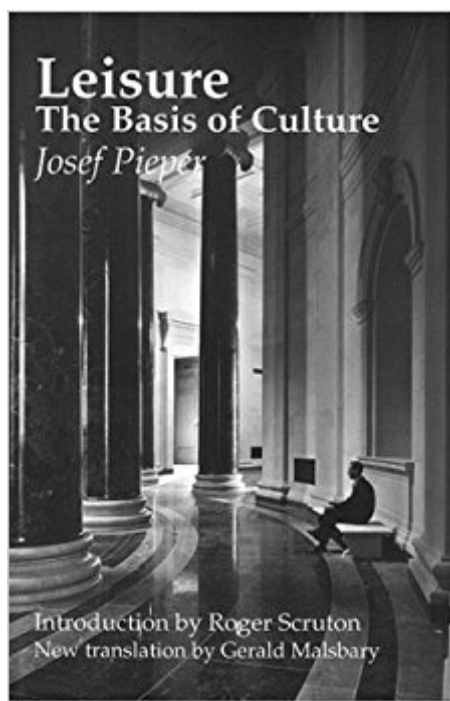


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Leisure, The Basis Of Culture



Synopsis

One of the most important philosophy titles published in the twentieth century, Joseph Pieper's *Leisure, the Basis of Culture* is more significant, even more crucial than it was when it first appeared fifty years ago. Pieper shows that Greeks understood and valued leisure, as did the medieval Europeans. He points out that religion can be born only in leisure—a leisure that allows time for the contemplation of the nature of God. Leisure has been, and always will be, the first foundation of any culture. He maintains that our bourgeois world of total labor has vanquished leisure, and issues a startling warning: Unless we regain the art of silence and insight, the ability for nonactivity, unless we substitute true leisure for our hectic amusements, we will destroy our culture—and ourselves. These astonishing essays contradict all our pragmatic and puritanical conceptions about labor and leisure; Joseph Pieper demolishes the twentieth-century cult of "work" as he predicts its destructive consequences.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I cannot say enough about this wonderful and important book. Its message is simple: Western culture has taken upon itself a disposition toward life—and an outlook upon the world—of total work; of work-for-work's sake; or, if you prefer, we have internalized the Weberian protestant work ethic to a debilitating degree. In so doing, so Pieper suggests, we threaten to lose our very souls, both culturally and personally. We must make time for contemplation and reflection, and to, more generally, bask in the truth, beauty and goodness that is available to us in every facet of existence. While Pieper is a Catholic philosopher in the Thomistic tradition, his arguments are solid

and broad enough for those who may be non-religious, or of different faiths. Nevertheless, Christians will, I am sure, enjoy Pieper's articulate use of Christian inspired ideas and use of sources. Those familiar with Heidegger will also appreciate Pieper's line of argumentation and the resemblances it has to the Heideggerian notions of *Gelassenheit*, *Gestel*, and *Aletheia*. The second half of the book is a fantastic apology for, and description of, philosophy and the contemplative life. In short, I cannot recommend this book enough for everyone. Its message is so needed now more than ever, as we have as a society become slaves of productivity. When I teach Introduction to Philosophy I will be sure to use this book! One last note in brief: if anything bad can be said, it would have to be in regard to the multiple typos throughout the text. I do hope that St. Augustine Press makes an effort to rectify this problem, as it seems an injustice to such an important book.

I read this book for the first time about ten years ago, and have just re-read it. Both readings were delightful and edifying. The first reading was like a slap in the face. It was a shock to have a writer attack the pre-eminence of utility. For nearly a half-century, it was pressed into my mind that usefulness was a virtue-- and not just a garden-variety virtue, but the foundation of all civic virtues. I dare say that practically everyone brought up in the West in the Twentieth Century was similarly molded, by the education establishment, by the penalty-reward system, by the politicians and (for a large part) by religious leaders. If you weren't doing something useful, if you weren't somehow contributing to the general utility of society, you were not a good citizen. An example (trivial, perhaps) is as follows: There was a time when kids could leave the house on a summer day, run around, hang out, play games, and finally come home for dinner. Not today! Little League, Soccer league, tennis lessons. Hup! Hup! Hup! Pieper cries out with a message that is, I claim, carrying with it more and more urgency. We have to start looking at each of our activities and asking "Is it good?", and not "Is it useful?" But even before this, we have to learn that those two questions are not identical. One of the other reviewers objected to Pieper's world view, asserting that in the modern age, we have more spare time for leisure than in years past. He said: "we work much less than people use (sic) to have to work and this is due to being able to produce more in less time." This is utterly false. At the height of human civilization, (in the West, anyway), there were less than 140 working days per year. The rest were Sundays and Festival days.

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