

Temple Tracts: Issue 6, Volume 1

Work, Leisure & The Good Life: A Trying Triangle

Ian Steedman and Arrigo Opocher



William Temple
Foundation

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Edited by Chris Baker

Arrigo Opocher is Full Professor of Economics at the University of Padua.

Ian Steedman is an Associate Research Fellow of the William Temple Foundation, Emeritus Professor of Economics at Manchester Metropolitan University, and Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Chester.

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Introduction

It is almost the ‘conventional wisdom’ these days to make the (rather obvious) observation that a country’s gross domestic product per head is not an adequate indicator of how good it is to live in that country. Nor would it become an adequate indicator if elaborated to show what the product consists of and how equally or unequally it is distributed among the citizens. This would be a relevant index, of course, but not a good enough one. This ‘conventional wisdom’ was recently given a valuable, formal statement in the Sarkozy report, commissioned by the then President of France and written by three important economists, Joseph Stiglitz, Amartya Sen and Jean-Paul Fitoussi (2010). It is not only output that matters and indicators of well-being are not all simply subjective – there are objective indicators too.

One important way of describing what happens in a society – and hence one basis for evaluating that society – is to show how its citizens spend their *time*. How many hours, per year say, are spent in paid employment? How many in travelling to and from work? How many in shopping, in cooking and in cleaning? How many in going to church, mosque, synagogue or temple? How many in caring for children, or for the elderly? And so on. We can also ask, of course, *who* is spending these various kinds of hours. The study of time-use is one good approach to saying how a society is functioning and to assessing that functioning in terms of wellbeing.

This short e-book aims to provide a simple introduction to the study of time-use and to raise a number of questions about any society’s allocation of time.

We begin by considering the meaning(s) of the terms work, leisure and the good life and then move on to consider what three great economists – John Stuart Mill, Alfred Marshall and John Maynard Keynes – have said about the good life and about the relative importance for well-being of output and of leisure time. We then present the findings of a number of empirical studies of time-use in different societies, before entering into a discussion of some of the issues that arise. We conclude by setting out some questions relating to the use of time in society that readers may wish to reflect upon. Ethical questions will quite often arise explicitly, or lurk just below the surface, and Christians, Muslims and other religious readers may well have a particular approach to these questions. They may also have relevant ideas about the extent to which religion and the spiritual life should be given expression in specific uses of time and the extent to which they should simply inform every kind of time-use. We shall not emphasize these matters, however, and will simply trust all readers to take serious issues in whatever serious way they think best.

Work and leisure – what do we mean? And what is the good life?

We all know roughly what is meant by work and by leisure but matters quickly become more complicated when we try to be precise. This leaves room for quips such as Voltaire's 'work banishes those three great evils, boredom, vice and poverty' (*Candide*) and Baudelaire's claim that 'work is less boring than amusing oneself' (*Journal Intime*). A more recent writer asserts that 'leisure is work you volunteer for' (Robert Robinson). When we turn to less light-hearted observations we find that many different ways of spending time are distinguished and that they can overlap in quite complex ways. To illustrate the point, consider the following ways of spending time (a list which the reader may easily extend):

Sleep;

Idling;

Playing;

Being unemployed, or involuntary leisure, which *may* generate feelings of bitterness;

Leisure activities of a valued kind – they may require learning and skill, e.g., playing a musical instrument, they may be 'hard work', and they may involve doing things – e.g., cooking, gardening, making furniture – that other people do in order to earn their living;

Engaging in competitive sports, or in non-competitive activities such as hill-walking;

Travelling, perhaps to work, or to shop, or to engage in voluntary work, or for pleasure;

Volunteering, whether for church work, social work, repairing hillside paths or walls, etc.;

Unpaid 'work', such as house-cleaning, shopping, childcare, gardening;

Paid work, which *may or may not* be enjoyable, give self-respect, provide friendship and the satisfactions of co-operation, doing one's duty, as well as providing one with a monetary income.

Even this short, incomplete list reminds us that the terms work and leisure are, at best, shorthand pointers towards complex phenomena. Paid work *may* be more enjoyable than some unpaid activities; and a given activity, for example, gardening, can be a pure pleasure, or a tiresome duty, or a means of earning money.

We shall have to speak of 'work and leisure' below, without constantly recalling these complications, but it must always be borne in mind that they are slippery terms. Nothing useful would be achieved by attempting to lay down precise definitions, however, and it may be more helpful to think as follows. Any activity, any use of time, can be viewed as giving rise to some directly undesired consequences (some pains), some directly desired consequences (some pleasures), some monetary costs, and some monetary gains. (The pains and pleasures can be spelled out, of course, and some of the four outcomes may be zero. Moreover, some of the pains and/or the pleasures may accrue to people other than the person carrying out the activity.) *This* is what matters about ways of spending time, not whether they be classified as work, as leisure or as something else.

It is of course true and important that while everyone faces the same 'time budget' – 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, and so on – different individuals face very different 'money budgets'. And since many ways of spending time involve the spending of money, the inequality of 'money budgets' will mean that even people of similar desires and interests may spend their time in very different ways.

While it is easy enough to agree not to waste too much time on verbal disputes about the definitions of 'work' and of 'leisure', people have been disputing the meaning of 'the good life' for thousands of years and no agreement is yet in sight. There can, of course, be no question of our settling the matter here! It may nevertheless be useful to recall that three broad approaches are commonly adopted in discussions of what constitutes a good life. Some will focus on the extent to which institutions, policies and individual actions promote the satisfaction of people's preferences. Others

will focus, rather, on the extent to which people's rights are respected and to which individuals, whether in their public or their more private roles, fulfil their duties. Yet others will stress the importance of the virtues, of the development and maintenance of good character and dispositions. The considerations to which these different preference-satisfaction, Kantian and virtue-ethics approaches draw attention can, perhaps, all be given some weight by the reader in thinking about the issues discussed below. We shall refrain, however, from advocating the exclusive adoption of any one approach to the complex normative questions that quickly emerge when various matters relating to the best use of time are thought about in a serious way.

How much time in employment?

Great importance is often attached to an individual's work, in the sense of time employed. There can be good reasons for this emphasis, of course, but it is as well to keep in mind that employment does not usually take up that big a *proportion* of someone's life. Consider X, who lives in an advanced capitalist economy today and who lives for 80 years. That is, for about 700,000 hours. Suppose that X is employed for 50 years, say from age 17 to age 67, and works for 2000 hours per year. Then X's lifetime hours in employment amount to 100,000 hours. Over a lifetime, then, X is employed for *one hour in seven*, or about 14% of the time.

Of course one can reasonably change the above numbers somewhat, or calculate hours in employment as a % of waking hours (rather than total hours), and so on; but no sensible numbers will show hours in employment to take up a high proportion of lifetime hours (in a modern, advanced economy). Moreover, the empirical evidence shows that this proportion has indeed fallen over time. Thus if great importance is attached to working time, that can only be for other reasons.

John Stuart Mill

In the immediate aftermath of the industrial revolution children entered employment very young and all workers - children, women and men - worked long hours, often in appalling conditions. Gradually, workers' organization and reforms such as the 1847 'Ten hours' bill brought some improvements in conditions and in real wage rates, together with the beginnings of (limited) schooling. The economic premises for a normal, non-exceptional, non-heroic, 'good life' (in any definition) for the great bulk of the people were being set, according to liberal thinkers like John Stuart Mill (1806-1873). There was some hope, at least, that in a not too-distant future people of good will, with no real distinction among social classes, could aim at the graces of life, free both from destitution and degradation and from excessive luxury.

Two main conditions had to be met, according to Mill, in order that this could happen. Population should not grow too much (thus involving an adoption by the working classes of the same fertility habits as the middle classes), and consumption of material goods should likewise grow with moderation (thus involving frugal lifestyles). These conditions being satisfied, the fruit of technical progress would be a sustainable reduction of the time of work, to the advantage of other activities including good forms of leisure. This point of view, that Mill argued in his major works, is succinctly expressed in enthusiastic tones (and perhaps some sense of paradox) in a magazine article, from which we quote at length: 'How many of the so-called luxuries, conveniences, refinements, and ornaments of life, are *worth* the labour which must be undergone as the condition of producing them? The beautifying of existence is as worthy and useful an object as the sustaining of it; but only a vitiated taste can see any such result in those fopperies of so-called civilization, which myriads of hands are now occupied and lives wasted in providing. In opposition to the 'gospel of work', I would assert the gospel of leisure, and maintain that human beings *cannot* rise to finer attributes of their nature compatibly with a life filled with labour – real labour, the exhausting, stiffening, stupefying toil of many kinds of agricultural and manufacturing labourers. To reduce very greatly the quantity of work required to carry on existence, is as needful as to distribute it more equally; and the progress of science, and the increasing ascendancy of justice and good sense, tend to this result' (Mill, *Collected Works*, XXI, p. 91). In the last edition of his *Principles of Political Economy* Mill predicted a stationary state of the economy characterized by 'a well-paid and affluent body of labourers; no enormous fortunes [...] but a much larger body of persons than at present, not only exempt from the coarser toils, but with sufficient leisure, both physical and mental, from mechanical details, to cultivate freely the graces of life'. (Mill, *Collected Works*, III, p.755.)

One generation after Mill – that is, towards the end of the 19th century – shorter working hours and the possibility of more refined lifestyles by working class families were still at the top of the agenda of social reformers and learned economists. The first of Mill's conditions for a happy stationary state was about to be met: to say the least, the problem of UK overpopulation had been much reduced, due to the consistent emigration flows to America and Australasia and the importation of cheap corn from the developing world. Also, the increase in standards of comfort determined not an increase, but a diminution of fertility.

Alfred Marshall

The problem of a wise private and social use of increasing productivity was now more open than ever. Alfred Marshall (1842-1924) strongly insisted on a virtuous circle involving refined lifestyles and labour productivity, via improved intelligence, energy, self-respect and force of character. Better lives were quite consistent with a better functioning of the economic machinery. Like Mill, Marshall insisted that long, exhausting hours of manual work were enemies of productivity, no less than they were inconsistent with the prospect of a 'nobler life'. At the same time, an excessive luxury and the idleness of either the rich or the poor were similarly detrimental. Further steps in reducing the share of lifetimes devoted to paid work had to be made, according to Marshall, both in terms of increasing the years devoted to schooling and in terms of shorter hours of (manual) work. At the time of Marshall's apprenticeship, Trade Unions were advocating the nine-hour day (which was obtained in 1871): in his writings, Marshall maintained that further diminutions for manual work were possible, and beneficial.

Once again, however, the problem of the *use* made of the additional time and of the additional 'national dividend' was central. Marshall introduced an abstract distinction between a 'standard of life' and a 'standard of comfort'. The former consists of a series of *activities* conducive to positive *moral* attitudes, while the latter consists of the satisfaction of material *wants*, and particularly 'artificial wants, among which perhaps the grosser wants may predominate'. (We may note the link here to virtue ethics and to preference satisfaction theories, respectively, as referred to above.)

An interesting aspect on which Marshall insisted in his *Principles of Economics* is a mutual relationship between activities conducive to intelligence, energy and self-respect and labour productivity: education, a wise use of leisure and restraint from the satisfaction of artificial and grosser wants all increase labour productivity, no less than the latter – via increasing wages – creates conditions for more refined life styles for the bulk of the population. A virtuous circle was possible, then, provided that people develop care and judgment in expenditure, resist the 'evil dominion of the wanton vagaries of fashion', do not over-indulge in food and drink, etc. Activities leading to better standards of life or, in Marshall's words, to a 'nobler life', were contrasted to the mere satisfaction of wants aimed at increasing material comfort and nothing else.

John Maynard Keynes

One generation after Marshall, another outstanding Cambridge economist, J.M. Keynes (1883-1946) argued in a famous pamphlet – *Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren* (1930) – that the falling trend in labour hours *could* go much further, due to increasing labour productivity until, one century or so ahead, 'for the first time since his creation man will be faced with his real, his permanent problem – how to use his freedom from pressing economic cares, how to occupy the leisure, which science and [capital accumulation] will have won for him, to live wisely and agreeably and well'. Keynes would certainly have subscribed to what his friend Bertrand Russell once said: 'to be able to fill leisure intelligently is the last product of civilization'. And both were in harmony with Aristotle's claim that 'the life of money-making is one undertaken under compulsion, and wealth is evidently not the good we are seeking; for it is merely useful and for the sake of something else' (*Nicomachean Ethics*).

Keynes calculated that after one century the members of a progressive society could enjoy, on average, an eight-fold increase in the volume of products. It was quite natural to him to imagine

that, on the way to reaching such a multiplication of material means of comfort, people would exchange products for leisure. He was remarkably accurate on the first count but far off target on the second. In spite of a spectacular increase in output per head of population in the second half of the twentieth century, even beyond Keynes's optimistic expectations, the goal of increasing the material wealth still occupies much of the energies of society in rich countries. And this was certainly *not* determined either by an increasing commitment to fighting poverty, or by the wish to aid the poor countries. Even though it is true that work time *as a share of an individual's life* has fallen significantly in the past century (but women's paid work increased), the evolution of capitalist market economies simply has not corresponded to the hopes and the ethical imaginations of three liberal economists, belonging to three successive generations, of the standing of John Stuart Mill, Alfred Marshall and John Maynard Keynes.

Some empirical evidence

Why do rich societies show no sign of consumption satiation and appear to value leisure rather less than some great social thinkers believed? The answer is, of course, multifaceted and we can only hint at a few major aspects. First, 'averages' sometimes conceal some important real phenomena. The impressive increase in output has been in fact *distributed* very unevenly (with an increasing inequality since the 1970s): wages for many jobs increased far less than average output, a significant part of society owns no share of an ever-increasing capital, it still struggles with the 'economic problem' and is simply not free to 'choose' to work less. The same is true *a fortiori* if we extend our attention to the world economy. Second, looking at the expenditure on some 'basic needs' such as food, clothing, housing, we may conclude that Keynes got it roughly right, but an evolving society continuously creates new kinds of needs and wants; industry creates new qualities of products which meet both old and new needs. Third, leisure often requires more money than time to be enjoyed: since leisure goods and services can be very sophisticated, a wage earner must work hard in order to enjoy them. Leisure should therefore *not* be considered as a simple alternative to consumption, especially in rich capitalist societies. Subtler explanations of the relatively low increase in leisure time may invoke coordination failures in organizing the time to be shared in common with other members of one's family or community, and the fact that many highly skilled workers are involved in *indivisible* tasks which may intrinsically require long hours and short vacations.

A sharp distinction between *paid* work and all other activities (under the label of 'leisure') is no doubt relevant to an understanding of the economic processes behind a certain growth in GDP. But the quality of life can be better described in terms of how people spend their lifetimes, as we said in the introductory pages. In this perspective, paid work is only one among many activities. Even though 'time accounts' are far less developed by the statistical offices than 'output accounts', we know quite a lot about time-use by people of different age, gender and social condition, in different countries and over long spans of time.

Taking a secular perspective (since the beginning of the twentieth century), a recent analysis (Ramey and Francis, 2009) of 'time accounts' in the US reached the following synthetic conclusions relating to total hours per *head of population*. The total annual hours of paid work relative to the members of society have in fact diminished, albeit not dramatically: this suggests that the time of paid work *as a share of one's lifetime* (comparing one generation with another) had a tendency to decrease. Most of this decline has been offset by an increase in hours spent in school: this is indeed the neatest stylized fact concerning the evolution of the patterns of time use. The number of hours spent in activities classified as 'housework' (like food preparation, laundry, ironing, clothing repair, cleaning, care of family members) are actually (slightly) higher now than they were in the early part of the twentieth century and are broadly the same as the hours devoted to paid work. The remaining (and by far the greatest) share of waking time, which includes leisure under any definition, remained roughly *constant*.

Further empirical evidence

We now consider some international differences and enter into some further details concerning the patterns of time-use in more recent years. (This section will inevitably contain rather a lot of numbers!)

Let us first consider the total *weekly* hours of paid work *relative to the number of the employed*. We know from the excellent and not-too-technical analysis of Faggio and Nickell (2007) that many developed countries are currently grouped around 38 hours per week, with the US slightly above (39.4) and France, for example, slightly below (36.2). The US and France happen to have the same broad share of part-timers (about 13%) so that the difference in average hours genuinely reflects a lower time-intensity of work in France than in the US (by full-time workers). Of course, the shares of part-timers are quite varied across developed countries: in the Netherlands, for example, that share is some 35%, reflecting a high participation of women who *voluntarily* work part time; at the opposite extreme we find Portugal, with less than 10% part-timers, most of whom are males who have not been offered a full-time job.

More significant international differences in the work time of the average worker concern the *number of weeks* of work in a year. Holidays and vacation weeks are much fewer in the US (nearly 4 weeks) than in most of Europe (about 7 weeks): this reflects different annual leave legislations and practices, different numbers of days of public holidays, as well as different rules governing sickness and maternity leave (in this latter case, a higher number of weeks in Scandinavian countries is largely explained by a higher fertility).

All in all, an 'average' American worker has been calculated to work for business 1,800 hours per year (out of the 8,760 total hours: about 20% of the year), while his/her French counterpart works about 1,450 hours (nearly 16%). Most other European countries are in between, sometimes closer to France (e.g. Germany, Netherlands, Sweden), sometimes closer to the US (e.g. the UK, Ireland, Finland). The trend of annual hours worked per worker in the past century or so has been decidedly to *diminish* in all countries. For instance, at the beginning of the twentieth century, they were estimated to be about 2,700 in the US. In the past thirty years or so they kept falling, sometimes very slowly (as in the US), sometimes relatively fast, as in France and Germany.

Another question is whether one actually engages in paid employment or not. Unfortunately, the 'longitudinal' data on work over a lifetime are quite scanty and statistics are concentrated on employment, unemployment or inactivity of population of different ages and gender at a certain point in time. Something can be inferred, however, from the statistics. First, about 90% of prime age (25-54) men are normally found to be employed and when they are not, this is mainly because they are classified as unemployed (which is an intrinsically temporary situation): 'almost' all males in developed countries enter paid employment for some years in their prime age. By and large, the males who never work in business are the long-term sick and the disabled. We find, however, a significant exception to this rule: in Scandinavian countries, where women have long been active in the labour market and are becoming as active as men, we find a significant share (about 10%) of prime-age men (versus some 15% of women) who do not work in business nor actively seek to. In France, these shares concerning 'inactive' prime-age people are around 6% and 20%, respectively. Perhaps surprisingly, these shares are *lower* than those in the US (about 9% and 24%, respectively); we should recall, however, that, on average, Americans start to work earlier and retire later than Europeans.

The time taken up by work-related activities – in the main commuting to and from the workplace – has been calculated by many authors to be some 10% of the (paid) work time. This proportion has remained remarkably stable over time.

Turning to *housework*, we find that the gap between working-age women and working-age men is narrowing. According to Ramey and Francis (2009), women's weekly hours in the US were about 50 at the beginning of the twentieth century, and became about 30 one century later; conversely, men's hours increased from about 5 to over 15. Freeman and Schettkat (2005) show that in the early 1990s men and women, in the US and in Europe, devoted some 60 hours per week to paid or household work. However, while the split between paid and household work was some 45 to 15 weekly hours for men in both regions, it was 30 to 30 for women in the US and 20 to 40 for women in Europe. Consistently, the same study estimates that an increase in the hours per week in women's paid work is offset by a nearly equal diminution in their hours per week in household work. This can be effected by either an increase in men's house work (at the expense of market work, as in the case of the Scandinavian countries) or by a 'marketization' of some household activities. In fact, it is found, for instance, that US expenditure per head in restaurants is twice as great as that in Europe. It is interesting to note that such a marketization is not only consistent with an increase in the labour supply by women, but is also consistent with an increase in labour *demand* in those sectors that provide services which are substitutes for household work.

The definition of 'household work' is highly conventional, of course, and potentially includes very diverse activities ranging from the typical domestic work to construction and repairs, from purchase of goods and travel related to consumption to the various aspects of child and elderly care. According to the estimates of Krueger *et al* (2009) for the US, activities related to the purchase of goods occupy nearly as much time as family care (some 6% of waking time of women and 3.5% of men) and, taken together, these activities occupy for women almost the same time as the typical domestic work (which is 13%). Similar data can be found for some European countries from the 'Harmonized Time Use Survey' of Eurostat.

With reference to the study of Krueger *et al* (2009), more than 18% and nearly 16% of the entire waking time of men and women, respectively, is occupied by watching television or to non-work activities on the personal computer; this compares with a bare 4% total for more traditional intellectual activities like reading books, listening to music or engaging in artistic activities.

Explaining international differences

The economic, institutional and cultural reasons why many Europeans devote a lower share of their lifetimes to paid work than their American counterparts is a matter of lively debate among economists. Some have argued that the heavier taxation on work in Europe is the main cause; others maintain that taxation alone cannot explain that much, unless it is considered together with a stronger employment protection legislation, more generous unemployment benefits, stronger trade unions and a more extensive welfare state. Still other authors notice that the experience of the Scandinavian countries, characterized by both strong 'institutions' and almost as much paid labour per head of population as the US, casts doubt on this thesis. Thus it is still unclear whether the European comparative attitude towards paid work depends primarily on the effects of institutional regulation (which can be modified by public policy) or largely on deeper 'cultural' factors which change rather slowly and unintentionally, as some historians have claimed.

The gain from rising productivity; more output and/or less work?

While the rate at which output-per-worker increases is constant neither over time nor across different countries, it is generally positive – and sometimes high – in modern capitalist economies. It is thus possible to have increasing output with unchanged labour input; or decreasing amounts of work with constant output; or, of course, some combination of more output and less work. And less work, per year say, can take different forms – e.g., fewer hours per week and/or fewer weeks per year; a falling ratio of working population to total population; working ‘less hard’ or in a more enjoyable way; and so on. The various ways in which the gain from rising productivity has in fact been shared out between rising output and different forms of work reduction have been examined both by economists (for example, Blanchard, 2004) and by historians (for example, Hubermann and Minns, 2007). Thus Blanchard found, for example, when comparing Europe with the US, that output per hour of work grew faster in Europe but that hours of work per head of population fell faster in Europe. The two effects roughly balanced, meaning that relative output per head of population remained about constant. And Hubermann and Minns maintained that the American tendency to take the gain in the form of greater output, rather than in that of shorter working hours (unlike the European trend) is not just a recent phenomenon but represents a historically long-standing difference between American and European societies.

Interesting as it may be to ask how the gains from rising productivity have actually been taken advantage of, it is quite a different question to ask what division between ‘more output’ and ‘less work’ is the most desirable. J.K. Galbraith in his famous book *The Affluent Society* (2nd ed., 1969) argued, for example, that making work easier and more pleasant is just as relevant as reducing hours of work (Galbraith, 1969: 299). In his view, the goal of everyone having ‘an occupation that is interesting and rewarding’ is more worthwhile than the goal of increasing output still further (Galbraith, 1969: 310). That view can, of course, be seen as a relatively early version of more recent objections to an undue concern with maximizing the growth of the Gross Domestic Product. (Or, at least, of some aspects of those objections.) It is also echoed, in part, by recent demands for a better ‘work-life-balance’. (This is a strange expression, for is not work a part of life? It seems to reflect the view that ‘work’, a bad thing, is *merely* a means to ‘life’, a good thing. As noted above, this is far too simple-minded a view.)

Stronger versions of the rejection of any GDP-growth obsession have, of course, been with us for some time. As we saw above, John Stuart Mill and John Maynard Keynes envisaged both the possibility and the desirability of a *zero*-growth in economic output. This could naturally be consistent with a continuing rise in productivity and a consequent reduction of some kind in the amount of ‘work’ done. It is less obvious that its implementation in the near future would be consistent with the obligations of advanced economies to poorer countries. Should the former perhaps be increasing their GDPs and giving more to the latter?

Economists on work versus leisure

We have insisted above that there need not be any sharp work/leisure dichotomy, yet contemporary economists do quite often reason *as if* there were such a hard and fast boundary, with work being simply a pain undergone in order to produce income and all pleasure coming under the heading of leisure. This is certainly *not* a necessary assumption for economic theory, however. Already in 1870, William Stanley Jevons went out of his way, when discussing labour time, to make it clear that a worker might derive positive pleasure from the earlier hours of work in a day; it only has to be supposed that the 'last' hour of work is felt as a 'disutility' that needs to be compensated by the payment of a wage. That a worker derives some positive satisfaction from working is perfectly compatible with the economists' idea that a wage payment is needed to draw out that worker's last hour of work. (That is, for a worker who can choose the number of hours worked, whether through overtime or otherwise.)

In so far as real wage rates are closely linked to productivity, the ever-rising level of productivity pulls up real wage rates and thus increases the loss of income incurred by any worker who decides to work, say, one hour less per week. Hence economists tend to emphasize that rising labour productivity increases 'the cost of leisure' and, perhaps, plays *some* role in discouraging workers from shortening their hours of work in response to rising real wage. Of course, other factors are also relevant, but that is no reason for ignoring the economists' perfectly sensible idea of the increasing cost of non-working time.

(One of the other factors, encouraging at least some people to work long hours, may be a *fear* of leisure time. There may be people who find companionship and significance, say, at work but who experience loneliness and aimlessness when not at work.)

Satisfying work

The impact of work on people's well-being does not, of course, depend only on the number of hours put in (together with related travel time). It depends also on *what* they are doing, whether it is or is not intrinsically enjoyable or interesting, whether it is or is not something they can be proud of doing, whether it does or does not give scope for initiative and creativity, whether or not it involves congenial social relationships, and so on and on; there are *many* dimensions to the matter of whether work is satisfying, meaningful, valuable for its own sake. (How often has the reader heard someone saying that they enjoy their work, except for the ever-increasing amount of bureaucratic form-filling?) And there is certainly no reason to suppose that every individual worker will attach the same relative importance to these various dimensions; different people, after all, are different. There may, nevertheless, be a sufficient degree of agreement about such issues to make it possible to have worthwhile discussion about the relative importance of (a) increasing output, (b) reducing hours of work, and (c) improving the 'quality' of work (understood, preferably, not just in terms of subjective 'happiness' but, rather, in terms of various objective criteria).

Whatever the result of such discussion might be in any given context, it would then be another question how the desired outcomes concerning output, hours and 'work quality' might actually be achieved.

An output imperative?

Galbraith once suggested that capitalist firms have a 'vested interest in output'; perhaps increasing output will be more important to them than reducing hours of work, or than making work more enjoyable? Whether firms be sales revenue maximizers or profit maximizers, perhaps they will always be pushing for more output and greater 'efficiency' in the production process. Advertising and other sales promotion activities, it might seem, will always be geared to stimulating output and never to encouraging increased leisure.

It is true that one cannot simply assume that firms will necessarily be motivated to bring about the 'output/hours/quality of work' mix that might be suggested by disinterested debate over what is desirable. One must nevertheless note that the suggestions of the preceding paragraph were probably too simple-minded. For one thing, changing work practices in such a way that work becomes more congenial may, in some cases, increase efficiency and lower costs. Then the drive to maximize profits (and hence to minimize costs) will in fact lead firms to make work more enjoyable. (How far employers will be prepared to go in giving their employees a greater say in how work is done will be a fascinating issue; there is, of course, no reason to assume that the answer will be the same in every industry, or to assume that *all* workers wish to assume greater responsibility.) And on the sales side, it must be borne in mind that 'consumption takes time' and that households will not buy, e.g., much camping gear, or many kayaks, if they have no leisure time in which to use them. For the capitalist system as a whole, therefore, the relationship between output and non-working time is less simple than was implied in the previous paragraph. (It is, of course, important that we just referred to the system 'as a whole'. An individual firm producing tents or kayaks has only a minimal influence over the total amount of non-working time in the economy. It may thus seek to maximize output and sales of tents or kayaks, whilst hoping that firms in general will reduce working hours.)

With respect to different uses of non-working time, firms will have an incentive to encourage 'commodity-intensive' forms of leisure: skiing generates more sales than meditating. One must not be naïve about 'simple pleasures', however; hill-walkers can spend a lot of money on the best boots, clothing and G.P.S. equipment; even meditators can spend money on mats and benches and on meditation schools and retreats! Yet the fact remains that firms will be inclined to promote commodity-intensive forms of leisure and that this is not necessarily conducive to leisure time being used in good ways.

Education for leisure

Whatever may be taken to be good (and less good) ways of spending non-working time, it matters that some of them at least will not be ways that people spontaneously enjoy and derive the maximum benefit from. Some good ways of spending time need to be learned and practised. This raises the question whether formal education, at school level at least, should be devoted in part to teaching children to engage in and enjoy good leisure activities, as well as training them to become employable. Lessons in music and in various sporting activities are common in schools, of course, but perhaps there are other desirable 'education for leisure' courses that should be introduced. (And there may be pressures to reduce the time given to music and sports in UK schools.)

Adult, voluntary education for leisure is also important, of course, but it has been cut back greatly in the UK in recent decades.

Retirement

If the retirement age in a given country remains the same as people live longer and longer then, automatically, an increasing percentage of the population is not working and, to that extent, 'leisure' is increasing. But then the issue arises of whether the productivity of those in work is rising fast enough both to increase their real wages *and* to provide adequate pensions for the retired. The days in which men, for example, retired at age 65 and often died before they reached 68 are long gone and the retirement age and pension arrangements in many advanced countries are now under increasing strain. Increases in the age of retirement are more and more likely and inevitably push against any general pressure for more leisure time. They will also require some changes in working practices, at least with respect to types of work involving considerable physical strength and/or agility.

The aging of the population has other implications for patterns of time-use. Increasing amounts of time, per year say, are now devoted – predominately by women – to the care of the elderly, whether by relatives or by paid employees. Elderly-care by relatives is an important example of time-use which is unpaid and both rewarding and (sometimes) distressing. It has been stated recently (*Mature Times*, June 2015) that, 'Across the UK today 6.5 million people are carers, supporting a loved one who is older, disabled or seriously ill. That's 1 in 8 adults who care, unpaid, for family and friends ... Every day 6,000 more people become carers.' (*Mature Times*, 2015: 1 & 4). The same source states that the number of 'over 75s' in the UK is predicted to increase by 37% to 7.3 million in 2025'. (p.4) If these figures are even roughly right then they carry very significant implications for the use of many people's time (both in paid and in unpaid caring activity) as the population ages.

Income and not-working

Pensions are not the only form of income received without there being corresponding work. Advanced capitalist economies often provide income-supplements of various kinds and there has been a tendency, in Europe at least, to shift from minimum-wage legislation to different kinds of *negative-income tax* (Blanchard, 2004: 23), which gives low-income recipients income which is additional to what they earn (and indeed increases as they earn less). The link between 'post-tax-and benefit' income, on the one hand, and work done, on the other, is thus weaker than that between 'pre-tax-and benefit' income and work.

A more radical approach to this link is to propose a 'basic income' or 'citizen's income' under which everyone would receive, simply by virtue of being a citizen of a certain country, a fixed basic income independent of how much work they do. It would be the same even for someone who does not work at all. (Everyone is then free to earn additional income.) This proposal has – unsurprisingly – been a controversial one but it has been supported by serious people, such as the economist James Meade, the political philosopher Philippe Van Parijs and the financial commentator Sir Samuel Brittan. This is not the place to enter into discussion of the controversy over basic income but any reader concerned with the issue of work and leisure might well wish to pursue the matter. (The Skidelskys (2013: 197-202), for example, pay considerable attention to basic income in their discussion of 'Money and the Good Life'.)

Final thoughts

The above brief discussion will perhaps have sufficed to persuade the reader that to focus on the ways in which the different members of a society use their time is a good way in which to organize one's thoughts about the changing nature of that society, about its social relationships, about (in)equality and about the implications of various moral attitudes for the ways in which people will act. It also provides a helpful framework for the ethical assessment of a society and of its policies, for considering how far they do or do not help people to lead a good life. Thinking about time-use will not, of course, tell one "What constitutes 'a good life'?" and we generously leave the task of answering that question to the reader.

Reflection

We conclude by posing a few questions that readers may wish to ponder. Some readers might even wish to e-mail their 'answers' info@williamtemplefoundation.org.uk.

Is it desirable to restrict GDP growth in favour of reducing the amount of work done? If so, what is the best form (or are the best forms) of work reduction? Or is making work more satisfying perhaps more valuable than simply reducing hours of work? Would all employees welcome greater responsibility at work? And if it is the desire for a high *relative* income, or consumption, that pushes output and hours-worked to increase, is there in fact much scope for reducing hours of work?

Would it be *wrong* for rich countries to curb either GDP growth or hours worked, when there is the alternative of giving greater assistance to poor countries? How does the answer to this question interact with the answer to the question whether GDP growth should be restricted for environmental reasons?

What forms (if any) should 'education for leisure' take? And should some uses of non-working time be encouraged and others discouraged?

Should the general age of retirement from paid work be increased as the population ages? What kinds of work are best suited to older workers? And how are the ever-increasing needs for care of the elderly to be best met?

Is the idea of a 'basic income' for every citizen to be supported? Can a country with a basic income scheme also have a liberal immigration policy?

To what extent do new goods and services contribute to the leading of good lives? Since no-one is *obliged* to use them, is it consumers rather than producers who bear the moral responsibility for their use?

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