that enlivens us. It is leisure that is an end in itself. This is leisure for grasshoppers.

Blackshaw (2017) argues that devotional leisure takes two forms: 1) *skhole*; 2) performative leisure. *Skhole* and performative leisure exist in tension with each other. They are at the same time both opposites and complements. Blackshaw (2017) terms the followers of devotional leisure as *skholers* and *chorasters* depending on whether they engage in *skhole* or performative leisure respectively. *Skholers* are people who use leisure to bring meaning into their lives. *Skhole* is driven by hermeneutics, the following of an interpretive tradition. It represents the desire, Blackshaw (2017) says, to try to know life’s secrets through a commitment to our chosen leisure practices:

When we engage with leisure as a devotion we know that commitment to it is our duty, but its *secret* is beyond interpretation; we do not know, cannot know about its secret; rather we *feel* its warm glow, we *sense* it....When we choose leisure in this way we do so with a sense of feeling, as though it were something holy, as though engaging in it were a religious function. There is more to leisure, this attitude would seem to suggest, than mere leisure activities or recreational pursuits; it is to live one’s life in a certain way. (p. 113, emphasis in the original)

As Blackshaw (2017) suggests, *skhole* goes beyond mere fun and games. It has a quasi-religious, calling-like quality. It is leisure that seeks meaning and has the potential to transform and elevate. However, while Aristotle associated such *skhole* with the contemplative life of the philosopher, Blackshaw (2017) places few limits on the forms of leisure that can be treated devotionally, though he does identify sport and popular culture as the two dominant areas of life in which devotional leisure practices currently take place.

Now whereas *skholers* quest for knowing life’s secrets, the driving force for the leisure practices of *chorasters* is to attract attention to themselves. For *chorasters*, all the world is a stage on which to project their unique beings. Leisure, argues Blackshaw (2017), provides theatre for *chorasters* to exhibit their “star quality” to others. If *skholers* are the monkish disciples of devotional leisure, *chorasters* are the dandies. Often their attention-seeking behavior has them on the periphery of the leisure universe, utilizing liminal and/or illicit leisure spaces for their leisure displays. (Blackshaw’s use of the term *choraster* is derived from the Greek term *khora* relating to Derrida’s discussion of the “receptacle” in Plato’s *Timaeus* that is the intermediary between the world of the Forms and everyday reality.) As an example of *chorastic* devotional leisure, Blackshaw (2017) describes the leisure activities of urban explorers or “urbexers”. These practitioners of devotional leisure are adventurers “interested in the physical discovery of abandoned buildings, bridges, churches, graveyards, drains, power stations, subways, and other

man-made objects which are abandoned or off-limits” (p. 154). Urbexers are trespassers in both a legal and figurative sense, rejecting legal forms of tourism and outdoor recreation. Being self-“liberated from the market and the normalizing gaze of organized climbing and descending, (e.g., mountaineering, potholing and caving councils and associations), with their formal affiliations and codes of professional conduct” Blackshaw (2017) says that urbexers “push the limits of the dominant morality” (p. 154).

This eclectic, often deviant nature of devotional leisure is a distinguishing characteristic of what I term Leisure 2. The unfettered, grasshopperish nature of Leisure 2 does not lend itself well to the ant-like management constraints of leisure service provision. For example, there are commercially available tours in which visitors can explore abandoned urban structures. But these are only simulated “adventures” as they are not transgressive and threats to personal safety are mitigated through risk management policies and procedures. In being rendered benign, such urban “explorations” lessen the allure that Leisure 2 offers in increased meaningfulness and performativity. The potential for flourishing (and alternatively, for mishap) from such neutered leisure experiences is diminished by converting Leisure 2 activities into Leisure 1.

However, the freedom that distinguishes Leisure 2 from the built-in constraints of Leisure 1 also raises the issue of whether Leisure 2 activities can become so daring that they diminish rather than enhance flourishing. Blackshaw (2010) provides an example of extremely transgressive devotional leisure when he recounts the consensual cannibalism of Armin Meiwes and Bernd Brandes. In what became a sensational criminal case, Meiwes, a German computer technician, advertised on a now defunct website--the Cannibal Café--for someone to eat. Brandes, accepted the invitation to dinner where, after the two attempted to consume Brandes’ severed penis as an appetizer, he was killed and butchered by Meiwes, who then dined on sautéed “steak of Bernd, with salt, pepper, garlic and nutmeg” (Deski, quoted in Blackshaw 2010, p. 35). When students I instruct encounter this grisly vignette in Blackshaw’s book *Leisure* (2010), many are so shocked that they reject the idea that such depraved acts could have anything to do with leisure. However, Blackshaw (2010) is remarkably blasé about the moral import of this sort of extremely deviant devotional leisure:

It is not difficult to understand why most people would find this kind of leisure activity sickening. But what is being describe here is not in itself amoral. As Rojek (2000) demonstrates in his discussion of abnormal leisure, leisure itself does not include ethics of *any* kind. It is part of the autonomy of leisure that it is able to free itself of morality. It might be distasteful to most people, but what Meiwes and Brandes were engaged in here was the hospitality of free exchange, where the pleasure of eating someone and the pleasure (and you would imagine also the pain) of being eaten, enhance each other. (p. 36).

But by treating this type of devotional leisure as merely a matter of taste Blackshaw is badly overplaying his hand. While cannibalistic dinner parties that are consensual may be leisure because of the apparent willingness of the participants, from an Aristotelian perspective it is clear that Brandes’ commitment to this sort of dining experience did not enhance *his* overall flourishing. And to a lesser degree the same might be said for Meiwes who is now languishing in prison (and who has since become a vegetarian). This is devotional leisure that, while done for its own sake, is also a dead end. It is egregiously vicious Leisure 2. Contra Blackshaw, rather than trying to

divorce leisure from ethics, what is needed is better recognition and understanding of the intimate connection between leisure, virtue and flourishing.

Mapping Leisure, Virtue and Flourishing

Having outlined the distinction between Leisure 1 as instrumental leisure and Leisure 2 as devotional leisure we can now turn to how these two leisure forms might be assessed normatively. Figures 3 through 6 illustrate possible ways to map leisure on to virtue and flourishing by using the vertical axis of the diagram to graph the normative dimensions of Leisure 1 and Leisure 2. The horizontal leisure axis and the vertical normative axis are represented as continuums and are potentially amenable to operationalization for empirical measurements using both subjective and objective criteria. As the conceptualization of the horizontal leisure axis has already been explained, I will focus the remaining discussion on the possible neo-Aristotelian versions of the vertical normative axis. It must be emphasized that the models presented are proposed ways of conceptualizing the relationship between leisure, virtue and flourishing and are not based on empirical study. Rather these mappings are intended to help visualize how both philosophical and empirical investigations of leisure, virtue and flourishing could be conceptualized. To demonstrate how the mapping would work, I will use the following archetypal characters relating to Aristotle's, Rojek's and Blackshaw's theories of leisure:

1. **Aristotle's *Phronimoi***: These people have got it together. They use their leisure to master the virtues, which helps them deal appropriately with life's challenges. A minority also engages in contemplative leisure (1a).
2. **Aristotle's Continents**: They are generally good people who periodically have to force themselves to act virtuously. Their leisure is mundane.
3. **Aristotle's Incontinents**: They are not so good people who are likely to give in to their vices. Their leisure is base.
4. **Rojek's Competent, Relevant & Credible (CRC) Go-Getters**: They are focused on using their leisure to expand their capabilities. They are strivers with little interest in leisure for its own sake.
5. **Blackshaw's Urbexers**: They live for adventure, taking both legal and physical risks exploring forbidden places. They are dedicated members of the clandestine urbexer community. Their leisure is moderately deviant.
6. **Blackshaw's Consenting Cannibals**: They are obsessed with sadomasochistic anthropophagy. Their leisure is so brutishly deviant as to be incomprehensible to others.

Working from an Aristotelian virtue ethics perspective, the most obvious starting point to conceptualize the vertical normative axis would be to represent it as a continuum between virtue and vice. If we then try positioning the six character archetypes it might look something like this:

2

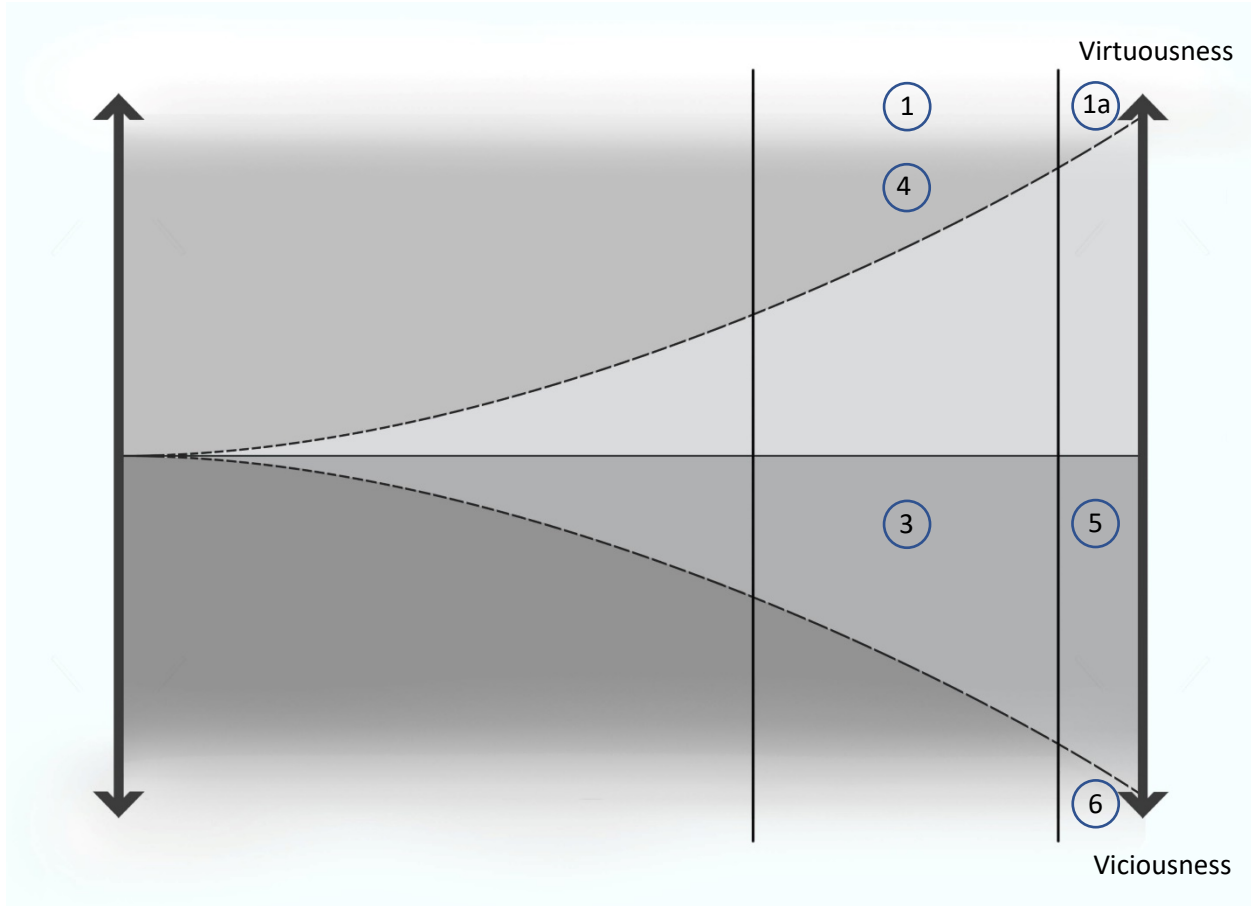


Figure 3: Leisure and Virtue (© 2019 Donald J. McLean)

Comments: Unsurprisingly, the *Phronimoi* come out on top as paragons of virtue, both in the practical virtues and the contemplative. Rojek's Go-Getters do well, but have a more limited repertoire of virtues than the *Phronimoi*, and do not register with devotional leisure. The Continents are mildly good as they struggle to practice the virtues, while the Incontinent and Urbexers dip into instrumental and devotional vice. The Consenting Cannibals are extremely vicious.

Now let's plot the six character archetypes from Aristotle's controversial Doctrine of the Mean. In Figure 4 the vertical axis ranges from deficiency to excess, with the midpoint being the excellence of the mean.

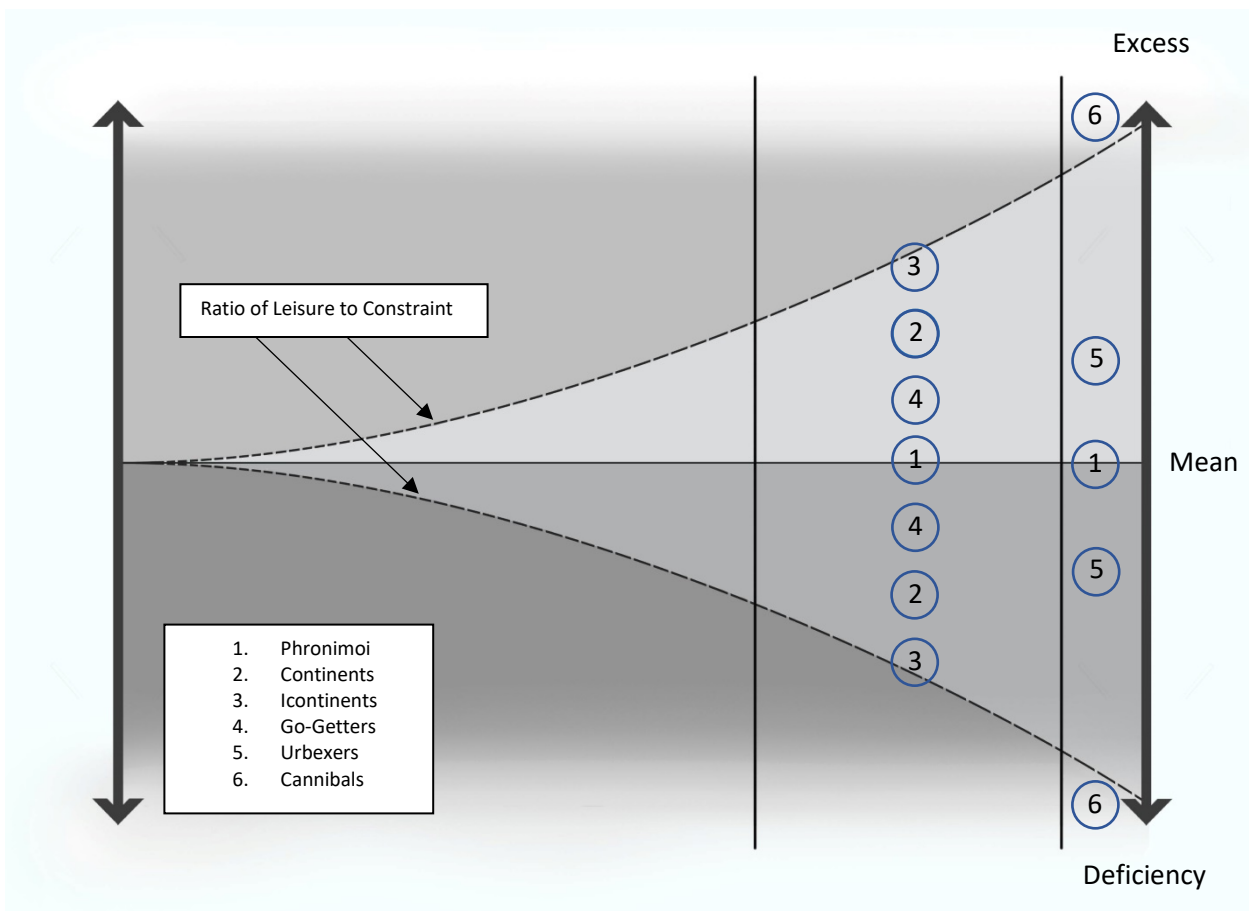


Figure 4: Leisure and the Mean (© 2019 Donald J. McLean)

Comments: The *Phronimoi* win again, situating themselves on the mean in both Leisure 1 & 2. Rojek's Go-Getters sit on either side of L1 mean as they lack the perfect balance of the virtues of the *Phronimoi*. The Continents depart further into excess and deficiency as their characters are such that they have to force themselves to do what is virtuous. The Incontinents trade in excess and deficiency, while the Consenting Cannibals again are at the extremes.

An alternate approach to the Doctrine of the Mean which is also associated with virtue and flourishing is the *kalon*, which has been variously translated as the fine, the noble, and the beautiful. Whereas the Doctrine of the Mean is suggestive of virtue through balance and order, the *kalon* includes notions that virtuous actions can be attractive and admirable for their own sake. Without engaging in a protracted discussion of how *kalon* should be interpreted, for illustrative purposes I have anchored the vertical axis in Figure 5 as admirable versus shameful.

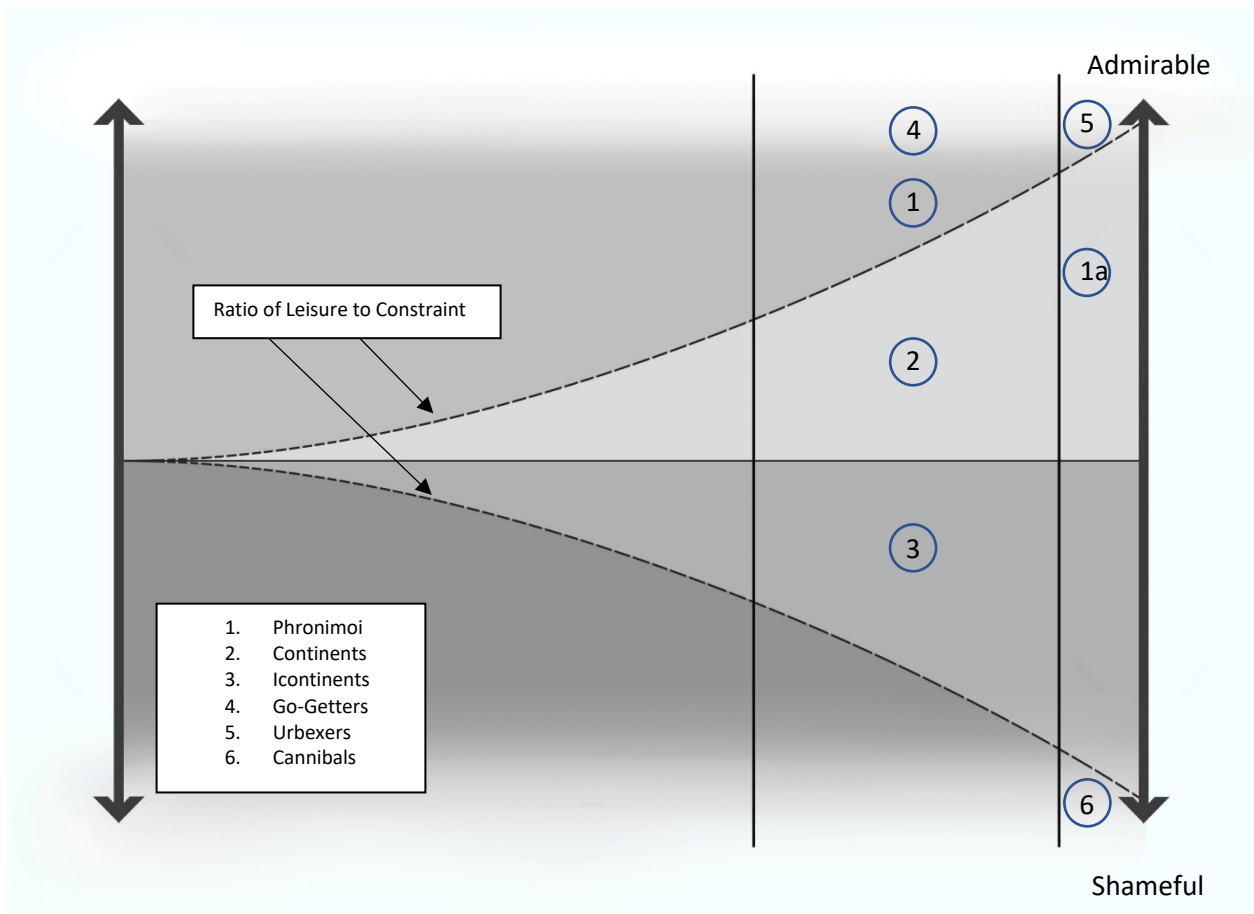


Figure 5: Leisure and the *Kalon* (© 2019 Donald J. McLean)

Comments: When admirability is the criterion, the cake is taken by Rojek’s Go-Getters for Leisure 1 and the Blackshaw’s Urbexers for Leisure 2, as they are more cool and exciting than Aristotle’s stable, balanced *Phronimoi*. The Continents and Icontinents hover on either side of mediocracy. Conversely, the Consenting Cannibals are remarkable specimens for the extreme shamefulness of their bestial appetites.

Finally, Figure 6 shows how the various character archetypes might map on to flourishing. The vertical axis ranges from flourishing to festering growth.

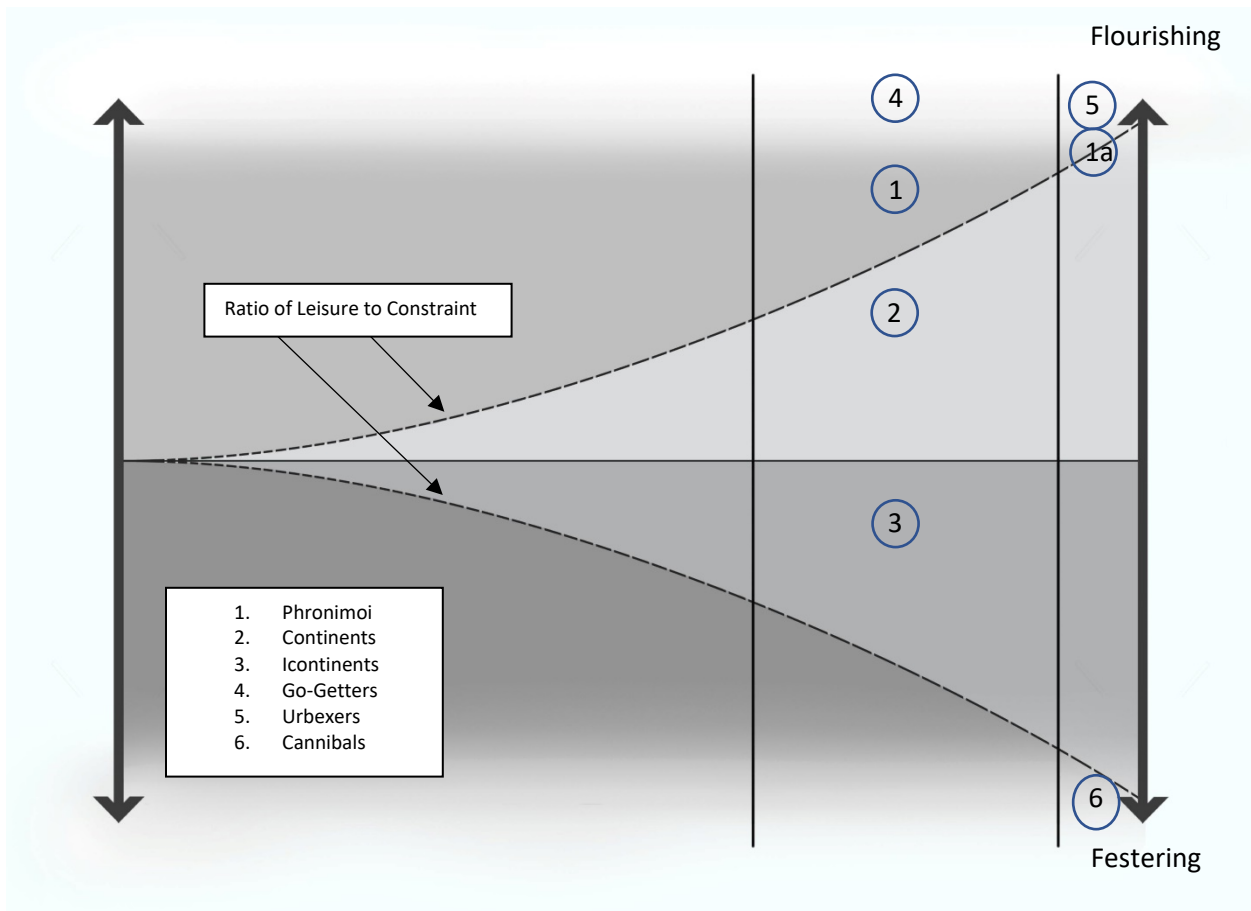


Figure 6: Leisure and Flourishing (© 2019 Donald J. McLean)

Comments: This mapping looks similar to that of Leisure and the *Kalon*, though the *Phronimoi* regain top-billing in Leisure 1 because of their well-rounded virtues. Contemplative *Phronimoi* with their safe but unexciting Leisure 2 are at about an equal level to the exciting but hazardous Leisure 2 of Urbexers. (Of note with this mapping is that the concept of flourishing according to L1 may be somewhat incomparable to the flourishing of L2.)

Conclusion

The preceding figures and comments represent an admittedly speculative armchair experiment lacking rigorous operationalization and data. However, they are the result of a thorough literature review and evaluation thus provide an initial template for how leisure, virtue and flourishing can be conceptualized for further research. Key to the reintroduction of the concept of leisure into contemporary virtue ethics discourse is the distinction between the instrumentality of Leisure 1 and the telic purposefulness of Leisure 2. These two forms of leisure provide the freedom to engage in both virtues and vices in the pursuit of the good life.

Leisure is a primary sphere of human existence for the pursuit of the good life by individuals, communities and societies. Leisure is also a critical space where human interactions with the environment can promote flourishing of both people and nature. Integrating contemporary

leisure research into the virtue ethics literature can serve as a pathway for exploring the connections of virtue to flourishing and function as a gateway to other aretaic-related concepts such as happiness, well-being, enjoyment, beauty, and meaningfulness. But while leisure is typically regarded as being instrumentally and intrinsically good, it is also a significant force for the creation and instantiation of harm and ill-being. Leisure researchers such as Rojek (2000) and Blackshaw (2010) argue that much leisure is abnormal and/or illicit. So, as well as being an essential part of life where people can exercise the virtues, leisure is also a realm in which people are likely to engage in vices. Paradoxically, though highly deviant leisure activities are clearly problematic, many far less “dark” leisure vices are positively connected with important aspects of a flourishing life. Leisure therefore offers a very interesting route for exploring not only the connection of virtues, but also vices, to flourishing and pursuit of the good life.

The modern revival of virtue ethics has largely forgotten leisure while in turn leisure studies has shifted its attention away from virtuous leisure. A leisure-based understanding of virtue and a virtue-based understanding of leisure is of mutual advantage to the development of both virtue-ethical thought and leisure research and service delivery. It is time to reunite leisure, virtue and flourishing.

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