



# The Leisurely Manifesto

Otium is Hard Work - The Original Affluent Society



Four Fourths

Jul 15, 2021

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*“But originally, it was included in education, because nature herself, as has been often said, requires that we should be able, not only to work well, but to use leisure well.”* - Aristotle

Leisure time, the Latin term “otium”, is what our every action revolves around. Whether you are a raging capitalist or a gym fiend. The capitalist seeking to accrue capital so he can have the option to do whatever he pleases, at whatever cost. The gym fiend seeking to maintain his

health to live longer so he can enjoy his time in old age without being laid up in a hospital bed. Both valid & worthy ways to live.

This leads us to the paradoxical nature of being a man of leisure. It's work.

Men of leisure do everything they can to ensure their leisure, which includes working hard.

But not all hard work is created equal.

Aristotle outlined two different kinds of goods; goods of first intent, and goods of second intent.

Goods of first intent are things directly beneficial or as Aristotle puts it, “that which is good in itself and is to be chosen for its own sake”. Goods of first intent include things such as love, fulfillment, & beauty, you know, the good stuff. The real stuff.

Goods of second intent were merely means that make getting goods of first intent possible. Goods of second intent are the basic necessities of life that need to be taken care of — food, clothing, shelter, money, etc. These are all necessary & fine, but alone they do not make life as meaningful as goods of first intent. These are means to an end.

Over time our jobs and our time are higher and higher percentage work of second intent. We end up doing work we do not love, that we do not find fulfilling, & that stresses us out & is therefore not rad. In this case, the means take us totally off the path to the ends.

Work of second intent is often work that we do to *appear* productive or useful, but that which we aim for in life - goods of first intent - are neither productive nor useful from a strictly utilitarian point of view. But here's the thing, productivity & usefulness are vomit-inducingly overrated, especially when focusing on appearing one way takes its toll on our mental well-being. We should take comfort & trust in knowing that **nature aims for something much higher than “productivity”**.

Work of first intent is the leisurely way. Work you enjoy, creating things you love. That's it, really.

And look, work is inevitable, so 1) get over it and 2) find something that not only can you enjoy but work that makes your life *less* stressful. The typical American jobs are neither of these things, often the way is to set out on your own & have a connection to the process of creating something. Hard work is enormously important and worth it, so long as it is aiming you at eventually doing *less* hard work.

*All art is absolutely useless. Put usefulness first, and you lose it.*

*Put beauty first, and what you do will be useful forever.” - Oscar Wilde.*

Marshall David Sahlins, an anthropologist at The University of Chicago, has proposed a theory of the “**Original Affluent Society**”. The Original Affluent Society proposes that for 96% of our existence, we worked 15 hours a week, and devoted the rest of our time to leisure.

All of that leisure time wasn’t spent doing nothing, but was spent tinkering, thinking, creating & exploring, for the most part our ambitions were pretty tame. Most of the time was probably spent wandering, practicing schedulelessness.

This was not only because of their limited desires. The most important desire being surviving the day, and after they had done all they could to ensure that survival as much as they could, there really wasn’t much else to do. Because their desires were appropriate, they only had to secure as little as they had to, not as much as they could.

It seems to me to be that this was what a majority of our existence has been. Noodling around. Chewing the fat.

We have a deep biological propensity to chill & do the work *no one is making us do.*

No one was making us do anything & we were able to thrive.

Today we often guilt ourselves out of doing what we love in order to do something “productive<sup>1</sup>”, when in reality most of what we call “production” is made up work of second intent. The language of business and work in America has even been crafted to work of

second intent. We have established that the things that matter most in life cannot be measured, but we always hear “that which gets measured gets managed” which implies that managing is the point of doing anything. (Wtf is up with this btw? Do people not know that managing stuff sucks?)

(Inevitably there will be some who say “well all I want to do is sit around and watch TV for 40 hours a week”, well, I don’t really know if there is anything wrong with that. The only appropriate response would be that you’re lazy & pathetic, but if you are okay with that then I guess what I think doesn’t really matter.)

Leisure is not for the lazy. The idea is working creatively so you can eventually enjoy the work you do & if you are really lucky this will lead you to working less. Your hard work should not be rewarded with *more* hard work. The glorification of industry, the “rise and grind” mindset is unsustainable and just not enjoyable. As a culture we should stop glorifying busy, the continuous glorification of busy will only lead us to digging holes with teaspoons instead of shovels, making us not only inefficient but alarmingly stupid. In order to get true productivity you cannot focus on being constantly active.

Being a self appointed man or woman of leisure makes you bad for society, & even worse, bad for the most holy economy. You become the ultimate heretic, sacrilege embodied, thoughtless, imprudent and worse of all, “lazy”. (Sidenote: Insults that come from those you don’t respect should be interpreted as compliments.)

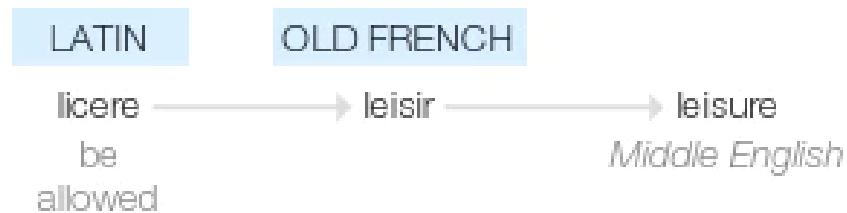
The responsibility to follow one’s instincts can make life more interesting than it otherwise might be. An allergy to the unnatural & the forced is a healthy allergy. This mindset has allowed me to enjoy even the most minuscule of life’s daily happenings.

The man of leisure, the idler and the enjoyer are one in the same. Life is much easier to enjoy when you aren’t trapped to seeing life through one specialized lens. You are free to wander, you are free to switch things up.

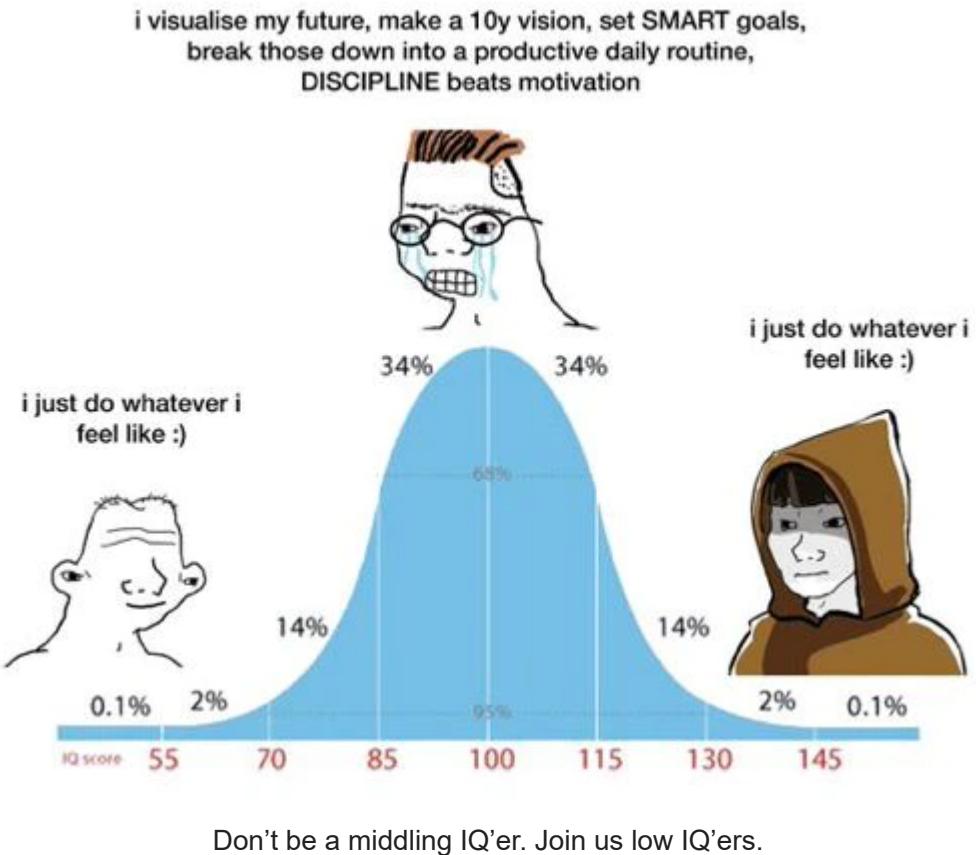
Men and women of leisure feel no need to explain away that which is meant to be unexplainable. No need to justify interests, and certainly don’t need to be good at things, or even understand them, to do them.

They believe the fewer reasons to do something the better.

The word leisure itself comes from the Latin word “licere” which means “license” or “to be allowed”. Leisure does not necessarily mean *doing nothing*, although it may very well include that, what it truly means is **doing what you want**.



This is where leisure and work should meet, but they often don't. If we were more wise as a people work & play would look a lot more similar. Leisure is the place where work should meet play.



In his spare time after his work at the patent office, Einstein was working on his theories of

space and time. Most people would think he was “working” but if you asked him he would tell you he was just enjoying himself, enjoying his curiosities.

As a culture we don’t understand this concept at all. The idea of enjoyable work has been ruined because work itself has been so compartmentalized by ideas like “work-life balance”<sup>2</sup>.

When it comes to work for us there is almost no nuance. Work is work and work is miserable, it’s something that the outside world requires you to do and if you could pick you would rather not do it all, this is work of the second intent.

What Einstein was doing in his spare time was leisurely work - doing what you enjoy.

Remember kids, you are always free to wander.

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1 “Productivity” is a made up idea. I do not know what it means.

2 Nonsensical term.

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**Daniel Bourke** Writes Eat, Move, Learn, Make · Jul 18, 2021  Liked by Lord of Leisure

When I got my first job working with people who worked full-time (9-5, I've never worked full-time in my life), I always heard the phrase "work-life balance".

And I never understood it. I'd reply with the cheeky comment, "but isn't work life and life work? They're the same thing..."

Hacking "productivity" ends up in you chasing your own tail. Because there's always something new, some better way to track some new objective some new special coffee which brings your focus in. A better focus trick would be to do something you're actually interested in.

I prefer the idea of not trying to improve anything or anyone, including yourself. The physical energy break this gives you has a paradoxical effect. You'll have people commenting on your calmness and peacefulness (the ultimate freedoms) asking what have you been doing lately? And they'll be shocked when you tell them nothing.

After all, empty space is what gives things meaning.

A room is four walls around nothing, a ship floats because of the empty space in its hull, music isn't noise because of the space between the notes.

Fantastic piece, looking forward to the next.

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