

TECHNOLOGY AND THE PHILOSOPHY
OF WORK

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An Aristotelian Perspective on Work

Classical moral philosophy has two major strands. One is concerned with our behaviour towards others; it attempts to establish the content and basis for those rules, primarily prohibitions tempering the excesses of violence and selfishness, without which social life would be intolerable. It is this strand which has dominated in recent English-speaking philosophical enquiry. Utilitarianism, for example, which bulks so large in contemporary discussions in both pure and applied ethics, is a theory of this kind.

Moral philosophy's second main strand addresses itself to the very different questions: what sort of life should I strive to lead? what sort of person should I seek to become? what is the Good Life for human beings?

It is with this second side of moral philosophizing that I am concerned this evening. Let us consider, in particular, the role of work as an element in the well-led life, and the impact on that role of new technology's current rapid transformation of the work place.

Many formulae have, over the years, been offered as epitomizing the Good for Mankind. Anything which does that indicates the outlines of the Well-led life. Among these competing conceptions, one which derives from Aristotle has not yet been bettered:

The Good life consists in exercising our human faculties in accordance with virtue.

To be active rather than passive, a producer rather than a consumer, a participant rather than a spectator, that is what this thesis endorses as a satisfactory approach to life. According to this vision, the exercise of the whole range of our faculties, with harmonious variation and in concert with others, constitutes the Happy or Fortunate Life. Bert Facey was a natural born Aristotelian.

We can judge the power of this idea about what life can and should be, from a little reflection on our own experience and our knowledge of common life: What is the worst part of the day? Waiting for a bus or train that does not come. Or, in Canberra, waiting at the airport for a delayed flight. Why is even a humane prison a place to avoid? Because of the enforced idleness implicit in imprisonment. Enforced idleness is the frustration of the active spirit. And to look on the other side of the same coin, losing any sense of purpose and any zest for life is the risk run by every perennial consumer. Once this problem was an upper class affliction. It had a name of its own: the boredom of the rich. Nowadays the affliction is less exclusive: unprofitable idleness is one component in the burden endured by the unemployed.

That symbol of alienation in the white-collar workplace, Bristow, twelfth in line for Chief Buyer at Chester Perry's, has a working life which is a burden

to him precisely because it provides no proper scope for the exercise of his faculties. He does not plan, together with his co-workers, any worthwhile achievement. What he does has no evident point and no goal to which *he* is committed. His tasks call for no skill, art, or expertise which would make performing them a source of satisfaction.

For those, on the other hand, who do have opportunities to use their powers and skills in pursuit of goals that they have set for themselves, both life and work are a blessing. They remain blessings despite hardships, setbacks, and occasions of grief.

You will recognize this from the biographies of craftsmen and inventors, of many of those who work the land, and of anyone with a cause or enterprise to further. I hope your own case confirms it.

This same message, that the exercise of human faculties is the key to human happiness, comes through in the most empirical of research: Evans reports in Friedrichs and Schaff's *Microelectronics and Society* that: 'considerable experience has been built up in analysing what determines job quality. This suggests that the main determinants . . . are: job content; its meaningfulness; the learning involved; working environment;' and then other familiar features: pay, security, effect on leisure.¹ Evans elaborates on the factors which constitute satisfactory job *content* more explicitly: the important ones include skill requirements, responsibility, freedom from supervision, and control over the pace of working, every one of which relates directly to the autonomous exercise of a worker's faculties. Meaningfulness includes seeing the place of one's own job in the overall production process, and appreciating its relevance to the final product. The general principle involved is no mystery: where the worker's task is intelligible, alienation can be held at bay.

In those conditions which enable the agent to identify with the work to be done, we have the reverse of alienation. Simone Weil, the French philosopher, noted that 'the sight of the unfinished task attracts the free man as powerfully as the overseer's whip stimulates the slave.'²

Where there is scope for the unfrustrated exercise of our faculties, *anomie*, boredom, and existentialist disgust with life are for the most part absent. Absent also is the sense of working life as an ordeal of endurance. People whose work furnishes adequate opportunities for them to bring their faculties to bear on a worthwhile task, show a relative indifference to questions of income or working conditions, and a contempt for demarcation issues, which contrasts vividly with the attitudes generated by alienating work.

A flourishing condition of mankind, involving autonomous and not too heavily frustrated activity, is spontaneously and perennially attractive. This

¹ J. Evans, 'The Worker and the Workplace' in G. Friedrichs and A. Schaff (eds.) *Microelectronics and Society, For Better or For Worse*. Oxford, 1982, p.158.

² S. Weil, *Oppression and Liberty*, trans. A. Wills and J. Petrie, London, 1958, p.99. The original was written in 1934.

is the key to the appeal many hobbies have for those whose work tends to be routine. People who make hang gliders, or music, or local dramatics, who form groups for ballet or bushwalking, unreflectively bear witness to the truth of the Aristotelian maxim: it is in the exercise of human faculties that life's solid satisfactions are to be found.

So that maxim provides us with a touchstone against which to develop a critique of contemporary work. I use the word 'work' here in its everyday sense, to cover anyone's economic activity, what people do to make a living, whether they enjoy it or not, and whether they would do it anyway, even without economic compulsion. There are of course other meanings for the term—of accomplishment, as in someone's *lifework*, or of painful effort, as in the *work with the weights* put in by an athlete in training.

Concern with the place of work in the Well-Led Life is largely, in the West, a response to the first industrial revolution. Before then, the unchanging forms of human labour must have seemed inevitable and inexorable, and what seems in that way to be beyond human powers of alteration invites not critique, but an attitude of resignation among those whose lot it is to be a worker, and of relief among those able to escape that fate.

Throughout the pre-industrial period, the need to work for one's living was in almost all cases incompatible with leading a cultivated or philosophical life, which perhaps helps to account for the absence of work as a theme for most philosophers.

The first industrial revolution showed that the circumstances of working life could change, and change dramatically. It showed further that work could change for the worse, since the factory system, with its application of mechanical power, and developed techniques of mass production, often resulted in de-skilling, by comparison with the displaced traditional occupations. Particularly in the factories, the work force's tasks became more mechanical, and the workers themselves were subjected to a more minute and rigorous regime of regulation in the order, speed, and content of their actions. This ever more detailed and rigid specifying of what the workers were to do, was determined and justified by the requirements of the machines they served.

From our Aristotelian perspective, this constituted a massive de-moralisation of working life, and the work of Marx, and the protests of Ruskin and William Morris, for example, involved recognizing this and conceiving superior alternatives.

The Dream of Freedom From Work

The transformation of cottage craft production into mechanized factory production did not make daily work any less exhausting or less life-devouring. But the change did make work less varied, less autonomous, more routine, and thus worse. Indeed such work struck observers as an irredeemably arid way to be required to spend one's life. So one form the Utopian impulse took was the hope that mankind should be relieved of work. This dream generally involves mechanical slaves who will provide for all our material needs, and

thus release the entire population to become a leisure class.

With the advent of electronic machinery, we are now going through the second industrial revolution. Painters of a more desirable future are in these days also liable to recommend a continual reduction in the work requirement. Let us harness the electronic revolution to mechanize a whole new range of economic functions, maximize productivity per worker, and minimize the working week. In that way work will eventually shrink to insignificance as a factor in people's lives.

Now a good deal of work in the services sector will always resist automation. Even where mechanization is possible, this plan is still decidedly premature. Even when brought to fruition, the policy offers only a second-best Utopia. It assumes that work can never be more than a *means* to the Good Life. But a general transformation of work into a *part of* the Good Life, rather than a mere means to it, is preferable.

It is more achievable, in that the transformation of work is more feasible than its near abolition. The electronic revolution can promote the transformation, no less than the elimination, of work. And transformation is the more desirable alternative. This is because of other stable features of our relationship to working life.

It is true that, especially in Australia, some people are working less. For male employees, the expected number of years in the workforce is declining. So is the number of work days in the year. So is the number of work hours in the week. The Williams Report pointed out that if current trends continue, by far the largest proportion of the waking hours in a normal employee's life, will be spent neither at work, nor in work related activities, such as clean-up, travel, or recovery. This will be the case even where there are no interruptions caused by involuntary unemployment.

Nevertheless, work is, for most Australian adults, still the single most important sector of their days and their weeks. Since housework, although unpaid, is unquestionably work, this is particularly true for women. Moreover, the reduction of total working time referred to in the Williams Report scarcely applies at all to managers, those in creative vocations, or the self-employed in business and the professions. For these groups, work is, and will remain, still more emphatically a dominating element in their lives.

In any event, no matter what the actual balance may be between work and leisure, working life remains significant because of at least two clusters of personal and social attitudes.

Work is still a major locus of self-identification. People, at least in part, define themselves, form their self-image, in terms of the work they do. This is partly a function of the division of labour, of course. Without that, no-one's work would distinguish them, and so work would not serve as an element in a sense of individual self.

But such times are long gone, and the sense of self is now closely bound up with one's working occupation. That, together with the geographical and

genealogical aspects of one's origin, provides the self-description we present to one another.

Thinkers of an existentialist stamp decry this, on the grounds that such external and adventitious characteristics should be no part of the autonomous individual's self-definition, but I see no harm at all in identifying oneself, in part, by way of one's distinctive contribution to the life of one's society.

This is particularly appropriate where the work involves skills and powers in which people can take a proper pride: fishermen, cabinet makers, and midwives can rightly value themselves on being able to make a contribution which it is not in everyone's capacity to provide. Once again, the significance of the Aristotelian maxim emerges.

The second major impact of a person's work on their self-image concerns not definition but self-respect. Our culture still rather relentlessly marginalizes those who do not work. In a myriad ways, people are made to feel less than full citizens if they are not in the workforce. The retired are treated as spectators, not expected to have any further influence on decisions even in their field of expertise. The unemployed, if they are to remain respectable, are expected to be actively, even anxiously, striving to get back on some payroll or start up some new enterprise. Even women who are raising a family and running a household, and who are therefore working long and hard, often feel that because they have no separate salary, they are not complete participants in society.

Consequently, those without a recognized place in the public economy face not only problems of inadequate income, but an erosion of self-respect which can cast a pall over the whole of life. This is demoralizing both in the normal modern sense of that term, and in the slightly more technical and literal sense of diminishing a person's capacity for the unhindered exercise of their faculties. The depression, apathy, and passivity that are among the hazards of extended unemployment have often been remarked upon. A sense of one's own worth, and confidence in one's own powers, turn out to be among the essential pre-conditions for humans to live well.

Some commentators on the future of work have deplored this link between a place in the mainstream economy and a decent self-respect. Jenkins and Sharman, for example, of the British white-collar union the ASTMS, identify the connection between work and self-respect as an inappropriate hangover from the time when there really was a need for unremitting endeavour, and idleness was anti-social.³

According to this line of thought, the need for everyone to work turned work into a duty, and in its most uncompromising form this conviction became the 'Protestant work ethic', a group of opinions and attitudes which views leisure as *prima facie* dubious, something to be earned, if at all, only by prior effort. Anyone who is idling should be feeling ill at ease.

³ C. Jenkins and B. Sharman, *The Collapse of Work*. London, 1979.

Those who share the Jenkins and Sharman view, and propose that we abandon this Protestant work ethic, assume that work is and must be a poor thing, never better than a necessary evil. When the evil ceases to be necessary, they urge, conscience should not goad us into going on with it. This takes for granted that work is always a burden, which only a sense of duty, or some external compulsion, can motivate us to endure. But if our work has become something capable of inspiring attachment, the role of a sense of duty in motivating us will disappear of its own accord.

The New Technology's Impact on Working Life

The development of electronic machinery *has the potential* to play a positive part in this. But unless we take deliberate steps, that potential will not be realized. As you know, the great transformation of work during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the harnessing of energy to expand output yet reduce or eliminate *drudgery*. The new transformation, worked by electronic machines, promises to expand output while eliminating *routine*. No-one can deny that drudgery and routine are enemies of the Good Life, and this is particularly plain from the Aristotelian point of view.

Applications of the micro-chip to handling routine tasks has advanced furthest in office-work, in recording, retrieving, and manipulating the information essential to the conduct of business or administration. We are all vividly aware of this transformation, since the computer has quite suddenly become commonplace and visible, no longer confined to a central and mysterious role within organizations, but in plain view, involved in dealings with the wider society.

Now there is a deep ambiguity in the business of introducing electronic machines to the office. Computers have very different impacts at different places in an administrative process.

For the new machines are not just capable of performing routine tasks in the manipulation of information. They are capable of performing these tasks at such speeds that whole new undertakings become possible. Many undertakings are themselves fully creative, but depend upon the completion in a reasonable time of multitudes of routine operations. There would be no space program without electronic machinery: even the business of calculating orbits would probably defeat unassisted human effort.

Less spectacularly, computing power can be harnessed to industrial design and manufacture. Computer Assisted Design and Manufacture uses both capacity to perform multitudes of calculations rapidly, and capacity to store, retrieve, and display relevant information in highly convenient ways. This gives designers powers they would not otherwise have, to explore possibilities, eliminate faults, and generally get on better with their creative work.

Less spectacularly again, what is already widespread, and promises to become universal, is the use of computing power in the management of enterprises and institutions. *Performance, inventory, debtors, cash position and so on* can be continuously monitored, and all kinds of projections and comparisons can be

made. Data relevant to decisions, in quantities that would overwhelm the unassisted mind, can be traced out. Trends can be discerned. Computer assisted management is here to stay.

As with the designers and engineers, the impact of computers in the working lives of managerial executives is almost wholly positive. A well-designed installation is a powerful and flexible instrument by whose means managerial tasks can be better performed. A manager experiences the arrival of the new technology as expanding scope for the exercise of human faculties in work. There are new skills to master; not just those involved in learning to operate the machines themselves, but those acquired in learning how to take increasing advantage of the machine's capabilities. Installing computers promises the satisfaction of making a better fist of the managerial task.

On the office floor, however, things can be very different.⁴ There, the arrival of the new machines can impoverish work. Operating a keyboard is a skill, of course, but it is one which, once mastered, offers little continuing challenge. And much office work can be de-skilled to the point where keyboarding is all that remains. When typists become word-processors, for example, all the skill and judgment that formerly went into choosing paper, font and type-face for a job, and then setting it out, can become unusable. In a word-processing system, all such decisions can be made in advance, then performed automatically.

The physical manipulation of paper, and the production of multiple copies, are becoming more and more the province of the machines. Filing and record keeping can now all be performed not by getting up and moving about, but by sitting at the same workstation putting information into the electronic memory. In these ways keyboard operating can become a much more monotonous occupation than its predecessors in the pre-electronic office, where distinct functions are dealt with by distinct operations,

There is no need to inform any Canberra audience that keyboards have become a health hazard. The apparent epidemic of Repetition Strain Injury seems to arise partly from keyboards themselves being ergonomically unsound, but also at least in part from the absence of proper variety in the operators' working day. RSI is a serious physical manifestation of what is at bottom a moral failure. Mesmerized by gains in output which seem to occur under minute division of labour, we have not insisted that jobs be designed along properly Aristotelian lines. To insist that workers overspecialize is to commit Taylorism, a fault named after the inventor of time and motion analyses of work. Any adequate concern for breadth of scope in work would rule out any job which

⁴ P. Mertens, 'The NSI Project' in N. Szyperski *et al* (eds.) *Assessing the Impacts of Information Technology*. Braunschweig, 1983. This generally positive report on the acceptability of computers in the workplace in Germany records a divergence between managers and employee's representatives on whether people are more content with the new computer-assisted jobs than with the old ones. p.67.

involved nothing but keyboarding. Now, faced with an industrial health problem which dramatises so unequivocally the shortcomings of our present practice, we propose the sheerly medical response of merely knocking off for a spell each hour or so. This might cope with RSI in the fingers and arms, but will do nothing for the RSI being inflicted on the spirit.

There is another aspect of the electronic office with strong negative potential: this is the ability of manufacturers to build into their machines capacities for the excessively close supervision of employees. For example, R. Howard in 'Brave New Workplace' reports on a telephone exchange in which the allocation of breaktimes and lunch times was computerized: ' . . . computer control squeezes out what little flexibility workers had before. Before computerization, a worker's morning break came about two hours after the beginning of the shift; now, it can come as early as fifteen minutes into the work day. Workers cannot go to the bathroom unless they find someone to take their place.'⁵ If a terminal is closed the computer is alerted and starts ringing a bell.

Word processing pools can monitor the number of key depressions made at each terminal during each hour. By having a terminal of their own, supervisors can become privy to all communication through the system, both between office workers, and with the outside world. Production, even in manufacturing, in car plants for example, can be placed on standards per hour, or even per minute, rather than taking note of production per shift.

In all these ways the introduction of new technology, instead of enhancing work, can cut away at the skills work calls for, and at the workers' scope for initiative, responsibility, and autonomy.

These characteristics of the new technology are not confined to its application in the office. Electronic machinery can fulfil supervising and monitoring tasks in manufacturing industry. Machines can be built to diagnose their own malfunctions, and when this happens the work of technicians can be downgraded and its satisfactions eroded.

Ian Reinecke, in his *Micro Invaders*⁶ has made the point that these changes in the workers' situation may be perceived by managers as positive advantages, for they increase managerial control over the performance of the enterprise as a whole. And it is the managers who decide to install the equipment. The machines will be designed with the attitudes and requirements of the purchaser, that is, the management, taking precedence over the interests and preferences of the actual operator.

Where offices are hierarchically organized, electronic technology can accentuate hierarchical centralization and control, and this may then re-inforce a management stereotype of employees as a feckless, slack, and clock-watching proletariat over whom it is necessary to exercise unremitting and minute

⁵ J. Howard, 'Brave New Workplace' in *Working Papers*, Cambridge, Mass., 1980, p.26. Cited in I. Reinecke, *Micro Invaders*, Melbourne, 1982, p.18.

⁶ I. Reinecke, *op.cit.*, p.146.

supervision if they are to produce at an acceptable rate. All such attitudes are of course completely at odds with the Aristotelian view of how work should be structured. Supervisory coercion is always a profoundly unsatisfactory motivation to productive effort.

It is plain that by the Aristotelian touchstone, not every development made possible by the electronic revolution is to be welcomed. People must become selective over just what sorts of monitoring devices are to be built in, and selective over the uses to which such devices are put—using a count of key depressions per hour as a safeguard against RSI, for example, rather than as a basis for disciplining the staff. More importantly, the machines must be designed to suit a working life fit for humans, rather than the jobs reshaped to suit the capabilities of the machines.

Selective acceptance can be put the other way about: the introduction of new technology should face a discriminating Luddism. A discriminating Luddism rejects those innovations which will, on balance, have a deleterious effect on working life. For any such discriminating Luddism to have a chance, decisions about the installation of machines must involve not only the managers but also the staff who will be the users. For that to become a matter of course, there needs to be a move from hierarchical to more co-operative social arrangements in the work place. The employees must have an uncontested veto on changes to their pattern of work; this would eventually have an impact on the manufacturers, who would find it necessary to design equipment that they could convince the users themselves to adopt. A substantial role for rank and file employees in decisions of this kind may have a radical sound in Australia, where the prerogatives of management are often emphatically asserted. But in Norway, for example, the introduction of new technology can take place only with union agreement.⁷

There is always a problem, of course, in undertaking what we might call Luddism in one country. If an innovation cuts unit production costs, then competition may enforce its adoption even if it is deleterious to the producers from a human point of view. So the more widely agreement can be obtained that it is essential to be selective in introducing change, the better. Even so, people may be required to choose between the character of their working lives and their real money income. No sane philosophy would endorse the idea that the money must *always* have top priority. From the point of view advanced here, the value of money, beyond that required for basics, lies in the fact that resources enlarge the range of opportunities for the human faculties. It is a self-defeating exercise to gain such resources by sacrificing scope for exercising our faculties at work.

The New Technology's Social Impact

Simone Weil has touched on a rather different aspect of the new technology, but one whose moral is again a cautious attitude to an ambivalent revolution:

⁷ J. Evans, *op.cit.*, p.184.

electronic machinery takes people in the workforce a whole new step away from comprehending their working environment. Much more even than with mechanical devices, the ordinary user knows how to work the electronic marvels without knowing how they work. Not understanding how they work, the user is in a position of absolute impotence the minute they begin to malfunction. This dependency extends beyond problems of repair and maintenance; it also rules out any question of the users themselves adapting or improving the machines. People who do not understand how their machinery works will not know what alterations are real possibilities and which ideas are idle dreams. The users become passive recipients provided with mysterious machines which they can neither maintain nor mould to their own needs or purposes.

Among the elements in a oppressive condition of society, Simone Weil identified two insidious monopolies: those of technical expertise, and of the capacity to coordinate multitudes of workers.⁸ Technocrats and managers, monopolizing these capacities, form powerful castes to the detriment of the people. Electronic machinery, of which she was unaware, multiplies the risks of concentrating society's essential expertise in damagingly few hands. The remedy is simple to state, but mind-bendingly difficult to execute. As she put it, we should ' . . . give to . . . labour that dignity which belongs to it of right, by giving the workman the full understanding of technical processes instead of a mere mechanical training.'⁹

Despite the potential deterioration in working conditions which electronic devices threaten, they also show promise of potential gain. They can be quick, clean, quiet, and convenient. They *can* be used not to concentrate power but on the contrary to make possible a great deal of decentralization in large organizations. Even if authority remains centralized, physical concentration can be reduced. The work place can return to a human scale, even in the largest enterprises, since the physical gathering together of all collaborating workers is no longer always necessary. Small scattered offices can share access to the same machines, and so participate in the same work. Commuter hassle and wasted travel time, and the inhuman anonymity of being but one among many hundreds in the workplace, can all be diminished. Using computers to achieve these results would be sheer gain.

Insofar as the new technology yields substantial productivity gains, and we are wise enough to divide those gains between higher production and more leisure, and then sufficiently just to share society's total work requirement fairly, we can expect continuing reductions in the total time spent at work. The second industrial revolution will in this way have as profound an impact outside the workplace itself, as did the first revolution, which set in train the urban population explosion.

The new machinery will have a direct effect, for example, in the everyday

⁸ S. Weil, *op.cit.*, p.64.

⁹ S. Weil, *op.cit.*, p.19.

processes of keeping life going. Here the omens are not good. We are threatened with the capacity to do our shopping, and our banking, from home. What we need to know to do these things can be displayed on the TV screen, what we need to do can be accomplished by sending signals down the telephone wires. Bank accounts will be adjusted, traders will be paid, and the goods will be delivered to our door, perhaps ultimately in a driverless truck.

Developments along these lines would reinforce people's isolation, and dependence, and passivity. One of the merits of almost every job, no matter how dreary, is that work provides people with an established social group, to which they belong, with which they can be at ease, and within which they can find friends. If work recedes in importance, so that for example the lives of most people include long periods of retirement, opportunities for human contact will need to be maintained in other ways. A system which enables life to be maintained without ever leaving the house is among the last things we need.

For most people, solitude and isolation are very great misfortunes; for nearly everyone, the opportunity to exercise our distinctively human capacities for intelligent and affectionate communication, is of cardinal importance to a sense of leading a meaningful and satisfactory life. Community is a fragile enough flower in our culture, and isolation should get no encouragement. Fortunately, if resistance sets in early enough, the introduction of any universal schemes for maintaining life by purely electronic contacts can be prevented. We need only to decline to use facilities which have an atomizing impact on social groups and social interactions.

An extreme version of such a reaction against high technology in the business of keeping life going is the movement towards self-sufficiency. The ideal of the self-sufficient alternative life-styles is to replace membership in the mainstream economy with life in a group virtually fully dedicated to its own direct maintenance, since getting food and providing shelter requires extensive and unremitting efforts if no advantage is to be taken of purchase for money.

The self-sufficient life requires from its participants a level of activity, initiative, and autonomy, together with such a range of skills and capacities, that it must earn the warm regard of any Aristotelian. However, the extent to which it represents a genuine alternative remains problematic. For the present, at least, the simple life relies on the mainstream economy, and its technologically magnified productivity, to furnish the education, technique, and opportunities for earning, essential if self-sufficiency is to avoid decline into peasant indigence.

For those who pursue self-sufficiency, the familiar structure in which the day divides in to work, life-maintenance, and leisure gives way to a less differentiated life in which these distinctions melt away. For the rest of us, the differences remain. How, then, does the electronic revolution stand to leisure, properly so called? As a development increasing productivity, this one bids fair to increase the total amount of leisure. Already, anxiety on this issue has produced the so-called Leisure Problem. Malcolm Muggeridge once unkindly

described David Frost as the man who rose without a trace. We can all sympathise with that assessment, but I must concede I once heard Frost introduce a discussion of the Leisure Problem with words which seem to me most appropriate. 'Have you noticed', he said, 'that the Leisure Problem is somebody *else's* problem. I don't have a leisure problem. You don't have a leisure problem. It's only other people who've got one.' Indeed, people with personal and material resources, who have been educated to be aware of the range of possible human activities, and are prosperous enough to choose between a wide range of these possibilities, who are healthy enough to be living without severe bodily frustration, and lucky enough to belong to sustaining social groups, have no reason to find time hanging heavy on their hands. Excessive leisure is a curse only for those who do not have the resources which are needed for making good use of it.

What contribution has the new electronic technology made so far to people's leisure? The impact to date has been considerable, but whether it has been desirable is another matter. Overwhelmingly, electronic goods encourage passive consumption. The chief new means of filling leisure with mere entertainment are the stereo, the television set, the VCR, the poker machine, and the pinball palace. But as the Aristotelian vision of mankind insists, a solid diet of passive entertainment will pall. Among the afflictions of the unemployed, for whom their leisure is a curse, is that they are condemned to daytime television.

Uncritical enthusiasts for electronics set before our horrified eyes the prospect of ever more television channels, more and cheaper video movies, even the prospect of going visiting not by going visiting but by staying home and exchanging images of one another, complete with telephone voice.

The effect of electronics on leisure need not be passivity and isolation. The computer hobbyists, those improving their chess, and the makers of home videos demonstrate this clearly enough. Video cassettes can be as important as books in providing or developing the knowledge and skill on which satisfying new activities rest. What is needed, if electronic devices are to have a more positive role than as mere time-fillers, is for people to learn to manage their leisure. A working life from which initiative and self-management have been systematically excluded, is no good place to acquire management skills for use in leisure time. Both for its own sake, therefore, and for its spillover effect in establishing habits of active initiative, the design and conduct of work should increasingly involve all the workers as collaborative planners and managers. Those whose work does not consist only in filling a role which has been fixed and pre-determined by others, will neither expect nor want their leisure hours to be filled for them by other people's efforts to provide distractions.

The philosophy of work, and that of leisure too, are aspects of a philosophy of life. If we can rightly identify those factors making for a flourishing and satisfying human life, we have the principles in terms of which both our work and our leisure should be assessed. I have been arguing for the varied, ordered,

and active life, the life which makes calls on our capacities, skills, and efforts, as the one which provides the best model on which to base such assessments.

Although the discussion has centred on changes taking place in the offices of commercial and administrative institutions, the principles apply everywhere that work needs to be done; comparable issues arise in mining and agriculture, manufacturing, infrastructure and services. Rather than blindly embracing an innovation, a wise policy places in the scales not only its promised reductions in unit labour costs, but also the role it may play in expanding, or frustrating, opportunities for the exercise of human gifts.