

The Economics of Sustainable Leisure

*E. Christopher Mare
Antioch University Seattle
Whole Systems Design
Autumn 2002*

Introduction

“What is the purpose of human life?” That is a question that has pre-occupied the minds of philosophers, theologians, and metaphysicians since time immemorial, since human beings first had the opportunity to gather around with one another and *think*.

One might just as easily ask, *“What is the purpose of Life?”* That is, Life as phenomena – the living as opposed to the non-living. From a biophysics point of view, the purpose of Life is to retard ‘entropy;’ but could that really be called its *purpose*? Or is it more like a consequence? A by-product? Maybe it’s just part of the definition: Life is what happens at the opposite pole of entropy, as a result of the processing of ‘negentropy’ or ‘syntropy.’ From that perspective, there is no real purpose to Life at all: Life just happens because it can, because it is possible.

Reflection and contemplation on ultimate purpose is only possible in the self-conscious, self-reflexive, self-referencing mind-field of the *human* experience (as far as we know); we could even go so far as to say that this sort of contemplation is a *function* of the human experience. Questioning purpose implies a search for meaning – critically evaluating the current nature of what exists, sifting through all the possibilities of what could be, and then arriving at an image of what is desired or preferred: What do we *want* our purpose to be? What *will be* the meaning of our lives? This kind of questioning invokes proactive free will vs. reactive causal determinism.

As a proactive free-willer presenting a premise from which to enter this discussion, I propose that the purpose of human life is this: Creating the context in which a glimpse of ultimate purpose may manifest *itself*, naturally, and once brought to conscious awareness, can be acted upon, with full intent. The *purpose* of human life is to discover and experience the *meaning* of human life; the purpose of an individual life is to discover and experience the meaning of that individual life. Humanity as a collective whole may have a common purpose, as just one component of the biosphere, but each individual within that whole has a unique purpose.¹ Discovering, experiencing, and actualizing the meaning of this unique purpose, this unique orientation to the whole, is the goal, the aim of the *individuated Self*.²

¹ “[T]he work of human works...[is] to establish, in and by means of each one of us, an absolutely original center in which the universe reflects itself in a unique and inimitable way” (Teilhard de Chardin, quoted in Edinger, 1992, p.105).

² The term ‘individuated Self’ is made in full reference to Jung’s original interpretation. This psychological aspect of the “Economics of Sustainable Leisure” will be reviewed in more detail as this paper proceeds.

It is very significant to have exclaimed in the above premise that understanding the purpose of human life begins with *creating the context* in which this understanding may appear, naturally, of its own accord. The context is an actual physical setting where actual physical bodies can provide for their actual physical needs, first. Once these needs have been taken care of, then, in a Maslovian sense, the free-will human being will have the free time necessary to resume contemplating meaning, imagining possibilities, and actualizing the full potentials of the individuated Self in 3-D reality, in actual physical form. If one skips creating the context and rushes right in, eager to comprehend meaning and purpose, one will have a shaky foundation, and the conclusions reached may turn out to be distortions.

I emphasize the innate physicality underlying human purpose – indeed, the inescapable *material* basis of earthly existence – because of a serious oversight I have detected in much of the thinking regarding the ‘evolution of consciousness,’ namely that it can or will proceed *exo-somatically* – outside of or without a body. This is perhaps grist for a whole other essay, but for now I just want to ask: What good is sculpting more detailed relief into the noosphere if the foundation of that sphere – the living, breathing, metabolizing biophysical basis of human existence – is not viable or functional or co-supportive? Biophysical here refers to both internal and external environments. What good are so many disembodied thought-forms if they are not directly contributing to the health and vitality – and prosperous evolution – of the real bodies and real ecologies from which they originated, and through which they are ultimately sustained? I guess you might say that I’m wanting to see an ‘eco’ prefix in front of the term ‘consciousness.’

All of the above is what I have in mind when introducing the phrase “The Economics of Sustainable Leisure.” To summarize: ‘Leisure’ is time freed from strictly utilitarian or dutiful activities, time that can be passed as one would choose, time that can be used, especially, to develop and refine those qualities that are one’s unique orientation to the whole – these qualities, of course, being an expression of the individuated Self. ‘Economics’ defines a socio-cultural system of production and sustenance that can provide a secure and copious material base from which to comfortably support leisure and the resulting impetus for self-actualization. ‘Sustainable’ refers to the time-independent condition or set of conditions whereby the above values and priorities may be continued into the indefinite future.

Creating and providing for these conditions, this living context, is what I have proposed to be the very purpose of human life. If not this, then what? Proposing some

implementable strategies for effectively realizing these conditions, this living context, is the purpose of this paper.

To gather evidence to support some concluding proposals, I will investigate previous socio-economic patterns in which ample creative leisure time was either a consequence or a priority. I will critically evaluate specifics of these prior patterns in order to derive and synthesize those effective strategies of the past that may be effectually forwarded to an “economics of sustainable leisure” for the present. These strategies will then become ‘design criteria’ for the practical implementation of an ideal living situation in which the purpose of human life may generously manifest itself, and thus be fulfilled.

The previous socio-economic patterns that will be investigated are: 1) generic hunter-gatherer bands, 2) the Classical Greek polis, 3) the monastic tradition, and especially the medieval European version, and 4) techno-industrial capitalist society.

Generic Hunter-Gatherer Bands

“*Homo sapiens* has been a hunter and gatherer for 90 percent of his existence, and if to this period we add the era of pre-man, the figure rises to 99 percent of our ancestry. Because of this long evolutionary experience, hunting and gathering is the way of life for which we are genetically “wired,” and it fits comfortably with our physical and psychological makeup” (Johnson, 1978, p. 33).

Any discussion about ‘human nature,’ or the ‘human purpose’ I’m attempting to reconstruct here, must include this long, extended gestation period of modern humanity. Although eventually eclipsed by the Agricultural Revolution and then the Industrial Revolution as predominant ways of life, the hunting-gathering lifestyle has continued to endure wherever it has been possible, even to the present day – so there still must be a little bit of hunter-gatherer in all of us. There is something inherently and distinctly ‘human’ about this way of life. Some hunter-gatherer based societies, like the Australian Aboriginals or the Kalahari Bushmen, have endured relatively unchanged for some 100,000 years.³ This proves this mode of living to be very sustainable in the long run.

While specific adaptation and subsistence strategies varied widely due to the intimately symbiotic relationship between a hunting-gathering group and its encompassing local ecology, “there were [nevertheless] commonalities in the hunter-gatherer way of life. People lived in small, mobile bands of about twenty-five individuals...These bands interacted with others, forming a social and political network

³ Who’s to say that ‘Dreamtime’ is not any more vivid, satisfying, or *real* than ‘clock-time?’

linked by customs and language. Numbering typically about five-hundred individuals, this network of bands is known as a dialectical tribe. The bands occupied temporary camps, from which they pursued their daily food quest” (Leahey, 1994, p. 60). In bounteous and abundant ecological milieus like the Pacific Northwest of America, however, a hunter-gatherer economic system could achieve its security and affluence in permanent, village-scale settlements.

Other prevalent characteristics of this lifestyle include: 1) strong social cohesion resulting from acknowledged descent from common ancestors; 2) unselfish economic cooperation and “mutual aid” within the group;⁴ 3) a clear division of labor between the genders; 4) the camp as a place of intense social interaction; 5) the sharing of food often involving elaborate ritual; 6) a de-emphasis on the accumulation of personal possessions and the resulting absence of class status; 7) deep functional knowledge of the flora and fauna (and spirits) of the local place and a deep identification with that place; 8) internal cultural mechanisms and taboos for controlling population; and, last but not least, as a direct organic outgrowth of this mode of living, 9) *inordinate amounts of ample leisure time*.

Says Leahey, “[The hunter-gatherer lifestyle] is an extremely efficient mode of subsistence, so that foragers can often collect in three or four hours sufficient food for the day...Hunter-gatherers are attuned to their physical environment in a way that is difficult for the urbanized Western mind to grasp” (1994, p. 61). Wm. Kotke is even more generous: “[A]nthropologists studying tribal foragers calculate that they had exceptional health and each person averaged 500 hours “work” annually to sustain themselves...Anthropologists who study agriculture-forager-hunter people worldwide say individuals of those cultures each average 1,000 hours “work” per year and that their health is not as good as the forager-hunter” (1990, p. 91); and he goes on, “Now, people work 2000 hours⁵ annually and need constant medical attention. [Their] diet is refined and produced by mass industrial production” (p. 93).

Even if these figures are debatable and dependent on specific bioclimatic regimes, the point is clear: the more advanced and complex an economic production system becomes, the more time and effort is required to participate in and comply with its demands. Picture a modern, advanced, post-industrial, urban human feverishly working eight, nine, even ten hours a day to meet his or her accumulated and often imposed ‘needs;’ then picture a Haida tribesman on the Salish coast. Which person is

⁴ “The phrase “survival of the fittest” is correct only up to a point; beyond that it should be “survival of the most cooperative” (Johnson, 1978, p.35).

⁵ I calculate this figure to be in upwards of 2500 hours per year, in current economic circumstances, out of a total of 8760 hours available. Taking eight hours of sleep at 2920 hours into account, that leaves a total of 3340 hours available per year for the possibility of pursuing leisure compared to 5340 for a hunter-gatherer.

going to have more leisure time? In all seriousness, if we want to design for “sustainable leisure,” then which lifestyle should we model and emulate?

It seems certain that a sense of distinct ‘individuality,’ as we post-industrialists know it, in hunter-gatherer groups was/is virtually unknown. For them, identity was/is aligned with the immediate social group, first, and then with the local life-force of their home place next. There was/is very little sense of a discrete ‘I,’ pursuing its own independent goals, outside of this context. Tribal peoples in general have much more of a collective orientation than a subjective one.

Traditionally, then, the ample leisure time afforded these people by their lifestyles was not filled with what could be called “the drive for self-actualization,” nor with the impetus for realizing the full expression of a proposed “individuated Self.” No, after the needs of the group were met, the leisure time that followed was unpretentiously filled with singing, dancing, chanting, telling stories, playing games, negotiating the mating dance of love, ingesting entheogens and gazing at the sky – you know, *just being human*. They were not contemplating the purpose or meaning of human existence – *they were living it*. Alas, we will not be able to rejoin their innocent naïve simplicity – for we have been expelled from the Garden – but there are surely some lessons to be gleaned from this lifestyle that can be used as design criteria in an “Economics of Sustainable Leisure” for the 21st century. The design criteria will be re-collected and formulated at the culmination of this essay.

Classical Greek Polis

“[I]t is to the Greek city-states of the fifth century B.C., particularly to Athens, that we have to turn if we are to see the emergence and definition of the distinctive qualities of Western civilization...We look for the rule of law, the participation of citizens in a self-governing community, *the recognition of the dignity of the individual*, the vision of the high potentiality of human reason, and the development of scientific and philosophical systems” (Finley, 1972, p. 62, emphasis added).

What can be gleaned by a cursory study of the Classical Greek socio-economic model that would be applicable to an “economics of sustainable leisure” for the 21st century? After all, it was in the Greek mind-field that the ideal of a life devoted to contemplative leisure first reached a level of widespread acceptance, respectability, and meaning.⁶ Yet, it was not only the sagacious, self-absorbed life of the philosopher that was honored; excellence of individual achievement and accomplishment in any field – athletics, oration, mathematics, warriorship, sculpture, poetry, etc. – was equally

⁶ Aristotle says of leisure: “A man will live thus, not to the extent that he is a man, but to the extent that a divine principle dwells within him” (as quoted in Pieper, 1952, p.4).

exalted. This was the birth of the ‘humanistic tradition’ that would grow to find full archetypal expression in Jung’s conception of the individuated Self.⁷

This earnest, idealist focus on the individual was amply demonstrated in the socio-political organization of the day, where literally hundreds of self-organizing units – the esteemed individual *poleis* – “were entirely independent of one another, with different constitutions, laws, ways of life and means of defense, and even different ways of speaking the same language and worshipping the same deities” (Freeman, 1963, p. 11). This cultural diversity originated within and was a direct reflection of geography: the mountainous, crenellated, inaccessible and difficulty-traversed terrain that is the Greek peninsula. The resulting inability or unwillingness to organize into a larger national unity is given as a significant cause for the eventual demise and lack of diffusion of Classical Greek culture. Nevertheless, the sum total that was the confluence of these scattered and individuated *poleis* sparked within a very short time an intellectual and artistic brilliance that has not seen an equal since; indeed, we are still living with the heritage of their cultural legacy.

“The unexamined life is not worth living.” This familiar quote from Socrates was taken to heart by his loyal student Plato, who in 385 B.C. founded the “Academy” – perhaps the world’s first institutionalization of a life-purpose devoted to contemplative leisure. “The Academy can justly be termed the beginning of organized Higher Education...[Plato] believed in a rigorous training in mathematics as a preliminary to a metaphysic which enabled the pupil to derive the principles of practical government from the Idea of the Good, perceived through this training as the principle of the Universe⁸...the Academy was concerned with rhetoric, literary criticism (in a new positive form), scientific classification and logic, as well as mathematics and pure philosophy” (Webster, 1969, p. 52).

Based on or as concomitant to this kind of directed formalized education, Plato set forth his political philosophy in the *Republic*, perhaps the world’s first Utopian treatise. In the *Republic* we get a glimpse of what life must have been like in the sacred olive groves in which the Academy was nestled.⁹ Here, men and women seem to have had the leisure time to lounge around daily, eating grapes, unhurriedly deliberating perennial philosophical questions that still have relevance for us 2500 years later. As the treatise unfolds, delivered by the dialectic Socratic dialogue, we get an emerging image

⁷ “There is a destination, a possible goal...[t]hat is the way of individuation. Individuation means becoming an “in-dividual,” and, in so far as “individuality” embraces our innermost, last, and incomparable uniqueness, it also implies becoming one’s own self. We could, therefore, translate individuation as “coming to selfhood” or “self-realization”” (Jung, 1990, p.147).

⁸ Or, as Finley elaborates, “It is from Plato that the Western world derives the view that beyond the ephemeral and the particular there lie universal and eternal forms or patterns, and that the creative power of ideas makes a viable and comprehensible world out of formless matter” (1972, p.62).

⁹ The word “Academy” is derived from a legendary Attican hero named *Akademios*.

of the characteristics of the ideal *polis*, the ideal society, the ideal city. Not surprisingly, we find that the ideal polis is governed by a small elite group of men and women – the “Guardians” – who have been conscientiously and purposely trained for their positions from a young age.

I say “not surprisingly” (and without reproach) because the Academy itself was very much an institution conceived for the inculcation of the elite. “[T]he Academy was largely a school for statesman and political consultants, and several of its members acted in this latter capacity in various cities” (Grube, 1974, p. viii). Plato himself was born into a wealthy aristocratic family and was expected from a young age to go into politics. As an idealist – and as one who witnessed the decline of Athens through the Peloponnesian War, largely through political incompetence – he declined. Plato’s uncle, Critias, was part of an oligarchy that later became known as the government of the Thirty Tyrants. Does this not seem paradoxical in a society that introduced to the world the principles of democracy?

Not wholly paradoxical, because the entirety of Classical Greek culture was prominently and strictly stratified. It has been estimated that out of a greater population of some 250,000 at its height, Athens contained some 60,000 to 80,000 slaves, about the same proportion as existed in the American South before the Civil War (Finley, 1972, p. 80). “Plato, for example, mentioned five domestics [slaves] in his will, Aristotle more than fourteen, his successor Theophrastus, seven...[the slaves] released from any economic concern, or even activity, the men who gave political leadership to the state, and a large measure the intellectual leadership as well” (ibid).

While Plato was imagining the ideal Republic to be guided by enlightened “philosopher-kings” devoid of personal property, one gets the impression that the Academy itself may have been more likely producing wealthy men of privilege. While creating the context for cultivating individual excellence is certainly a noble effort, and is in essence the goal of this present inquiry, one must question the ‘sustainability’ of having the project wholly maintained by the labor of slaves. While the elites of the Academy were attentively, studiously, leisurely contemplating the highest potentials of human nature and the comparative benefits of free persons in a democracy, their lunch was being prepared by individual persons with no free choice in the matter. My hunch is that there is an inner tension to this kind of arrangement that will prevent it from long enduring.

The above has been an exploration into the second historical socio-economic model that provided for contemplative leisure. Potential design criteria for an “economics of sustainable leisure” in the 21st century will be re-collected and enumerated at the

culmination of this essay. But before moving on to the monastic tradition, especially the medieval European version, another revealing quote from Aristotle, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, c. 340 B.C.E.: “Happiness lies in virtuous activity, and perfect happiness lies in the best activity, which is contemplative. Contemplation is preferable to war or politics or any other practical career, because it allows leisure, and leisure is essential to happiness...Man cannot be *wholly* contemplative, but in so far as he is so he shares in the divine life. The activity of God, which surpasses all others in blessedness, must be contemplative. And that all these attributes belong most of all to the philosopher is manifest. He, therefore, is the dearest to the gods. And he who is will presumably also be the happiest; so that in this way too the philosopher will more than any other be happy.”

The Monastic Tradition, Especially the Medieval European Version

Is not the image of medieval monks or nuns cloistered in their monastery, reverently studying the gospel, the very apotheosis of a life devoted to contemplative leisure? Perhaps; although it must be remembered that all religious traditions from all times and places have had their own form of devout religious community sequestered somewhat from the rest of society; and it also must be remembered that some monks are hermits.

If the presence of organized religion is considered as one of the defining characteristics of civilization, such that pre-civilization or exo-civilization cultures have no need for organized religion and instead practice some form of vernacular, nature-based spirituality, then the religious community in all times and places serves as a refuge or haven for those unwilling or unable to engage the secular compulsions and priorities of civilization. But so is prison to a certain extent! Is the would-be, aspiring monk or nun driven by an ardent pious desire to know and be one with God? Or is the drive a need to escape the internal disorientation resulting from being compelled to participate in a society whose values and aims s/he cannot identify with?

Thomas Merton, the monk, helps to clarify these questions: “We are likely to meet postulants in two kinds of identity crisis: those whose adolescent identity problem has not been solved and practically cannot be solved because they are too neurotic; and those with an identity crisis on a deeper spiritual level. The former do not really want an identity. They do not want to be mature and we can do nothing with them...The latter people are capable of maturing spiritually. They have excellent qualities, and they are handicapped only by the deep self-doubt and inner confusion that come from not experiencing themselves as really having a mind and a will of their own” (Merton, 1998, p. 44).

Merton is writing about mid-20th century seekers from a Christian background; but could this not be the psychological profile of any monk from any age? If that is so, if the primary reason for entering a monastery is the resolution of a disconcerting identity crisis, then the monastery does indeed serve as a context for self-actualization, for realizing the individuated Self. In these cases, the personally experienced self reaches the Jungian ideal of merging with and becoming one with the larger collective Self.¹⁰

Whatever their initial motivations, the life of contemplative community that is the monastic tradition surely transforms its participants. “[W]hat are monks like?...the answer is curiously simple. They have a great deal in common which cuts across differences of rule, culture, climate, language and religious belief...What marks the monks in the course of their long lives is a silence of the spirit, a childish innocence, an apparently meaningless goodness. They become like good children playing at being good. Their simplicity is more obvious than their depth...through celibacy, community isolation, and the long, sober intoxication of prayer, the monks in old age develop [a] kind of eccentricity...They perch more lightly on the globe than the rest of us” (Levi, 1987, p. 15). If the purpose of human life is to discover the meaning of human life than perhaps this is the path to it: The qualities described above are the timeless qualities at the root of human nature. When all the distractions, inconveniences and intrusions of temporal, civilized, secular life are pared down, whittled away, then what is uncovered at last is the brilliant primordial essence of humanness. This essence is able to reveal itself naturally and spontaneously in the context of contemplative community.

Now that I’ve given rational justification (as if it needs any) for the monastic tradition, in the sense that the monks and nuns are preserving for us what is the primordial essence of human nature, I’m still curious to know how they support themselves. How are the primary material needs of bodily existence provided for in this kind of life of contemplative leisure? To answer this essentially economic question, I want to look specifically at a medieval tradition from a time well before the Industrial Revolution. Post-Industrial Revolution influences will be looked at in the next section.

“The impressive agrarian record of 12th century Cistercians was not the reward of new and revolutionary techniques or economic principles; it was largely a byproduct of the organization and spiritual aspirations of the Order...The monks’ dedication to poverty and their resolution to live in total seclusion, free from secular and feudal entanglements, forced them to forego customary sources of ecclesiastical revenue and to seek remote and uncultivated “deserts” where the only means of survival was, of

¹⁰ “In its broad outlines the individuation process...falls into two main independent parts...The parts are the first and second halves of life...The task of the second half is a so-called ‘initiation into the inner reality,’ a deeper self-knowledge and knowledge of humanity, a ‘turning back’ (*reflectio*) to the traits of one’s nature that have hitherto remained unconscious or become so. By raising the traits to consciousness the individual achieves an inward and outward bond with the world and the cosmic order” (Jacobi, 1973, p.108).

necessity, *their own manual labor* spent reclaiming the land at their disposal” (Lekai, 1972, p. 282, emphasis added).

“The success of Cistercian agrarian economy and its superiority over the antiquated and decaying manors lay largely in the organization and planned exploitation of the Order’s estates...Cistercian settlers [in contrast to the manorial serfs, handicapped by numerous dues and obligations] worked for themselves, inspired by the fact that life and survival depended on the success of their labors” (ibid, p.295).

These descriptions of the Cistercian economy provide beautiful working examples of an “economics of sustainable leisure.” The monks took care of their needs themselves – *they were self-reliant* in the context of small, self-contained communities. Their life was not all chanting and prayer and self-absorbed philosophical or theological speculation – they were out there tilling the garden, tending the sheep, building the cloisters, etc. In marked contrast to the kind of contemplative leisure propounded by the Classical Greeks, these monks *included* the labor of daily life in their contemplation. I regard this attitude as very respectable, dignified, *and*, ultimately, very sustainable. “Leisure is not the opposite of work (we should be able to work in leisure). The opposite of work is play” (Steindl-Rast, 1972, p. 295).

While it is certainly true that the Cistercians relied on donations or grants to acquire their land in the first place, once it was obtained they became very productive and caring stewards. One might say that monks of all persuasions are performing vital economic functions for the greater whole by their choice of vocation. Just think: if I was exceedingly wealthy and made a token donation to a religious order so that my prayers might be answered or so that I might retain a right relationship with God in spite of my avariciousness, then a real economic function will have been fulfilled. The monasteries must set up a positive vibration in the local area that benefits everyone.

I do not know enough to be able to extrapolate the Cistercian example throughout all of the European medieval monastic orders, but I imagine these rest were all pretty much self-reliant in this way, with internal economies of their own. The big hurdle was acquiring the land in the first place or maintaining an existing abbey without being overburdened with taxes or tithes.

A friend of mine who grew up in Switzerland says her Dad was educated at a fairly wealthy and somewhat famous monastery. Besides a school, the monastery also served as an orphanage and a hospital. The monks made fine wines and medicinal tinctures for sale. And, she says, they ate very well from the land they tended.

There is much to learn from the monastic tradition when formulating an “economics of sustainable leisure” for the 21st century. Specific conclusions and comparisons will be drawn at the culmination of this exploratory essay.

Techno-Industrial Capitalist Society

This cursory historical exploration of examples of people coming together to create contemplative community, and in particular the economics that supported such a lifestyle, has finally arrived at the present. What can be learned from the techno-industrial capitalist system in our move to create a contemplative community of sustainable leisure?

In this type of society, the opportunities for living a life of leisure (with or without contemplation) are easily attainable and accessible to all – at least in theory. Wasn't that the materialist promise of the Industrial Revolution – that increased production would automatically solve the majority of social problems? So much production and consumption was supposed to translate into wealth, prosperity and affluence for all. The human ideal would finally have a chance to unfold in all its glory!

Now that we've reached an advanced (and, according to Berman, 2000, *declining*) stage of this novel, one-of-a-kind type of society enabled by a one-time energy bonanza, a quick survey of the social landscape will reveal that the promise was not fulfilled. Sure, compared to the historical examples viewed above, there is certainly an increased *standard* of living, based on the throughput consumption of material goods, and evidenced by scattered pockets of leisurely affluence, but poverty is still widespread and on the rise. What's worse, it would seem that the human purpose has become grossly distorted in the mechanized industrialization process. If the *purpose* of human life is to discover and experience the *meaning* of human life, and to create the context in which an understanding of such meaning can unfold naturally, then what has transpired instead is a *substitution* of the search for meaning with the endless search for the means of acquiring ever more material goods. The obvious question is: To what extent does the acquisition of material goods contribute to meaning? Of course, when one speaks in broad terms like 'society' one invokes generalities, not pertaining to all; still this material acquisitiveness is a defining characteristic of this day and age.

If we are so advanced, then why does an average member of this society work up to *five times* as much as a hunter-gatherer just to meet their basic needs? Work here refers to something we do to accomplish a purpose which lies outside the activity itself, such as simply maintaining the needs of day-to-day existence through paying rent, taxes, car payments and insurance, etc. Something is askew here. I read somewhere (and I wish I could remember the reference; I think it was Hazel Henderson) that there is enough real wealth in the world for every single person to claim ten million dollars (\$10,000,000) worth for themselves. Or was it every single family? In either case, this is absolutely remarkable, extraordinary, preposterous. With so much affluence readily

available, why isn't every single person on the planet living a life of sustainable leisure, if that is what he or she would choose?

An economist named J.W. Smith, Ph.D., wrote a scholarly and immensely revealing tome entitled *The World's Wasted Wealth 2* (1994), in which he states in the preface: "We say we are efficient but we're not. If we were efficient we only need to work two days per week at no loss of food, fiber, shelter, or recreation...*productive* labor in the United States averages less than two days per week for each employable citizen...That 50 percent, or more, of society's labor is wasted has been known [for some seventy years]...That much unnecessary labor means that much capital is also wasted." Smith goes on to analyze in detail the structure of a system constructed for the "massive interception of wealth." Some of the themes he covers to arrive at his conclusions are: 1) the origin of the monopolization of the tools of production and the control of trade; 2) the siphoning of the world's wealth to centers of capital; 3) the formula for this wealth appropriation process; 4) that wars are fought over who will own the world's wealth; and 5) with their own industry, the world's impoverished could produce the necessities of life and rise out of poverty.

If, as mentioned earlier, one of the characteristics of civilization – that is, *city*-based socio-economic systems – is the presence of organized religion, then another defining characteristic is a strict hierarchical stratification by class. That some would consider themselves superior and because of that alleged superiority demand a greater share of the collective resource base is endemic to the system.¹¹ The quality that makes these people 'superior,' according to Schmookler (1984), is none other than the capability or willingness to consolidate, control, and wield arbitrary power. Because these people deem themselves superior, and have been bred into long family histories with this same belief, they tend to plunder and hoard as much material wealth as they can, to the deprivation of everyone else – *as if this was the purpose of human life*. This unbridled, and unfortunately uncontrollable, will to power is perhaps the central issue here. One must wonder, in contrast to the values of the ascetic monk, whether this willfulness is innate to human nature or is acquired. Additionally, we may rightly wonder what sort of cultural context could be created to temper and discourage the destructive tendencies?

A book written at the turn of the *last* century, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (Veblen, 1899), sheds some light on this issue. Speaking about sedentary communities at an "agricultural stage of industry," the author states: "[S]ince labor is their recognized and accepted mode of life, they take some emulative pride in a reputation for efficiency in their work" (p. 41); and then goes on to add, speaking about the "superior pecuniary

¹¹ An essential characteristic of *village*-based socio-economic systems, by contrast, is a deliberate effort to display parity in wealth and consumption.

class,” that “the most imperative of these secondary demands of emulation...is the *requirement of abstention from productive work*” (ibid, emphasis added). Veblen calls this “the predatory stage proper” and explains, “during the earlier stages of quasi-peaceable development of industry that follows the predatory stage, a life of leisure is the readiest and most conclusive evidence of pecuniary strength, and therefore of superior force...Conspicuous abstention from labor therefore becomes the conventional mark of superior pecuniary achievement and the conventional index of reputability; and conversely, since application to productive labor is a mark of poverty and subjection, it becomes inconsistent with a reputable standing in the community” (ibid, p. 43). Does this not sound like the attitude of the men lounging around in the Academy?¹² For both of these examples, the means of providing leisure was/is the institutionalized subjection of other human beings to do the basic labor.

One more quote from Veblen’s insightful book: “Even if the institution of a leisure class had not come in with the first emergence of individual ownership, by force of the dishonor attaching to productive employment, it would in any case have come in as one of the early consequences of ownership. And it is to be remarked that while the leisure class existed in theory from the beginning of predatory culture, the institution takes on new and fuller meaning with the transition from the predatory to the next succeeding stage of pecuniary culture” (ibid).

While written over a century ago, these passages still reveal so much about the imbalance of our times. The celebrated “leisure class” of capitalist society, if we may be blunt, is a class of predators, at best, or parasites at worst – and I think the bankers and those that manage “debt” are the most egregious of this category. These people are, in effect, sucking the productive life out of those less willing or less able to wield arbitrary power (including the biosphere itself!), all for the sake of providing for their leisure and vacations, and for reinforcing their hubristic exaggerations. And yet the paradox: with all this free time, are these so-called elite engaging themselves in deep contemplation on the purpose and meaning of life? Are they positively contributing to the world’s catalogue of accumulated wisdom and enlightenment? Probably not. Psychologically speaking, I would think they have a need to deny their deeper motivations and rationalize their actions; and so their free time is filled inordinately with useless and vacuous expediences with the purpose of maintaining and increasing their arbitrary power and their oblique standing within the hierarchy. It seems ironic but nevertheless cogent: the accumulation of excessive wealth may actually *detract* from a meaningful life of contemplative leisure.

¹² I must say, I’m a real fan of the Academy; however, I do believe it would be a much more replicable model if the students would do some of the basic sustenance work for themselves.

There is an important underlying issue here that needs attention: that of the attitude toward 'work.' How has it come to be that providing for one's most basic needs by one's own physical labor has become "disreputable" while coercing others to provide for one's needs fosters a "reputable standing in the community?" This attitude seems to present a palpable distortion of human nature, at least the primordial nature that can be traced back for more than two-million years. I have continually asseverated throughout my writings that this attitude is one of the more insidious and inevitable consequences of that socio-economic pattern called *civilization*.

In the classic *Small is Beautiful* (1973), E.F. Schumacher devotes a whole chapter to what he calls "Buddhist Economics." "'Right Livelihood" is one of the requirements of the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path. It is clear, therefore, that there must be such a thing as Buddhist Economics" (p. 53). "The Buddhist point of view takes the function of work to be at least threefold: to give a man a chance to utilise and develop his faculties; to enable him to overcome his ego-centredness by joining with other people in a common task; and to bring forth the goods and services needed for a becoming existence" (p. 54). "[T]o strive for leisure as an alternative to work would be considered a complete misunderstanding of one of the basic truths of human existence, mainly that work and leisure are complementary parts of the same living process and cannot be separated without destroying the joy of work and the bliss of leisure" (p. 55). I consider Schumacher's thinking here to reflect pure perennial wisdom. By these standards, the life of the celebrated "leisure class" of advanced, predatory capitalist society would appear to be in a state of abject spiritual poverty.

Then consider the words of another supposedly intelligent, educated man writing about *Leisure: The Basis of Culture* (Pieper, 1952). "The proletarian is the man who is fettered to the process of work. To be fettered to work means to be bound to this vast utilitarian process in which our needs are satisfied, and, the working man is wholly consumed in it" (p. 4). "Fettered" means to be "chained or shackled." If there is such a thing as a "proletarian," does this situation of humanity *choose* to be fettered? The author goes on to say: "The "total-work" State needs the spiritually impoverished, one-track mind of the "functionary" ...[P]roletarianism, thus understood, is perhaps a symptomatic state of mind common to all levels of society" (ibid). And yet, it was claimed that the idle leisure of the predatory class imbued a state of spiritual impoverishment!

Such misunderstanding posing as scholarship. As was displayed at the beginning of this section, there is already so much wealth and technological prowess available that no one need be 'fettered' to work; and yet, the joy of providing for oneself and one's family by honorable vocations – the joy of growing food and sharing it with friends, the joy of designing and making a handicraft to meet a need, the joy the Amish must feel

when helping to raise a barn for a neighbor – all this is lost if work is discounted as menial subjection to poverty. I would reaffirm as fundamental to this argument that the genuinely spiritually impoverished are the celebrated “leisure class,” people who have never gotten their fingernails dirty, who have never worked up a sweat in energetic physical labor, who live in sterile, self-serving, insipid bubbles of degenerative activity that they call leisure, who hoard and wield arbitrary power at the expense of the greater whole so that others must provide for their needs. This is not the purpose of human life; this is a pernicious distortion – and not only that, it leads to a flabby middle age.

I want to dutifully close this section by quoting and analyzing at length words from a celebrated ‘economist of the leisure class:’

“Excessive equality makes for cultural uniformity and monotony. Rich men are essential if there is to be an adequate subsidy to education and the arts. Equality smacks of communism and hence of atheism and therefore is spiritually suspect” (Galbraith, 1969, p. 65).¹³

“One insults the business executive or the scientist by suggesting that his principal motivation in life is the pay he receives. Pay is not important. Among other things, it is the prime index of prestige. Prestige – the respect, regard, and esteem of others – is in turn one of the more important sources of satisfaction associated with this kind of work. But, in general, those who do this kind of work expect to contribute their best regardless of compensation. They would be disturbed by any suggestion to the contrary” (ibid, p. 248).¹⁴

“Such is the labor of the New Class. No aristocrat ever contemplated the loss of feudal privileges with more sorrow than a member of this class would regard his descent into ordinary labor where the reward was only pay...In keeping with all past class behavior, the New Class seeks energetically to perpetuate itself. Offspring are not expected to plan their lives in order to make a large amount of money...From their earliest years, the children of the New Class are carefully indoctrinated in the importance of finding an occupation from which they will derive satisfaction – one which will involve not toil but enjoyment. One of the principal sources of sorrow and frustration in the New Class is the son who fails to make the grade – who drops down into some tedious and unrewarding occupation. The individual who meets with this

¹³ This sentiment directly contradicts the words of one Thomas Jefferson. To refresh the memory: “We hold these truths to be self evident, That all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive to these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its power in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness” (from Becker, 1942, p.8).

¹⁴ This kind of statement becomes a sort of absurd travesty in light of recent corporate scandals like Enron.

misfortune...is regarded by the community with pity not unmixed with horror” (ibid, pp. 249-50).

This kind of thinking is pure rubbish. Where is the dignity found in village-based cultures? The words of Galbraith read like a manifesto for the slacker, for the sloth, for the disingenuous at heart. With these kinds of values, one might suspect that someone as feeble as the ‘village idiot’ could treacherously rise to become president.

Conclusion: Design Criteria

This cursory survey of historical, anthropological, and sociological patterns, and their associated supporting economics, in which the potential for contemplative leisure was manifest, was intended to provide information that can be used practically when designing “sustainable communities of contemplative leisure” for the 21st century. What characteristics, traits, or features can be gleaned from these prior patterns and constructively brought into the present?

It is now possible to enumerate a few of these qualities as “design criteria” for a proposed “economics of sustainable leisure:”

- 1) *Design for frugality.* It seems quite clear that the possession of excessive wealth becomes a distraction to the goal of contemplative leisure. Where excessive wealth exists, it is always accompanied by strict class distinctions, where one side will inevitably have to play the role of slave – whether ‘wage slave’ or otherwise. This imposes inherent instability in the system and so is not sustainable in the long run.

Designing for frugality means strategically reducing ‘needs;’ the quickest way to increase wealth is to reduce needs. With less need there is less feckless busi-ness in one’s life and more time available for sweet contemplation.

Contemplative leisure, therefore, is concomitant with an attitude of simplicity.

Is it any wonder that monks take vows of poverty? All spiritual traditions emphasize asceticism as a pre-condition for genuine spiritual understanding; and spiritual understanding is the purpose, or at least one inevitable by-product, of a life devoted to contemplative leisure.

“If we are to enjoy this planet for a long time, we may as well face the fact that trying to perpetuate the affluent society is going to be an uphill struggle. To maintain the heavy flow of raw materials now being cranked through our economy will become an increasingly laborious and ultimately desperate task. Affluence will grow less comfortable, and there will be less peace and security in it. If the earth is to be a true home for us, a place of refuge and

nurture, we may as well start to think about how we can make it such a place. The task will not be as difficult as it may sound, and requires no wishful thinking about technological breakthroughs, effective government, or heightened human consciousness. We can move toward a secure, sustainable way of life easily if we accept the logic of frugality” (Johnson, 1978, Preface).

- 2) *Design for community.* While hermitage may present opportunities for extended contemplative leisure, it seems to circumvent the human purpose proposed in this essay. Human being-ness was nurtured in the context of intimate, mutually supportive community and it is there that one will discover the primordial essence of human nature, and ultimately universal meaning. Thoreau gathered his insights and his notes *and then went back to join his fellows.*

But ‘community’ has become a slippery term. “[A]s early as the mid-1950s an enterprising American sociologist had uncovered more than 90 discrete definitions of the term in use within the social sciences” (Cohen, 1985, p.7). And so it is best to introduce ‘community’ with some qualification.

Paleolithic hunter-gatherers were believed to self-organize into ‘bands’ of about twenty-five individuals. In this way, they were able to provide for an internal economy of interdependent specialization of tasks that produced more security, abundance, and *leisure time* than had each individual gone it alone. To go it alone would have been impossible then and is only possible now due to the artificial (and seemingly transient) conditions of manufactured affluence. So the community should be fairly small, intimate, and self-contained.

If it is to be effective, the immediate community must be regarded as a greater whole of which the individual is a part. Despite the emphasis on the individuation process in this essay, the ultimate purpose of such a process is to discover the unique function the individual can serve for the whole. In a marvelous paradox: the farthest extensive realization of the individuated Self is at once the beginning of return back to the Source. What too often masks as individuation in these days is more of an exaggerated, isolated ego-centeredness that serves no purpose for the whole, and actually serves to stunt the growth of the individual.

And so, in an “economics of sustainable leisure,” we design for community. We design for interdependence and mutual aid. We design for a specialization of tasks appropriate to the unique aptitudes and talents of the individual – but all these tasks are designed to be functions that support the needs of the whole. This is basic systems thinking.

We also need to design for a balance of community and privacy. This is very important. “The very reason people join to form community of this kind is the mutual help they can give to one another in creating an environment in which leisure is possible. The leisure of which we are speaking is not the privilege of those who have time, but the virtue of those who take time” (Steindl-Rast, 1972, p. 298). And yet, “Togetherness without solitude is not truly togetherness, but rather side-by-sidedness. To live merely side by side is alienation. We need time and space to be alone, to find ourselves in solitude, before we can give ourselves to one another in true togetherness” (ibid, p. 293). “To live leisurely means to celebrate every moment of life. Contemplative community is solitude-community which provides leisure to celebrate life” (ibid, p. 298).

- 3) *Design for Permaculture*. All these design criteria are inter-referencing; they are each vital aspects of the whole that is the “economics of sustainable leisure.” Likewise, Permaculture is multi-disciplinary and inter-referencing. Its purpose is to take into account all those elements necessary for the design and implementation of a truly permanent culture.

How did it feel when I suggested earlier modeling the economic base after the hunter-gatherer lifestyle? Ridiculous? Well maybe it’s not. Hunter-gatherers are stronger and healthier, with a far more diverse and nutritious diet than is available to the industrial palette, a diet that is the profusion of the living essence of the place where the people live – hence: this diet is indigenous or bioregional.

One philosophical practice of permaculture is to bypass the energy- and labor-intensive industry of agriculture by cultivating *perennial* food systems. The benefactors of a mature permaculture system then need only to forage through the agro-forestry garden in order to feed themselves – in theory at least; but this ideal is worth designing for because the result of such a system would be not only a bounty of nourishment but also a bounty of *leisure time*.

A permaculture system can be designed to provide – in addition to food, fiber, medicine, building materials, etc. - assorted luxuries. Animals can be cleverly integrated into the system to provide many useful functions, including proteins. I envisage the fully developed permaculture system to be a hunting-gathering paradise, a veritable Garden of Eden. Such systems are labor intensive in the beginning but become increasingly self-maintaining and self-producing as time goes on – meaning, of course, that we finally reach our goal of copious and unfettered amounts of leisure time in which to realize the full expression of the individuated Self.

This is the essence of “the economics of sustainable leisure:” 1) accepting, adopting, and practicing the logic of frugality; 2) learning to participate in a well-defined, interdependent, and mutually-supportive community; and 3) creating a thriving permaculture system as a perennial material resource base. Once these criteria have been implemented and integrated with one another, a context will have been created whereby contemplative leisure may appear naturally, effortlessly, spontaneously, of its own accord. And out of those long, sweet hours of contemplation, a glimpse of ultimate meaning may reveal itself, and the purpose of human life may be fulfilled.

Bibliography

- 1) Arendt, Hannah (1959) *The Human Condition*. Doubleday Anchor Books; Garden City, New York
- 2) Armstrong, Edward A. (1973) *Saint Francis: Nature Mystic*. University of California Press; Berkeley
- 3) Becker, Carl L. (1942) *The Declaration of Independence: A Study in the History of Political Ideas*. Vintage Books; New York
- 4) Bellamy, Edward (1897/1960) *Looking Backward*. New American Library; New York
- 5) Berman, Morris (2000) *The Twilight of American Culture*. W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.; New York
- 6) Boissonnade, P. (1964) *Life and Work in Medieval Europe*. Harper Torchbooks; New York
- 7) Bridenbaugh, Carl (1961) *The Colonial Craftsman*. Phoenix Books, The University of Chicago Press; Chicago
- 8) Burch, Mark A. (1995) *Simplicity: Notes, Stories and Exercises for Developing Unimaginable Wealth*. New Society Publishers; Gabriola Island, B.C., Canada
- 9) Cipolla, Carlo M. (1980) *Before the Industrial Revolution: European Society and Economy, 1000-1700*. W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.; New York
- 10) Cohen, Anthony P. (1985) *The Symbolic Construction of Community*. Tavistock Publications; New York
- 11) Davis, Louis E. & James C. Taylor, editors (1972) *Design of Jobs*. Penguin Books Ltd.; Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England
- 12) Edinger, Edward F. (1992) *Ego and Archetype*. Shambhala; Boston
- 13) Finley, M. I., in Norman F. Cantor, editor (1972) *Ancient Civilization: 4000 B.C. to 400 A.D.* Thomas Y. Crowell Company; New York
- 14) Freeman, Kathleen (1963) *Greek City-States*. W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.; New York
- 15) Galbraith, John Kenneth (1969) *The Affluent Society*. New American Library; New York
- 16) Goodman, Paul & Percival Goodman (1960) *Communitas: Means of Livelihood and Ways of Life*. Vintage Books; New York

- 17) Greco, Thomas H., Jr., (1994) *New Money for Healthy Communities*. Thomas H. Greco, Jr., Publisher; Tucson, Arizona
- 18) Grube, G.M.A., translator (1974) *Plato's Republic*. Hackett Publishing Company; Indianapolis, IN
- 19) Gyatso, Palden (1997) *The Autobiography of a Tibetan Monk*. Grove Press; New York
- 20) Haskel, Peter (2001) *Letting Go: The Story of Zen Master Tosui*. University of Hawai'i Press; Honolulu
- 21) Henderson, Joseph L. & Maud Oakes (1963) *The Wisdom of the Serpent: The Myths of Death, Rebirth, and Resurrection*. Collier Books; New York
- 22) Hine, Robert V. (1983) *California's Utopian Colonies*. University of California Press; Berkeley
- 23) Jacobi, Jolande (1973) *The Psychology of C.G. Jung*. Yale University Press; New Haven, CT
- 24) Johnson, Warren A. (1978) *Muddling Toward Frugality*. Sierra Club Books; San Francisco
- 25) Jung, Carl Gustav (1933) *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*. Harvest Books; New York
- 26) Jung, Carl Gustav (1957) *The Undiscovered Self*. Mentor Books; New York
- 27) Jung, Carl Gustav (1990) *The Basic Writings of C.G. Jung*. Bollingen Series, Princeton University Press; Princeton, NJ
- 28) Kotke, Wm., in Van Andruss, et al. (1990) *Home! A Bioregional Reader*. New Society Publishers; Gabriola Island, B.C., Canada
- 29) Leakey, Richard (1994) *The Origin of Humankind*. BasicBooks; New York
- 30) Lekai, Louis J. (1977) *The Cistercians: Ideals and Reality*. The Kent State University Press; OH
- 31) Levi, Peter (1987) *The Frontiers of Paradise: A Study of Monks and Monasteries*. Weidenfeld & Nicholson; New York
- 32) Lopez, Donald S., Jr., editor (1995) *Buddhism in Practice*. Princeton University Press; Princeton, N.J.
- 33) Marsella, Elena Maria (1966) *The Quest for Eden*. Philosophical Library; New York
- 34) Maslow, Abraham H. (1964) *Religions, Values, and Peak Experiences*. The Viking Press; New York
- 35) May, Rollo (1953) *Man's Search for Himself*. W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.; New York
- 36) Mehrabian, Albert (1976) *Public Places and Private Spaces*. BasicBooks, Inc., Publishers; New York
- 37) Merton, Thomas (1965) *Seasons of Celebration*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux; New York
- 38) Merton, Thomas (1977) *The Monastic Journey*. Sheed, Andrews and McMeel, Inc.; Kansas City
- 39) Merton, Thomas (1998) *Contemplation in a World of Action*. University of Notre Dame Press; Notre Dame, IN

- 40) Milani, Brian (2000) *Designing the Green Economy*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.; Lanham, MD
- 41) Pieper, Josef (1952) *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*. Liberty Fund, Inc.; Indianapolis
- 42) Plato, translated by G.M.A. Grube (1974) *The Republic*. Hackett Publishing Company; Indianapolis, IN
- 43) Robinet, Isabelle (1993) *Taoist Meditation: The Mao-shan Tradition of Great Purity*. State University of New York Press; Albany
- 44) Roszak, Theodore (2001) *Longevity Revolution*. Berkeley Hills Books; Berkeley
- 45) Schipper, Kristofer (1993) *The Taoist Body*. University of California Press; Berkeley
- 46) Schmookler, Andrew Bard (1984) *The Parable of the Tribes: The Problem of Power in Social Evolution*. University of California Press; Los Angeles and Berkeley
- 47) Schumacher, E.F. (1973) *Small is Beautiful*. Perennial Library; New York
- 48) Schumacher, E.F. (1979) *Good Work*. Harper & Row, Publishers; New York
- 49) Shaffer, Carolyn R. & Kristin Amundsen (1993) *Creating Community Anywhere*. Jeremy P. Tarcher/Perigree; Los Angeles
- 50) Smith, J.W. (1994) *The World's Wasted Wealth 2*. The Institute for Economic Democracy; Cambria, CA
- 51) Steindl-Rast, David F. K., in M. Basil Pennington, editor (1972) *Contemplative Community: An Interdisciplinary Symposium*. Cistercian Publications Consortium Press; Washington, D.C.
- 52) Thoreau, Henry David (1854/1982) *Walden*. Bantam Books; New York
- 53) Veblen, Thorstein (1899/1953) *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. New American Library; New York
- 54) Weber, Max (1947) *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. Oxford University Press; New York
- 55) Weber, Max (1958) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Charles Scribner's Sons; New York
- 56) Webster, T.B.L. (1969) *Life in Classical Athens*. Capricorn Books; New York
- 57) Westhues, Kenneth (1968) *The Religious Community and the Secular State*. J.B. Lippincott Company; Philadelphia
- 58) Whitmyer, Claude, editor (1993) *In the Company of Others: Making Community in the Modern World*. Jeremy P. Tarcher/Perigree; Los Angeles
- 59) Zaretsky, Eli (1973) *Capitalism, The Family, and Personal Life*. Harper Colophon Books; New York