

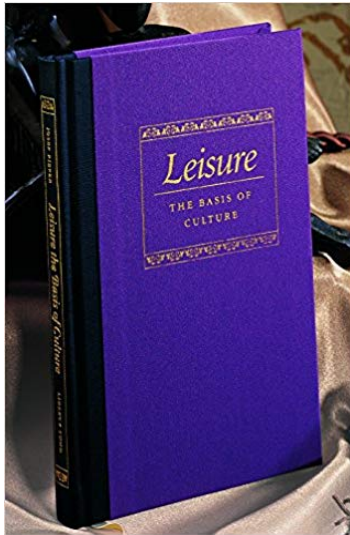


#EconlibReads



Leisure: the Basis of Culture

By Josef Pieper



1. Pieper starts by noting the objection that "it's not the right time" to talk about leisure. While Pieper was referring to the post-War period, to what extent do you think *today* is the right time to talk about leisure? Why?
2. How does Pieper distinguish between "work" and "leisure?" How is this different from the way we've become accustomed to thinking about the two?
3. Pieper notes the etymology of the word leisure. What does this suggest the relationship between leisure and schooling should be?
4. How do you think we've arrived at this "new and changing conception of the nature of man" that Pieper alludes to on page 5? How has this transition rendered us unable to truly understand and think about leisure?
5. On page 6, Pieper says, "nowadays the whole field of intellectual activity...has been overwhelmed by the modern ideal of work and is at the mercy of its totalitarian claims." What does this mean???
6. How would YOU answer the question posed on page 7, "Is there such a thing as pure 'intellectual contemplation'?" Explain.

7. Pieper employs the terms "ratio" and "intellectus" to distinguish two different types of knowledge or understanding. What is this difference, and why is it important to Pieper's larger project?
8. Why have we come to the conclusion that for something to be good, it must be hard? Pieper acknowledges that the highest form of knowledge may indeed require effort, but "the effort is not the cause; it is the condition." (p. 16) What does he mean by this?
9. How does Pieper distinguish between the "liberal arts" and the "servile arts"? Again, how important is this to his larger project? To what extent do you think this remains a fair distinction?
10. What is the difference between education and training for Pieper? On page 21, Pieper longs for a (literal?) **place** for education to take place. Where do you think this place is (or should be)? What do you think it should be like?
11. What's the relationship between leisure and idleness, according to Pieper?
12. What does Pieper mean by the following (p. 26), "Leisure, it must be clearly understood, is a mental and spiritual attitude- it is not simply the result of external factors..."
13. On page 31, Pieper writes, "no one who looks to leisure simply to restore his working powers will ever discover the fruit of leisure." What does this mean? Have *you* ever achieved a state of leisure? How did you do it?
14. On page 33, we find one of the Big Questions Pieper stresses throughout the book. "...is it going to be possible to save men from becoming officials and functionaries and 'workers' to the exclusion of all else?" How would *you* answer this question?
15. What does humanism mean to Pieper? How might humanism thwart the onslaught of the world of work, as Pieper fears?

16. How has the term "proletariat" shaped the modern 'workaday world,' and in particular to the structure of social class, according to Pieper? What would it mean to de-proletarianize our world today? How plausible do you find this prospect? To what extent do you think it would have the effect(s) Pieper seeks?
17. On page 43 Pieper says, "If the essence of 'proletarian' is the fact of being fettered to the process of work, then the central problem of liberating men from this condition lies in making a whole field of significant activity available and open to the working man." What do you think he envisions here? What might such a scheme look like *today*? What are some 'external opportunities for leisure' that might encourage individuals toward *true* leisure?
18. What is the "seductive appeal and power of totalitarian forms," according to Pieper? How is leisure the preeminent weapon against totalitarianism?
19. Why does Pieper believe that leisure is necessarily rooted in divine worship? How does this explain the purpose, possibility, and justification for leisure, according to Pieper?
20. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement by Pieper (p. 47)? Explain. "...the world of 'work' and of the 'worker' is a poor, impoverished world, be it ever so rich in material goods..."
21. What do you think the 'sham forms of leisure' Pieper refers to (p. 48) are? How does Pieper regard boredom? How do you think Pieper would react to the emphasis on 'play' we see calls for in schooling today?

Part II: The Philosophical Act

22. What IS philosophy to Pieper???
23. What does Pieper mean when he says, "Work is the process of satisfying the 'common need'." How is this different from the common *good*?

24. Imagine the scene in the marketplace Pieper suggests on page 67. What do YOU think the reaction to such a questioner would be? Does the scene play out in your mind in the same way you think it does for Pieper? Explain.
25. What is "spurious philosophy," and why is it more dangerous than even 'real' philosophy to the man enmeshed in the workaday world? (What role does 'wonder' play here?)
26. Are philosophy and the 'self-sufficient world of work' *really* as incommensurate as Pieper argues (p. 74) Put another way, can a businessman *never* engage in philosophizing?
27. What does academic freedom mean to Pieper? Why does he consider philosophy to be the freest of all the liberal arts? To what extent do you think he would still feel the same, more than 50 years later?
28. How is philosophy an 'attitude of mind' (p. 78)? By this definition, what other discipline(s) can make the same claim? To what extent can economics make it?
29. Does philosophy **depend on** religion? Explain.
30. What is the relationship between "spirit," "environment," "reality," and philosophy to Pieper? What does Pieper mean by the following: "...when man shuts himself up in his environment, in the sphere defined and limited by his immediate needs, the degeneration that follows is only possible because spiritual degeneration is possible."
31. Let's take one of Pieper's own questions (p. 95) "What distinguishes a philosophical question from one which is not philosophical?"
32. What is the "bourgeois mind" to Pieper (p. 102), and what's wrong with it? *Must* the poet and the philosopher (among others perhaps) be UNbourgeois?

33. Why does Pieper say there can be no such thing as a "professional" poet or philosopher? To what extent do you agree? (And what about economists?)
34. What does Pieper mean by "wonder?" What is the relationship between wonder and philosophy?
35. On page 109, Pieper asserts, "that philosophy is radically different from the sciences." In what ways is it different? What is proper role for the sciences, according to Pieper?
36. Why do you think Pieper concludes that modern philosophy has become so antithetical to theology? How are the two properly related, according to Pieper?

