

**The University of St. Thomas**

**Odyssey Program**

### Questions to Guide Your Reading

#### Josef Pieper, *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*, Chapter I

Take a look at the first epigraph on the page that faces the first page of chapter I. It reads: “But the gods, taking pity on human beings – gave them regularly recurring divine festivals, as a means of refreshment from their fatigue; they gave them the Muses, and Apollo, and Dionysius as the leaders of the Muses, to the end that, after refreshing themselves in the company of the gods, they might return to an upright posture.” First, some notes on the text:

**The Muses:** In Greek mythology, the Muses were a sisterhood of goddesses – their number was sometimes reported to be three, sometimes nine – who were said to inspire the creation of great art. It is from their name that we take the English word “music.” But music was not the only form of art thought to be inspired by the Muses. Indeed, in the Greek world, poetry, whether epic poems such as Homer’s *Illiad* and *Odyssey*, or the lyric poetry of Sappho, and even many Greek tragedies, were often accompanied by music. Many of these works – especially the tragedies – were performed, or composed specifically for use in, the major Greek religious festivals. So, for example, it was common, on a major religious festival, for all the citizens of Athens to gather together for a large feast, during which the wine would flow freely and many citizens would go to the theater to watch one of the great tragedies of, for example, Aeschylus, Euripides, or Sophocles. So, although we might be tempted to associate the Muses solely with “music,” during the ancient Greek period, they were associated with all of the great arts of creative “making” (in Greek, *poesis*): music, dance, theater, sculpture, painting, and poetry.

**Apollo:** Apollo, the sun god, was not only considered to be the god of reason, but was also often considered to be the leader of the Muses. You might consider before class the significance of suggesting that the “god of reason” was the leader and guide of the Muses – those who inspire the arts and crafts. It is interesting, is it not, that we hear echoes of the Greek word “Muse” not only in a word with festive connotations, such as “amuse,” but also in a word with more studious connotations, such as to “muse upon” a text or idea.

**Dionysius,** or Dionysos in Greek, was the god of wine, although he is also often associated with the harvest (festivals were often held at the time of harvest) and with the theater (theater events, as I have already indicated, were often held during festivals and often included some drinking of wine). He is also known by the name **Bacchus**, thus the frenzied rituals inspired by this god (and the drinking of his brew) were sometimes called *bakcheia* in Greek, or in English, “bacchanals” (the adjective, which sometimes comes in handy, would be “bacchanalian”). Dionysius was also associated, by Plato for example (see his dialogue *The Symposium*, which is carried out in the context of a long drinking party), with a kind of divine madness that could itself be the mouthpiece of truth and wisdom. At the end of the Nineteenth Century, the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche was to become famous for his claim that human life always involves a struggle between the rational aspects of human nature (what Nietzsche calls the “Apollonian”) and the more passionate or “ecstatic” aspects of human nature (which he describes as the “Dionysian”). Greek tragedy, thought Nietzsche was born out of a mixture of these two elements.

Now some questions to consider.

1. What do you suppose is the significance of using this particular passage as a sort of “preface” to his book? Does it give you a sense of what might be coming? When we get to the end of the book, I will ask you a similar question. I will ask: “Now that you’ve finished Josef Pieper’s book, why do you suppose that he used the epigraph at the beginning? What significance did it have?” Right now, you can give only a preliminary answer. Later, you will compare this answer with the one you will give having read the entire book, and ask yourself: “How close was I to guessing the thesis of the book?” As you read, please keep this little epigraph in the back of your mind.

\*Here is a hint to help you with the previous question. Look at the “Preface to the English Edition” on the previous pages. There Pieper describes what he calls the “common origin or foundation” of the two essays in your book. (We have only assigned the first essay on “leisure,” and not the second, on “the philosophical act.”) What, according to Pieper, is the thought that is the “common origin and foundation” of the two essays in the book, and how does it relate to the first epigraph we discussed above?

\* Common origin and foundation: “Culture depends for its very existence on leisure [which, Pieper suggests, is not merely time off from work, but also freedom from work, not merely in terms of time, but in terms of one’s mind-set

about work and life], and leisure, in its turn, is not possible unless it has a durable and living link with the *cultus*, with divine worship.”

2. Pieper says on the first page of chapter I (p. 3 in your edition), that “We are engaged in the re-building of a house.” Pieper wrote this book in Germany in the summer of 1947. What do you suppose he means when he wrote to his fellow Germans: “We are engaged in the re-building of a house”?

\* In general, the re-building of Germany’s bombed out cities, towns, and infrastructure

3. Interestingly, although Pieper admits that there is much work to be done reconstructing war-torn Germany, he says that what is important, is “not only securing survival,” but what else? Why would this second dimension have been as important as the first in the immediate aftermath of World War II, the Holocaust, and the dominance of the Nazi Party in Germany?

\* See p. 3, par. 2: “also putting in order again our entire moral and intellectual heritage”

\* Pieper understood that the nation had not only crippled itself physically by the war it had waged, but it had crippled itself morally and spiritually as well by its participation in the Nazi atrocities.

\* Pieper’s question to the German people was, in essence, “Now what must we do to rebuild Germany – not only physically, but also in terms of the moral and intellectual character of German society and culture?”

4. What, according to Josef Pieper, is one of the foundations of Western European culture? Does this comment strike you as odd? If so, why? Are you pleased to hear that leisure is one of the foundations of Western European culture? What do you suppose your parents would say if you told them that you were reading a book which argues that leisure was one of the foundations of Western European culture?

\* See p. 3, par. 3: “leisure is one of these foundations”

5. What is the Greek word for leisure? The Greek word for leisure has come down to us in what English word? Does that seem odd to you? Have you ever before thought there was a relationship between “school” and “leisure”? (Then again, if you weren’t enrolled as a full-time college student, what would you probably be doing? Or to put this another way, if you have any friends who aren’t in school, what are they doing while you’re in school? Unless they are independently wealthy, they’re probably working a job. And even if you too have a part-time job, isn’t it the case that you need time off from your job in order to attend school? Does it make any sense to you now why the ancient Greeks would have thought there might be a relationship between “school” and “freedom from work” – at least a certain type of work?)

\* See bottom p. 3, top of 4: The Greek word for leisure is *skolei*, which is the origin of the Latin *schola*, from which we get the English “school”

6. Why, according to Pieper, has the original meaning and true significance of “leisure” been practically forgotten today?

\* See p. 4, par. 1: it has been forgotten in today’s leisure-less culture of “total work;” “in order to win our way to a real understanding of leisure, we must confront the contradiction that arises from our overemphasis on the world of work.”

7. What does Pieper think of this phrase from German sociologist Max Weber’s famous book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (note, the saying has to do with Weber’s estimation of the modern world; it has nothing to do *per se* with Protestantism): “One does not only work in order to live, but one lives for the sake of one’s work”?

\* See p. 4, par. 2: He offers the following: “We work in order to be at leisure.”

8. Note, however, that Weber’s saying might more charitably be interpreted as suggesting that, in the modern world (unlike the ancient world), we do not merely work in order to secure our survival – merely in order to gain things such as food, clothing, housing, and shelter – we *choose* our work, and being successful at that work becomes one of the major goals of our life. But isn’t there still a danger here? Isn’t it still possible that we’re defining our identity in terms of our “work” – our “job” – and not taking sufficient account of other important dimensions? The fundamental questions thus remain: How important is work? How much of our lives and our identities are bound up with our jobs? Are there other important things as well as work? Are we paying attention to them as well? What are they, and how much effort are we expending on them? College education, most people assume, is about “getting a job.” This is not untrue. But consider this: Should a college education help prepare you in other aspects of your life as well? Should it help prepare you to become a more complete human person? Should it help prepare you to live a “good life” – by doing things, for example, like asking you to consider what “living the good life” is? If college is meant to prepare you for “the real world,” and

“the real world” involves both work *and* other things beyond work, should college help prepare you for those “other things” too? If so, why? If not, why not?

9. What are the Greek and Latin words for “work” (and by this we mean the kind of work you do when you are employed)? What, according to the philosopher Aristotle, is the “pivot” around which everything turns?

\* See p. 5, top: Greek: *a-scholia*; Latin (*neg-otium*): in both cases, literally “not-leisure”

\* the pivot around which everything turns is leisure

10. According to Pieper, what Christian concept was built on the Aristotelian concept of leisure?

\* See p. 5, par. 3: “the Christian concept of the ‘contemplative life’ (the *vita contemplativa*) was built on the Aristotelian concept of leisure

11. Pieper suggests, furthermore, that the distinction between the “Liberal Arts” and the “Servile Arts” also has its origins in the ancient Greek concept of leisure. In the next several chapters, you will be introduced more thoroughly to the distinction. For now, you might simply note, which of the two, says Pieper, is not appropriate for the “holy rest” of the Sabbath? To follow up, you might simply consider for yourself: What sorts of things do I do (other than sleep) when I have time, and I want to “rest”? Do you *ever* take time simply to rest and “be you”? If not, why not? If you do, what sorts of things do you do, and what do they reveal about “being you”?

\* See p. 5, near bottom: “when the issue of ‘servile work’ arises, the kind of activity that is deemed inappropriate for the ‘holy rest’ of the Sabbath, Sundays, or Holidays”

12. Pieper suggests at the bottom of p. 6 that he will not be using the word “worker” in his essay “in the sense of a distinct kind of occupation” – that is to say, any sort of occupation in particular. His “target,” therefore, is not any particular kind of work, or even “having a job,” both of which he will admit are necessary and good human activities. What he is after, in other words, is a particular *attitude* toward the world of work, and indeed, oftentimes, toward life itself. He is after the attitude, which he thinks is becoming more common in the modern world, that views “work” (in the sense of a “job”) as being the whole description of what is meaningful about human life. Now a question: What is it, according to Pieper, that “looms behind the new claims being made for ‘work’ and the ‘worker’”? What, in other words, is Pieper going to have to “dig more deeply into” in order to get at the roots of the problem?

\* See p. 7: “An altered conception of the human being *as such*, and a new interpretation of the meaning of human existence *as such*, looms behind the new claims being made for “work” and the “worker.”

\* The task at hand is “digging more deeply to the very roots of a philosophical and theological understanding of the human person.

13. Pope John Paul II, in a 1981 encyclical “On the Dignity of Human Labor” entitled *Laborem Exercens*, suggested that to understand the dignity of human work, we must understand that work has two dimensions: an objective as well as a subjective dimension. The *objective* dimension of work is the thing produced, whether it be cars, electrical circuits, or a painting by Rembrandt. Talking about the *subjective* dimension of work directs our attention at *the one working*: the worker. Regarding work, then, Pope John Paul II says the following: “work bears a particular mark of man and of humanity, the mark of a person operating within a community of persons. And this mark decides its interior characteristics; in a sense it constitutes [work’s] very nature.” And again, later in the same document, he insists: “even in the age of ever more mechanized ‘work’, the proper subject of work continues to be man.” Finally, in his conclusion at the end of the encyclical, the Pope says this: “On the basis of these illuminations emanating from the Source himself, the Church has always proclaimed what we find expressed in modern terms in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council: ‘Just as human activity proceeds from man, so it is ordered towards man. For when a man works he not only alters things and society, he develops himself as well. He learns much, he cultivates his resources, he goes outside of himself and beyond himself. Rightly understood, this kind of growth is of greater value than any external riches which can be garnered.’ ... Hence, the norm of human activity is this: that in accord with the divine plan and will, it should harmonize with the genuine good of the human race, and allow people as individuals and as members of society to pursue their total vocation and fulfil it.” How are Pope John Paul II’s concerns similar to those of Josef Pieper? Note that the one is writing about the nature of “work” and the other on the nature of “leisure,” so you might expect their perspectives to be absolutely opposite. But in fact, they are very similar. For both men, the questions about “work” and “leisure” bring us back to a more fundamental question. What is it?

\* It brings us back to the fundamental question: What is the nature of the human person?

\* For Pieper: “The task at hand is “digging more deeply to the very roots of a philosophical and theological understanding of the human person.” For Pope John Paul II, “the subject of work continues to be man.”

14. Compare the following text from Pope John Paul II's encyclical "On the Dignity of Human Labor" (*Laborem Exercens*) with the chapter you've just read by Josef Pieper. How are they similar? How are they different? The following selection is from section 6, one of the most important sections of the encyclical – a section entitled "Work in the Subjective Sense: Man as the Subject of Work":

In order to continue our analysis of work, an analysis linked with the word of the Bible telling man that he is to subdue the earth, we must concentrate our attention on work in the subjective sense, much more than we did on the objective significance ...

Man has to subdue the earth and dominate it, because as the "image of God" he is a person, that is to say, a subjective being capable of acting in a planned and rational way, capable of deciding about himself, and with a tendency to self-realization. As a person, man is therefore the subject of work. As a person he works, he performs various actions belonging to the work process; independently of their objective content, these actions must all serve to realize his humanity, to fulfil the calling to be a person that is his by reason of his very humanity.

The ancient world introduced its own typical differentiation of people into classes according to the type of work done. Work which demanded from the worker the exercise of physical strength, the work of muscles and hands, was considered unworthy of free men, and was therefore given to slaves. By broadening certain aspects that already belonged to the Old Testament, Christianity brought about a fundamental change of ideas in this field, taking the whole content of the Gospel message as its point of departure, especially the fact that the one who, while being God, became like us in all things devoted most of the years of his life on earth to manual work at the carpenter's bench. This circumstance constitutes in itself the most eloquent "Gospel of work", showing that the basis for determining the value of human work is not primarily the kind of work being done but the fact that the one who is doing it is a person. The sources of the dignity of work are to be sought primarily in the subjective dimension, not in the objective one.

Such a concept practically does away with the very basis of the ancient differentiation of people into classes according to the kind of work done. This does not mean that, from the objective point of view, human work cannot and must not be rated and qualified in any way. It only means that the primary basis of the value of work is man himself, who is its subject. This leads immediately to a very important conclusion of an ethical nature: however true it may be that man is destined for work and called to it, in the first place work is "for man" and not man "for work". Through this conclusion one rightly comes to recognize the pre-eminence of the subjective meaning of work over the objective one. Given this way of understanding things, and presupposing that different sorts of work that people do can have greater or lesser objective value, let us try nevertheless to show that each sort is judged above all by the measure of the dignity of the subject of work, that is to say the person, the individual who carries it out. On the other hand: independently of the work that every man does, and presupposing that this work constitutes a purpose – at times a very demanding one – of his activity, this purpose does not possess a definitive meaning in itself. In fact, in the final analysis it is always man who is the purpose of the work, whatever work it is that is done by man – even if the common scale of values rates it as the merest "service", as the most monotonous even the most alienating work.

\* Differences: The Pope's discussion of the value of work and his more critical attitude toward the ancient world's differentiation into classes according to the kind of work done: Work which demanded from the worker the exercise of physical strength, the work of muscles and hands, was considered unworthy of free men, and was therefore given to slaves." The Pope reinterprets this ancient idea in the light of

the biblical message that Jesus was a carpenter who for most of his life did precisely this sort of "work of muscles and hands."

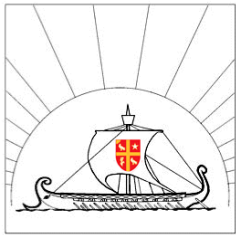
Similarities: The perspective that says "work is for man and not man for work. The perspective that says we must consider that it is to be a full and complete human person, living a full and meaningful

human life. In other words, "work" (whether manual labor or college professor) is a means to an end, not an end unto itself. Our question (and Pieper's), therefore, will be: What is the ultimate end that can motivate our work and make our lives meaningful?

15. Do you suppose that Prof. Pieper and Pope John Paul II mean to negate the meaning and value of work – indeed hard work? Or are they suggesting, rather, that work should be understood as a means to another end; that it be considered a *part* (an important part, but a part nonetheless) of a whole and complete human life?

16. Do the positions laid out by Josef Pieper and Pope John Paul II seem crazy to you? (They certainly aren't the "usual"

ways we think about work and leisure.) Or do their views make sense? If you believed that what they were saying was true and took those truths seriously, would it change anything in your life? If so, what? (Don't worry; we won't be testing you on this last question. But that doesn't make it unimportant. Quite the contrary: The truly important questions are ones that *life* tests you on, not school. All we can do is invite you to reflect on the important questions about the meaning and purpose of life. *Answering* those questions is something you do not only with your mind, but *with your life*. And those are things you must choose for yourself.)



**The University of St. Thomas**

**Odyssey Program**

### **Questions to Guide Your Reading**

Josef Pieper, *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*, Chapter II

1. In the previous chapter, Pieper discussed how in the ancient world the “intellectual life” had often been associated with “leisure” and freedom from work. So too, at the beginning of this chapter, he begins by re-stating that same theme “Up until this time (at least from the point of view of someone who worked with his hands) the province of intellectual enterprise tended to be looked upon as a kind of paradise, where nobody needed to work.” In other words, something that used to be the case is so no longer. It used to be the case that the intellectual life was associated with not working. But now, says Pieper, by a strange cultural transformation, the intellectual life itself has also become associated with work.

To get a sense of what he means, try this thought experiment. Let’s say your father calls you at school and asks, “What are you doing?” – and you answer: “I’m thinking.” He might be tempted to reply: “Stop wasting time and get to work! We’re paying a lot of money for that education.” But doesn’t such a response suggest that “thinking” must justify itself as a kind of work? So, for example, if your father asked you, “What are you doing?” – and you answered: “I’m working diligently on my classes,” he probably would be a lot happier. As long as “thinking” can be justified as a kind of work, then it is not “wasting time.” But just sitting and thinking – about the world, about the meaning and purpose of life, about what makes a rose beautiful – well, to many people, that seems just a bit too frivolous. Shouldn’t you be doing something useful? Do you understand now what Pieper means when he talks about the “world of total work”?

But we might point out two things: First, many of the most important discoveries in history were made by men and women who were inspired by their wonder and amazement at the world to sit and think. And secondly, perhaps thinking, pondering, and questioning have a value beyond whether they can make us money or produce wonderful new products. Perhaps thinking, pondering, and questioning are activities that human beings are simply meant to do. Perhaps they are the activities that make human life more human. Keep these things in mind as you read the remainder of the chapter.

2. Pieper dedicates the first part of this chapter to elucidating a distinction between two ways of “knowing.” The first way of knowing Pieper calls *ratio*, which traditionally (when people spoke Latin) was the Latin word for “reason” or the power of discursive thought: the power, says Pieper, “of searching and re-searching, abstracting, refining, and concluding.” The second way of knowing Pieper calls *intellectus*, which was the Latin word for “understanding.” *Intellectus*, says Pieper, refers to the ability of “simply looking” (*simplex intuitus*), “to which the truth presents itself as a landscape presents itself to the eye.” Your job as you read is to figure out what Pieper is trying to get at by means of this distinction.

So, for example, look on p. 9 at his description of two different kinds of perception. (“Perception” is different from “knowing.” “Perception” is simpler. It is what we mean when we talk about “sense perception.” You can understand the difference between “perception” and “knowing” if you think of a time when, driving at dusk, you have “seen” something on the road in front of you, but haven’t known *what* it is. Although you “perceive” the object, you don’t “know” it.) Thus, on p. 9, Pieper distinguishes between two ways of looking at a rose. The first way he describes as a “relaxed” looking: that is when “we are merely looking at the rose and not *observing* or *studying* it, counting or measuring its various features.” This latter sort of “looking,” says Pieper – the kind that involves “studying, counting, and measuring” – would *not* be a “relaxed” action. It would be, he suggests, rather, “an act of aggression.” But, he continues: “simply looking at something, gazing at it, ‘taking it in,’ is merely to open our eyes to receive the things that present themselves to us, that come to us without any need for ‘effort’ on our part to ‘possess’ them.

Does this distinction between merely “gazing at” a rose and a more “aggressive” sort of looking, which involves “studying, counting, and measuring” it in order to “possess” it or “control” it – does this distinction make any sense to you? Have you ever looked at the world – or read a book or simply sat and listened to another person, for that matter –

simply with the desire to let it disclose itself to you in all its fullness, and not with the intention of “using” it, “controlling” it, or “possessing” it?

3. In subsequent pages, Pieper moves from “perception” to “knowing,” and asks: What about on the level of knowing: Is there such a thing as an “intellectual vision” that is “relaxed” – that involves “opening ourselves to receive the things that present themselves to us,” and come to us without any need for “effort” on our part to “possess” or “control” them? What do modern philosophers (such as Immanuel Kant) say about the possibility of such a “relaxed” knowing? What did ancient and medieval philosophers say?

\* Modern philosophers such as Kant answer: no. Ancient and medieval philosophers say: yes.

4. According to Pieper, of these two – *ratio* and *intellectus* – which is the distinctively human manner of knowing? Which is the manner of human knowing that man shares with the angels? Which sort of knowing does Pieper think helps to serve the highest fulfillment of what it is to be human?

\* properly human: *ratio*

\* shared with angels: *intellectus*

\* the highest fulfillment of what it is to be human is the superhuman: the divine: *intellectus*

5. How did the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus describe this higher form of intellectual knowing?

\* “Listening-in to the being of things.”

6. Let’s think about this phrase: “*Listening-in to the being of things.*” What do you suppose that means? Let me give you two examples that might help.

The first example involves a line from a poem (“The Dry Salvages”) by poet T. S. Eliot. In that poem – the third of the so-called *Four Quartets* – Eliot speaks of:

“...music heard so deeply.

That it is not heard at all, but you are the music

While the music lasts.”

Does Eliot’s line make any sense to you? Have you ever had such an experience? If not with music, then perhaps with Nature?

7. The second example involves some famous comments made by the Twentieth Century German philosopher Martin Heidegger on a painting by the artist Van Gogh sometimes known by the name “Peasant Shoes.” In reality, Van Gogh painted several different images of shoes during his life – all of them old and rugged, but not the same pair of shoes twice – all of them entitled, simply, “A Pair of Shoes.” The painting that Heidegger had in mind, however, is probably the following:



Having seen this painting, Heidegger wrote the following: “From Van Gogh’s painting, we cannot even tell where these shoes are. There is nothing surrounding this pair of peasant shoes in or to which they might belong – only an undefined space. There are not even clods of soil from the field or the field-path sticking to them, which would at least hint at their use. And pair of peasant shoes and nothing more. And yet –

“From the dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes the toilsome tread of the worker stares forth. In the stiffly rugged heaviness of the shoes there is the accumulated tenacity of her slow trudges through the far-spreading

and ever-uniform furrows of the field swept by a raw wind. On the leather lie the dampness and richness of the soil. Under the soles vibrates the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of the ripening grain [in the summer] and its unexplained self-refusal in the fallow desolation of the wintry field. This equipment [the shoes] is pervaded by uncomplaining worry as the certainty of bread, the wordless joy of having once more withstood want, the trembling ... and shivering at the surrounding menace of death. This equipment [the shoes] belongs to the *earth*, and it finds its place in the *world* of the peasant woman....

“But perhaps it is only in the picture that we notice all this about the shoes. The peasant woman, on the other hand, simply wears them. If only this simple wearing were so simple. When she takes off her shoes late in the evening, in deep but healthy fatigue, and reaches out for them again in the still dim dawn, or passes them by on the day of rest, she knows all this without noticing or reflecting...”

This quality of the shoes – known by the woman without reflection, but which we must somehow discover – was revealed, says Heidegger: “Not by a description and explanation of a pair of shoes actually present [such as might be given by a scientist]; not by a report about the process of making shoes [such as might be given by a reporter]; and also not by the observation of the actual use of shoes occurring here and there [such as might be given by a sociologist]; but only by bringing ourselves before Van Gogh’s painting. This painting spoke. In the nearness of the work we were suddenly somewhere else than we usually tend to be .... What happens here? What is at work in the work? Van Gogh’s painting is the disclosure of what the equipment, the pair of peasant shoes, *is* in truth.”

Thus, concludes Heidegger: “The art work opens up [“reveals”] in its own way the Being of things.” That is to say, the art work discloses in and by means of the thing (in this case, a simple pair of shoes) a whole way of life -- that is to say, a whole way of “existing in the world.”

Now some questions. First: Does Heidegger’s comment about art “opening up in its own way the Being of things” make any sense to you? Do you have any examples of your own? Does it help you to make any more sense of the phrase, “*Listening-in to the being of things*”? Does it help you to understand what Josef Pieper is talking about when he compares “contemplating” a rose (or a pair of old shoes) versus “studying, counting, and measuring” it in order to “possess” it or “control” it?

Note, if you will, that “*listening-in to the being of things*” does not mean staring at the shoes blankly and stupidly. It is not mean emptying your brain. It may, however, mean getting *yourself* out of the way to allow the *thing* to speak to you. Plenty of people undoubtedly have heard a piece of music or looked at an old pair of shoes and said to themselves nothing more than, “What’s the title of this song?” or “That’s an ugly old pair of shoes.” Just as plenty of people have looked at the sky without wondering “Why is it blue?” or added salt to water without wondering “Why do the little granules disappear?” But is there something to be gained by gazing at the world *in wonder*, not because you think you can “use” it or “make” something out of it – which aren’t in and of themselves bad impulses – but just because you want to understand it? Perhaps for no other reason than because what it is to be human is simply to *question – to want to know*?

Is there a difference, for example, if a person asks: “What is this song?” and means not, “What is the title?” but: “What *is* this? How does the composer or performer *do* that? How does such a sound come to be?” If so, what is the difference?

Is there a difference between your mother looking into your closet and asking: “What’s the story with this old pair of shoes? Why haven’t you thrown them away?” and you, looking into your grandmother’s closet and asking: “What’s the story with this old pair of shoes? Why have you kept them all these years? What happened that made them so important?” If so, what is the difference? Is there a difference between looking at a whale and asking: “How much oil do you suppose that thing would produce?” versus wondering “How in the world does a creature that big get enough food to sustain itself?” If so, what is the difference?

Now look back at all the examples I gave in the previous paragraphs concerning the song and the shoes, and ask yourself this: If you are trying to memorize or remember the names of songs for an exam, is it work? On the other hand, if you are fascinated by a piece of music and you listen to it over and over in order to understand it more deeply, is it work?

How about this: If your mother asks you for an explanation of why there is an old, dirty pair of shoes in your closet, is it work – both for you and for her? (Do you think it’s any less painful for her to hear the explanation than it is for you to give it?) If, on the other hand, you ask your grandmother for the story behind an old, beloved pair of shoes, is it “work” when you listen to her tell the tale? Explain the differences. Are you starting to understand why Pieper claims (on p. 13, for example) that “the simple act of the *intellectus* is *not* work?” Explain.

Are you finally starting to get a sense of what Pieper means by his distinction between *ratio* and *intellectus*? Are you starting to understand, for example, why he thinks the intellectual life, properly speaking, involves both?

Explain. And given what Pieper thinks about the relationship between *intellectual* and *ratio*, what sort of education for students do you suppose he would favor?

\* Last question: He *probably* would favor – and he does – a liberal arts education that educates both *ratio* as well as fostering an appreciation for and development of *intellectus*.

8. At the bottom of p. 13, Pieper suggests that the statement “knowing is work,” is a statement “with two sides to it.” It implies, he says, “a demand *on* the human being, and a demand *made by* the human being.” What is the *demand on* the human being? What, on the other hand, is the claim *made by* man?

\* The demand made on the human being: If you want to understand something, you have to work.

\* The demand made by the human being: If knowing is work, exclusively work, then the one who knows, knows only the truth of his own, subjective activity [he knows only his own thoughts], and nothing else. There is nothing in his knowing that is not the fruit of his own efforts: there is nothing “received” in it.”

9. Reflecting upon the concept of “intellectual work,” Pieper concludes that, if we judge intellectual activity the way we judge work, then we would be drawn to the conclusion that “the *truth* of what is known is determined by the *effort* put into knowing it.” What does Pieper think of this conclusion? What do *you* think of this conclusion? Do you, for example, agree with the idea that, even if you’ve given the wrong answers, you should get an A in a class or on an exam because you put forth a lot of *effort*? Is the phrase: “But I worked really, really hard on this [fill in the blank] – exam, paper, test, assignment” – part of your vocabulary? (If it is, here’s a bit of advice: Forget that phrase. You won’t find it useful anymore – either in college or, ironically enough, in the “working world.”)

10. Pieper suggests that the Cynic philosopher Antisthenes was what he calls “a surprisingly ‘modern’ figure,” who “was responsible for the first paradigm of the ‘worker’ – rather, he represented it himself.” Describe the character of this man Antisthenes? Is he like you? Is he like anyone you know? To what does Pieper compare this man Antisthenes? What sort of education do you suppose Antisthenes would favor for the young? What sort of things do you suppose he would think are best left out?

\* As an ethicist of independence [rugged individualism?], this Antisthenes had no feeling for cultic celebration, which he preferred attacking with “enlightened [that is to say, cynical] wit.” He was “a-musical” and a foe of the Muses: poetry only interested him for its moral content. He felt no responsiveness to *Eros* (he said he “would like to kill Aphrodite,” the goddess of beauty and love). And as a flat Realist, he had no belief in immortality (what really matters, he said, was to live rightly “on this earth”).

\* He is the very “type” of the modern “workaholic.”

\* Antisthenes would undoubtedly want a very “useful” education: that is to say, one useful for business, but with a smattering of ethics (moral content). He wouldn’t have much use for things like music, theater, cultic celebration, or something like theology. And as for literature, art, or poetry, he would always read merely to get the “moral content,” not to appreciate the beauty of the work.

\* God only knows how he would have chosen his wife. One presumes either because he found her “useful” or “good moral content.”

11. On pp. 15 and 17, Pieper compares what the German philosopher Immanuel Kant has to say about the relationship between our natural inclinations and morality with what the medieval theologian St. Thomas Aquinas has to say on the same subject. Please compare the two, and please indicate the role of “love” in Aquinas’s view.

\* Kant: Whatever someone does my inclination – and that means, without effort – is a betrayal of true morality. Indeed, according to Kant, the moral law by definition is opposed to natural inclination. The Good is difficult, and the voluntary effort put into forcing oneself to do something becomes the standard for moral goodness. The more difficult thing must be the higher good.

\* Aquinas: The essence of virtue consists more in the Good than in the Difficult. When something is more difficult, it is not for that reason necessarily more worthwhile. Note: it is NOT “virtue makes it possible for us to MASTER our natural inclinations.” No, that would be Kant. For Aquinas: “virtue perfects us to that we can *follow* our natural inclinations **IN THE RIGHT WAY.**” The highest realizations of moral goodness are known to be such precisely in this, that they take place **EFFORTLESSLY** – that is to say, because it of their essence to arise from **LOVE**.

12. Above, I asked the question, “is there something to be gained by gazing at the world *in wonder*, not because

you think you can “use” it or “make” something out of it – which aren’t in and of themselves bad impulses – but just because you want to understand it? Perhaps for no other reason than because what it is to be human is simply to *question – to want to know?*” Let me suggest for a moment that perhaps one of those “natural inclinations” we’ve been talking about is a “natural inclination” to know the truth of things. Thomas Aquinas thinks we have such a natural inclination. From what Josef Pieper has said about Thomas Aquinas and the natural inclinations, what do you suppose Aquinas would say about the degree of difficulty and our natural inclination to know the truth? What would be the role of love on such a view?

Now go back to the examples I gave you above of asking about some music you love or asking your grandmother about some old shoes. What makes this “asking” so much more “effortless” than the kind of studying you often do in school?

A related question: Is it possible to “know” the world without “loving” the world? Is it possible to “know” the truth without “loving” the truth? What would Pieper say? Would it make any sense to you if I told you that *a liberal arts education is about discovering what you love* – “discovering” in the sense of “finding out” what it is you love, and then, once you’ve found it, seeking to “discover it” more and more?

\* When something is more difficult [like studying], it is not for that reason necessarily more worthwhile. Note: it is NOT “virtue makes it possible for us to MASTER our natural inclinations.” No, that would be Kant. For Aquinas, “virtue perfects us so that we can *follow* our natural inclinations IN THE RIGHT WAY.”

\* The goal of “education” on this view is to open ourselves up more fully to our natural desire to know.

\* Again: “The highest realizations of moral goodness are known to be such precisely in this, that they take place EFFORTLESSLY – that is to say, because it of their essence to arise from LOVE.”

\* Education follows not from slave labor, but from love of the world and a desire to understand it.

\* Isn’t what makes the “asking” about the music and the shoes so much easier the fact that you LOVE them?

13. What does Pieper describe (on p. 18) as “the essence of knowing”? What does he say, on the next page, about what “knowing” means? Think back to our examples about the old shoes and the music. Do those examples suggest that there is just one way of “discovering reality” – of “grasping the being of things”? Or are there many? Perhaps as many as the various disciplines in a university? Perhaps more?

\* the essence of knowing lies, not in the effort of thought as such, but in the grasp of the being of things, in the discovery of reality.

\* Knowing means that the reality of existing things has been reached.

\* Perhaps we might say that a “university” is about searching for truth from a host of different directions, using a number of different means and methods.

14. On p. 19, Pieper talks about workers having “mask-like, stony features, ready to suffer pain, no matter what the reason.” (By the way, is that an accurate description of what you think the successful college student is supposed to be like? Is reading Pieper’s book changing your view at all?) What, according to Pieper, makes this notion of suffering radically different from the Christian understanding of suffering and self-sacrifice? What, for Thomas Aquinas, is “the goal and the norm of discipline”?

\* In the former case, one does not ask *why* (note the proviso: ready to suffer pain “no matter what the reason”).

\* In the Christian notion of self-sacrifice, one does not intend the painful as such, nor seeks exertion for the sake of exertion, nor the difficult simply because it is difficult; rather, what one seeks is a higher bliss, a healing, and the fullness of existence, and thereby the fullness of happiness: “The goal and the norm of discipline is happiness.”

15. Let’s reflect for a bit on that previous image of the “worker” with the “mask-like, stony features, ready to suffer pain, no matter what the reason.” What is distinctive about this person is, as Pieper points out, that he or she “does not ask why” – *why* am I doing all this work? You are about to enter upon the monumental task of getting a college degree. Do you know *why* you are setting forth to do all this work? If you don’t, does that strike you as odd?

Consider the following quotation by a man named J. J. Van der Leeuw:

“Most men are a mystery to themselves; many are even unaware of the existence of the mystery.... Yet, what could be stranger than that any human being should go through life and bear with all its vicissitudes, suffer the miseries common to all men, rejoice in the evanescent pleasures of life, bear its incessant burden and never ask why? If we were to see a man travelling under great discomfort and many hardships, and if, when we asked him whither he

was going, he were to answer that the question had never occurred to him, we should certainly consider such a man crazy. Yet that is exactly the case of most people in ordinary life. They go on the journey from birth to death, they toil along the weary road of life, and never ask why, or if they do, they ask the question in a superficial way, not really caring whether they find the answer or not.”

In a best-selling book entitled *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, author Stephen J. Covey tells his readers that one of the first of the seven habits is to “start with the end in mind.” That is, identify your purpose. From years of experience, Covey has found that many people are so lost in their “busy-ness,” they never take the opportunity to stop and ask themselves *why* – why am I doing what I’m doing? From years of experience, I have found that many students who don’t understand why they are in school, end up sleep-walking through their classes – classes for which they are paying dearly, but which they barely care enough about to show up to.

When such students start getting poor grades – as they invariably do – their parents and teacher will often exhort them to “bear up,” “get tough,” “show some *discipline*.” These are not bad pieces of advice. In fact, they are often very good pieces of advice. But think back: What does Thomas Aquinas say is “the goal and the norm of discipline”? The goal and norm of discipline is *happiness*.

Okay, so now the question is, what makes you *happy*? From some years of experience asking this question of my students, I have found that some of them have almost no idea what would make them happy. And when they don’t, they have no *reason* to become disciplined.

Do you have any idea what would make *you* happy? Have you ever thought of college as a means to reaching happiness? Have you ever thought of a job as a means to reaching happiness? Why not? Isn’t “happy” what all people desire to be? Is there anyone who says: “Nope; not me. I don’t want to be happy. My goal in life is to be utterly miserable”?

Think for a moment, if you would, about the kinds of things that make you happy. It might be spending time with family and friends, or taking long bike-rides on back country roads, or restoring cars. One student of mine said that what made him happy was driving around with his friends. But it was also important that it be in a very particular car: specifically, in a blue 1968 Mustang convertible that he and his father had restored. To each his or her own.

But now ask yourself this: Is there any connection between the things you are doing now and the things that truly make you happy? Is there any connection, for example, between the career you think you want and the things that actually make you happy? Have you even considered the question? If you haven’t considered such questions at all and have absolutely no idea *why* you are doing what you’re doing, and if what you’re doing isn’t motivated by *love* of something, what makes you think you’ll be able to discipline yourself to get through it?

Okay, so let me ask you this: If *you* were a teacher, and *you* had students who were sleep-walking like zombies through their classes, wasting thousands of dollars of education, what sort of questions would *you* be asking them? Wouldn’t you ask them “*Why* are you doing this?” So – do you have an answer? (By the way, if you don’t, you’re still allowed to stay. But we hope you won’t be too annoyed if we keep asking you, year after year, pesky questions like: “Where are you going? What are your goals? What is the purpose of life? What kinds of things make one’s life *happy* and *meaningful*?” We are convinced that somewhere along the line – either now or later in life (or now and for the rest of your life) – you’ll have to ask these questions. Well, you’ll have to ask them, that is, if you ever want to be happy. If you don’t want to be happy – if a life of working with “mask-like, stony features, ready to suffer pain, no matter what the reason” sounds good to you – well then, hey, knock yourself out!)

16. On p. 20 of his text, Pieper sums up the two theses he has already argued against – namely (1) the view that human knowing is accomplished exclusively in the manner of discursive activity (that is to say, by filling your head with lots of useful facts), and (2) the view that the effort that goes into thought is the criterion of its truth. Besides these two, he says, “there is a third element involved as well, which appears to be even more crucial than the first two and seems to comprehend both of them within itself.” What is this third idea about work?

\* See bottom p. 20: “Work means ‘contribution to society.’ And ‘intellectual work’ is intellectual activity as social service, as contribution to the common utility.”

\* Top of p. 21: “Even the learned man and the student are workers; they too are drawn into the social system and its distribution of labor.

\* The intellectual worker is also bound to his function; he too is a functionary in the total world of work, he may be called a “specialist,” [and “expert”], but he is still a functionary.

\* Nobody is granted a “free zone” of intellectual activity, “free” meaning *not* being subordinated to a duty to fulfill some function.

17. To get an idea what Pieper means when he says (on p. 21) that even the learned man and the student are workers; “they too are drawn into the social system and its distribution of labor” – and later on the same page: “Nobody is granted a ‘free zone’ of intellectual activity, ‘free’ meaning *not* being subordinated to a duty to fulfill some function” – consider the following. If you found out, after some experience of the subject, that you loved English literature, or art history, or the structure of the DNA molecule, so much so that you decided to major in English or Art or Biology, what would you say if someone asked you: “Yeah, but what are you going to *do* with a degree in that?” Would you: (A) make up some function that you might conceivably fulfill, (“I’ll be an English teacher”; “I’ll work in an art museum”; “I’ll be a doctor”), or (B) tell your questioner that there are a million different jobs in the world, and a liberal arts education is about discovering what you love and then doing it?

18. All of this brings us to Pieper’s discussion of the “liberal arts” that begins on the bottom of p. 21. How does Pieper describe the “liberal arts”? How are they distinguished from the “servile arts”?

\* Every art is called *liberal* which is order to knowing; those which are ordered to some utility to be attained through action are called *servile* arts.

\* Liberal arts, therefore, are ways of human action which have their justification in themselves; servile arts are ways of human action that have a purpose outside of themselves, a purpose, to be more exact, which consists in a useful effect that can be realized through *praxis* [action; doing].

\* The “liberality” or “freedom” of the liberal arts consists in their not being disposable for purposes, that they do not need to be legitimated by a social function, by being “work.”

19. On p. 22, Pieper asks: “Is there still an area of human action, or human existence as such, that does not have its justification by being part of the machinery of a ‘five-year plan’?” It might help to remember that Pieper wrote this book in 1948, in the aftermath of World War II, and during the time when Stalin ruled the Soviet Union and, not insignificantly, the Eastern half of Germany. During these years, Stalin instituted a series of what were called “Five Year Plans” to bring about economic development. Every part of Soviet society was supposed to be coordinated in order to bring about the desired economic progress. Thus, Pieper’s question might be restated thus: “Is there an area of human action, or human existence as such, that does not have to be justified by being part of a program of economic development?” What do you think? So, for example, what about the appreciation of beauty? Does a class in art have to be justified by the claim that, someday, you might decide to invest in some paintings by Monet or Rembrandt? Does a class in evolutionary biology have to be justified by the possibility that, some day, you might be able to develop a revolutionary new type of virus that would eat common bathroom mold? Does the exploration of space have to be justified by the fact that science from the space program brought about Teflon cookware and Tang? (By the way, if you ever do develop a mold-eating virus, and it’s safe around humans, please let me know. I could really use it. But in the mean time ...)

Take, for example, the painting we talked above by Van Gogh that people call “Peasant Shoes.” Let’s say that we knew this woman whose shoes were in the painting. And let’s say that we, along with the Catholic Church, wanted to affirm what Pope John Paul II used to call “the dignity of human labor.” How could we do it?

We might do begin, of course, by trying to relieve some of the economic want and need of such workers. But has Van Gogh done a service to the peasant woman as well? Not merely because he has given some extraneous “beauty” to a drab life, but precisely by having respected her dignity by revealing it in his painting of the shoes? Can we “celebrate” because of such works of art, while still working to improve the of the poor? Or are we merely romanticizing the condition of the poor? (We might be.) Can such a work help us to respect the humanity of the worker? And if we come closer to her humanity, are we more or less likely to intervene wisely to try to help? What are your thoughts?

20. Now look on p. 25, where Pieper says the following: “It should go without saying that not everything that cannot exactly be categorized as ‘useful’ is useless. And thus it is not at all without significance for a people and the realization of a nation’s common good that room be allowed, and respect be granted, for what is not ‘useful’ work’ in the sense of immediate application.” Does it make sense to say that some things, done merely for their own sake or merely for the joy of doing it, may end up being “useful” economically or socially, but that being “useful” is not the point of doing them?

So, for example, at one point in my life, I (Prof. Smith, silly professor of theology) worked as a research technician for Frito-Lay Research and Development. (Seriously.) I worked in the Department of Basic Research. Our job was simply to learn as much as possible about the chemistry of potatoes and corn and packaging materials and

anything else used by Frito-Lay. But since it was a corporation, and since top executives of corporations are usually worried about the “bottom line,” we were frequently being asked what “useful products” we had come up with recently in order to justify our existence. As much as we tried to point out that we weren’t “New Product Development” – they had their own big, beautiful lab across the way – but the “New Product Development” people made use of our “basic science” all the time, we just couldn’t seem to make the executives understand. What *we* knew, that some of *them* didn’t, is that “basic research” often paid big dividends in the long run in ways that no one could foresee. But for the “basic research” to be any good (or useful), it had to be pursued for its own sake and not because we could draw a clear line between this particular experiment in the lab and such and such an improvement in potato chips.

So, once again: Does it make sense to you to say that some things, done merely for their own sake or merely for the joy of doing it, may end up being “useful” economically or socially, but that being “useful” is not the point of doing them?

21. Now take a look at p. 23 in Pieper’s book, where he says the following: “There is not much to dispute about whether, or to what extent, the natural sciences, medical sciences, jurisprudence [law], or economics should have a circumscribed place for themselves in the functioning unity of the modern social system” – in other words, they are generally considered “useful” in society. “It is of the nature of the individual sciences to be related to purposes that exist apart from themselves. But there is also a philosophical manner of treating these special sciences ....” Please understand: Pieper is *not* merely talking about *philosophy courses* in, say, the “philosophy of science” or the “philosophy of law” or the “philosophy of economics” – all potentially interesting courses. What he is talking about, rather, is a *philosophical approach* (what in English, we usually call a “theoretical” approach) to these disciplines. That is to say, we are talking about studying natural science, law, or economics not simply for what it can *do* for you in terms of a career, but simply because studying natural science, law, or economics are interesting in and of themselves.

At the bottom of p. 24, then, Pieper says the following: “The functionary is trained. Training is distinguished by its orientation toward something partial, and specialized, in the human being, and toward some one section of the world.” Consider the following possibility. What if we invited Shell Oil over to campus to train our chemistry or business students for very particular jobs at Shell Oil? The obvious benefits of such a system would be that you would know that all your training would be “useful” in terms of getting you a job. Would there be drawbacks as well? So, for example, what if you decided to leave Shell Oil? What if you wanted to move into a different career? Would Shell Oil’s training to make you a Shell Oil functionary still serve you well in the long run? Would it serve you well as something *other than merely* a Shell Oil functionary? If not, what sort of education would be better? Is there, for example, a kind of education that would train you to be flexible – to be ready for any number of career paths? What would such an education look like? Would that education leave you more “free” than the one where you were trained to become a functionary at Shell Oil?

22. It is an interesting thing about a liberal arts education and personal freedom: many people throughout the centuries have noticed a connection between the two. But to take just one contemporary example, consider the following excerpts from an article entitled “Georgia Turns to the West for Ideas” (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, vol. 54, no. 42 (June 27, 2008): A22-23):

“Charles H. Fairbanks Jr. sits among a tight circle of a dozen students, each bent over a thick volume of Plato’s *Republic*. They are discussing, in English, the concept of the city-state guided by philosophers as a part of a “great books” course.

Here at Ilia Chavchavadze State University, where Mr. Fairbanks teaches six months a year, a radical change is taking place. No longer do professors stand stiffly on podiums, lecturing in Russian. No longer do students study only highly specialized and technical subjects.

Georgia, along with a number of other former Soviet countries, is rapidly reforming its higher-education system. Russian is being replaced by English in the classrooms and textbooks. Western-trained professors are flooding campuses with new methods of teaching. And liberal-arts courses are replacing vocational training.... ‘Our priority is to catch up with leading European and American universities,’ said Georgia’s president, Mikheil Saakashvili....”

Amazing, isn’t it? Students in Georgia yearning to be free from the dictates of the former Soviet system – that is to say, students who want to be free to do what *they* choose to do, rather than what the Russian government wants them to do – are turning to the liberal arts for an education that will prepare them for freedom. In the former Soviet Union, the education on which you are now embarking would be considered “radical” and “dangerous” – a threat to

the social order. That's because it is. Real reading, real thinking, and real questioning have always been a threat to any totalitarian social order.

Later in the same article, in a section entitled "A University Revolution," you will find the following:

"The idea to switch to a liberal-arts model in higher education, rather than the narrowly focused specialty schools and institutes of the Soviet system, in which a student might learn only about mining, say, first appeared in Georgia in 2000.... All of Georgia's universities have [now] instituted general-education requirements. Many highly specialized, outmoded courses have been trimmed from course catalogs.... At Chavchavadze, students who once took as many as 14 predetermined courses each week now study only five subjects at a time. And they are able to take courses outside their majors."

*Courses outside their majors!* Dear God, the horror! Students might actually learn something outside their own discipline. And if they did, then what? They might start *thinking* about what they are being taught. And then, they might even start – I shudder even to say it – they might even start *questioning*. That can't be allowed. That won't prepare students to take their designated places within the modern economy.

And finally, our article says this: "After decades of learning from old-fashioned Soviet or post-Soviet books, our students have become modern thinkers, able to read Machiavelli, Stephen Hawking, or Max Weber." Yes, reading books – not pre-digested textbooks in which the selection and flow of information can be carefully controlled, but real books by great authors – can be dangerous. Why else do you suppose the former Soviet Union would have banned them? Perhaps our slogan at UST should be: "Come to the University of St. Thomas and read dangerous, banned books: Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Machiavelli, Thomas Jefferson, Dostoevsky, the Bible."

Now that you've read about these colleges and universities in Georgia, does it make any more sense to you what Pieper means when he deplores the kind of education that creates "functionaries"? I'll ask my question again: Is there a kind of education that would train you to be *flexible* – that is, to be ready for any number of vocations or career paths? – ready, in fact, to live a full and free life within the modern world? What would such an education look like? Would that education leave you more "free" than the one in which you are trained to become a "functionary"? And here's one more question: Is that the kind of education you *want*?

23. After making the statement that: "The functionary is trained. Training is distinguished by its orientation toward something partial, and specialized, in the human being, and toward some one section of the world." Pieper continues with the following: "Education is concerned with the whole: whoever is educated knows how the world as a whole behaves. Education concerns the whole human being insofar as he is *capax universi*, "capable of the whole," able to comprehend the sum total of existing things." What do you suppose that means?

24. In *Man's Search for Meaning*, a very powerful book that emerged from reflections on his time in the Concentration Camp at Auschwitz, Jewish psychiatrist Victor Frankl makes the following comment: "Any attempt at fighting the camp's psychopathological influence on the prisoner .. had to aim at giving him inner strength by pointing out to him a future goal to which he could look forward." "Nietzsche's words, 'He who has a *why* to love for can bear with almost any *how*,' could be the guiding motto.... Whenever there was an opportunity for it, one had to give them a *why* – an aim – for their lives, in order to strengthen them to bear the terrible *how* of their existence. Woe to him who saw no more sense in his life, no aim, no purpose, and therefore no point in carrying on. He was soon lost." And in light of all this, Frankl makes the following claim: "It is a peculiarity of man that he can only live by looking to the future – *sub specie aeternitatis*. And this is his salvation in the most difficult moments of his existence, although he sometimes has to force his mind to the task." (By the way, that Latin phrase *sub specie aeternitatis* is difficult to translate into English, but it might best be rendered as "under the notion of eternity," or better yet: "with a view toward one's eternal destiny.")

What do you think? Do you suppose it would be crucial to have a sense of the meaning and purpose of life to stay alive in someplace like a Concentration Camp? Would it be less important outside of a Concentration Camp? Do you think Frankl is right in his supposition that human beings can really only survive if they can make sense of their present existence in terms of a larger vision of things – *sub specie aeternitatis*? If so, what kind of education would be best suited to prepare students to face such questions and such challenges? Does Pieper's statement to the effect that "Education concerns the whole human being insofar as he is *capax universi*" make any more sense to you now? Do you want that sort of education? Or would you rather be trained as a functionary?

25. Okay, I admit it; that last question was a bit unfair. No one wants to be labeled a “functionary.” But once you get past the rhetoric, the question still remains: What do you think is the purpose of an education? To train you for a specific entry-level job? To train you for a whole career? Or to train you for a whole life – a life that includes work as an important element, but which may include other important elements as well? If I were to ask you what the “other important elements” of life should be, would you be able to give me a list? Or has your education thus far been justified to you solely on the basis that it would help you “get a good job” and thus “getting a good job” is the only serious life-goal you bring to your consideration of education? Be honest. Does the example of the schools in the former Soviet republic of Georgia (see question 22 above) suggest any other possible goals?



The University of St. Thomas

Odyssey Program

### Questions to Guide Your Reading

#### Josef Pieper, *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*, Chapter III

1. In the first paragraph of chapter III, Pieper claims that, from the perspective of one who is immersed in the world of “total work” – from the perspective of such a “worker” (whose life is gauged entirely by work) – leisure (and, we might add, an education in something like the liberal arts), “can only appear as something totally unforeseen, something completely alien, without rhyme or reason – as a synonym, in fact, for idleness and laziness.” Isn’t he right about that? Isn’t he right that “leisure” (and by extension, something like the liberal arts) is often taken to be a synonym for idleness and laziness?

Think back to the example I gave before: What if your father called you and asked, “What are you doing?” and you told him: “I’m thinking,” or worse yet: “I’m listening-in to the being of things,” what do you suppose he would say? I for one would certainly be sympathetic if he said: “Stop being lazy and get to work!” But, let’s be honest, that’s because when you tell him, “I’m thinking,” he undoubtedly knows you well enough to know you’re probably just playing a video game and you really *should* “get to work.”

Pieper says elsewhere: “The talk of ‘valuable working time’ is, after all, not just talk; something utterly real is involved. Why should anyone decide to sacrifice this previous article without sufficient reason?” What Pieper is searching for is precisely this “sufficient reason.” What distinguishes him from others is simply that he doesn’t believe that leisure can be defined solely as a “break from work.” That would be to define leisure – and life itself – *in terms of work*. On this view, we take a break from work, so that we can be refreshed, in order that we can *get back to work*. The question Pieper poses to us is this: “Is there any purpose in life *other than work*?” Or to put it another way: If we ask the question, “Is life for work, or work for life?” – and by that we mean, “Is human life supposed to serve the ends of work, that is, does it find its total fulfillment in work, or is work supposed to serve the ends of a full and complete human life? – and if we answer, no, work is merely *part of* or is meant to be *a means to* a full and complete human life, then aren’t we left with the obvious question: “Okay, then what *is* a full and complete human life?” Let me suggest to you that *that* is the primary question of a liberal arts education.

Do you know what would constitute a full and complete human life? Do you understand, in other words, what you’re working *for*? If not, why not? Would it be worth spending some time reflecting on this question?

2. Leisure, in the sense Pieper is using the term, is definitely *not* idleness or laziness. That is a common mistake – one made by both students and parents. Students, when they hear the word “leisure,” think of things like “Spring Break,” “Saturday nights,” “party!” Parents, when they hear the word “leisure,” especially in association with their teenagers, will think of things like “video games,” “endless hours on the cell phone,” “my children staring blankly at the television screen.”

What should be clear by now, however, is that “leisure” implies none of these things for Josef Pieper. For Pieper, “leisure” is bound up with “contemplation,” and “contemplation,” on this view, is not blankly staring into space waiting for something “spiritual” to happen, but is, as Pieper says on p. 31 of this chapter, “the disposition of receptive understanding, of contemplative beholding, and immersion – in the real.” It is, he says, “the necessary preparation for accepting reality; only the person who is still can hear, and whoever is not still, cannot hear.” Does that sound like Spring Break or video games to you? I hope not.

Parents, for their part, are sometimes worried that talking about “leisure” and studying the “liberal arts” will make their children shiftless, lazy bohemians who hang out in dark coffee shops talking incessantly about Nietzsche and Sartre, staring dully at the latest avant garde art, and sharing their existential angst, never getting a job. In high schools, I think they call that being “emo.” If we meant any of those things by “leisure” and the “liberal arts,” your parents would be right to be worried, and they would be well-justified in sending you to another school to get a *real* education.

But “leisure,” in the sense Pieper is talking about, *isn’t* sitting around staring vacantly at the video game console or gyrating to loud music with 200 other adolescents in a cheap beer-induced fog at a beach-side bar. Nor are the “liberal arts” about becoming “artsy” and “sensitive” and hanging out with a bunch of intellectuals who know all sorts of odd things about Russian literature and the tribal cultures of Bali, Indonesia, but can’t even hold a job. Not even

close. Leisure is the necessary prerequisite for a liberal arts education, not merely because one needs “time off” from work in order to go to school – although that is true as well – but because the kind of education we are talking about is one in which the students must dispose themselves *internally* to seek knowledge and understanding of the world. ***It is about discovering what you love, so that you can spend a lifetime doing what you love.***

Indeed, to the objection that leisure and the liberal arts encourage idleness and laziness, Pieper says this: “Now the code of life of the High Middle Ages [when Thomas Aquinas lived] said something entirely opposite to this” [that is, opposite to the notion that leisure bred laziness]. Thinkers in the Middle Ages believed that it was precisely the “inability to be at leisure” that went together with idleness; that “the restlessness of work-for-work’s-sake arose from nothing other than idleness.”

Now *here* is an interesting thought: Perhaps the restless activity of the contemporary American worker is merely the flip side of the restless activity of the contemporary “party animal.” For neither is true leisure possible. That’s the problem. At many top-level universities in America, the students have this motto: “We work hard, and we party hard.” Sadly, neither seems to give them much satisfaction. They work to keep themselves busy, and they drink (“party”) in order to forget how empty and hollow their lives of total work, total ambition, and total success are. Let me suggest that, oftentimes, what Americans call “partying” is not “leisure,” it is merely “distraction.”

On this sort of “distraction,” the American Catholic writer and Trappist monk Thomas Merton, in a book entitled *The Ascent to Truth*, writes the following:

“The earthly desires men cherish are shadows. There is no true happiness in fulfilling them. Why, then, do we continue to pursue joys without substance? Because *the pursuit itself* has become our only substitute for joy. Unable to rest in anything we achieve, we determine to forget our discontent in a ceaseless quest for new satisfactions. In this pursuit, desire itself becomes our chief satisfaction....”

“It is not enough to say that the man who is attached to this world has bound himself to it, once and for all, by a wrong choice. No: he spins a whole net of falsities around his spirit by the repeated consecration of his whole self to values that do not exist. He exhausts himself in the pursuit of mirages that ever fade and are renewed as fast as they have faded, drawing him further and further into the wilderness where he must die of thirst....”

“A life immersed in matter and spirit ... is a life not merely of deluded thoughts and aspirations, but above all a life of ceaseless and sterile activity. What is more, in such a life the measure of illusion is the very intensity of the activity itself. The less you have, the more you do. The final delusion is movement, change, and variety for their own sakes alone.”

(A quick question: What would the opposite of “a life of ceaseless and sterile activity” be? Would it be the kind of “leisure” that Pieper is talking about? Just a thought.)

Merton continues: “Man was made for the highest activity, which is, in fact, his rest. That activity, which is contemplation, is immanent and it transcends the level of sense and of discourse. Man’s guilty sense of his incapacity for this one deep activity which is the reason for his very existence, is precisely what drives him to seek oblivion in exterior motion and desire. Incapable of the divine activity, which alone can satisfy his soul, fallen man flings himself upon exterior things, not so much for their own sake as for the sake of the agitation which keeps his spirit pleasant numb. He has but to remain busy with trifles; his pre-occupation will serve as a dope. It will not deaden all the pain of thinking; but it will at least do something to blur his sense of who he is and of his utter insufficiency.... ‘Distraction [says Pascal] is the only thing that consoles us for our miseries and yet it is, itself, the greatest of our miseries.’

“Why? Because it ‘diverts’ us, turns us aside from the one thing that can help us to begin our ascent to truth. That one thing is the sense of our own emptiness, our poverty, our limitations, and of the inability of created things to satisfy our profound need for reality and for truth.”

Do you think Merton is right about our tendency to seek out “distractions,” whether in work or shopping or partying, that keep us “numb,” that serve as a kind of dope, that blur our sense of who we are and why we are here? I would like you to keep this passage by Merton in the back of your mind as you read the chapter by Pieper.

Please also consider the following. How does the passage above from Merton’s *Ascent to Truth* help to illuminate the following passage from Pieper’s *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*: “Now the code of life of the High Middle Ages

said something entirely opposite to this” [that is, opposite to the notion that leisure bred laziness]. Thinkers in the Middle Ages believed that it was precisely the “inability to be at leisure” that went together with idleness; that “the restlessness of work-for-work’s-sake arose from nothing other than idleness.” So, for example, on this view, what do the restless party-animal and the restless worker have in common?

\* the inability to enjoy true leisure is what causes us to restlessly seek out work or partying

3. But let’s return to the topic of laziness, or what in the Middle Ages was known by the Latin word *acedia*. Wishing to distinguish “leisure” from “laziness,” Pieper points out (on p. 28) that, during the Middle Ages, laziness or *acedia* was not thought to be caused by leisure. What, on the contrary, was thought to be the ultimate cause of laziness? [Hint: It has something to do with that project of “digging more deeply to the very roots of a philosophical and theological understanding of the human person” that Pieper was talking about at the end of chapter 1.]

\* that the human being had given up on the very responsibility that comes with his dignity: that he does not want to be what God wants him to be, and that means that he does not want to be what he really is, and in the ultimate sense is.

\* *Acedia* (sloth, idleness) is the “despair of weakness”: despairingly not wanting to be oneself.

\* “behind all his energetic activity, he is not at one with himself.”

4. According to Pieper, then, what would be the opposite of idleness and laziness? Is it the acquisitive effort or industriousness, as practiced in the economic life of civil society? Is laziness, on this view, the result of a lack of economic ambition and enterprise? If not, what is it instead?

\* No: “The opposite of *acedia* is not the industrious spirit of the daily effort to make a living, but rather the cheerful affirmation by man of his own existence, of the world as a whole, and of God – of Love....”

\* “There can only be leisure, when man is at one with himself, when he is in accord with his own being.

5. Think about these two statements from your text: (A) “The opposite of *acedia* is not the industrious spirit of the daily effort to make a living, but rather the cheerful affirmation by man of his own existence, of the world as a whole, and of God – of Love....” And (B) “There can only be leisure, when man is at one with himself, when he is in accord with his own being.” Do you understand now why we can say that, for Pieper, “leisure” and the “liberal arts” will definitely *not* result in sitting around in bars or coffee shops bemoaning life, wallowing in rejection and existential angst? Explain why not. Do you also understand now why, for Pieper, the *answer* to the problem of idleness and boredom is not necessarily to be found in the world of “total work”? Why not?

\* Because both *acedia* (sloth, idleness, laziness) and the ceaseless activity of the “workaholic” spring from the same source: the inability to be at rest with oneself, with the world as a whole, and thus to enjoy true “leisure.”

6. Why, according to Pieper, should we not confuse true “leisure” merely with things like “breaks,” “time off,” “weekend,” “vacation,” and so on?

\* These are external. Leisure, says Pieper, is “a condition of the soul.”

7. Why, according to Pieper, is “leisure” (in his sense) a necessary precondition for coming to understand the truth? Why, then, by extension, is “leisure” (in Pieper’s sense) a necessary precondition for a liberal arts education?

\* Leisure is “an inner absence of preoccupation, a calm, an ability to let things go, to be quiet.”

\* “Leisure is a form of that stillness that is the necessary preparation for accepting reality; only the person who is still can hear, and whoever is not still, cannot hear. Such stillness as this is not mere soundlessness or a dead muteness; it means, rather, that the soul’s power, as real, of responding to the real – a *co*-response, eternally established in nature – has not yet descended into words. Leisure is the disposition of receptive understanding, of contemplative beholding, and immersion – in the real.”

\* If a liberal arts education is about coming to know the truth about the world and about oneself, then this sort of receptive attitude (namely, leisure) would be a necessary prerequisite.

8. On p. 32, Pieper asks this: “The surge of new life that flows out to us when we give ourselves to the contemplation of a blossoming rose, a sleeping child, or of a divine mystery – is this not like the surge of life that comes from deep, dreamless sleep?” *Is it?* Have you ever had an experience of what he is talking about?

Actually, you might ask yourself two questions. First, have you ever experienced a deep, dreamless sleep from which you awoke and the world seemed suddenly new and fresh and full of life? Similarly, have you experienced the

“surge of new life that flows out to us when we give ourselves to the contemplation of a blossoming rose, a sleeping child, or a divine mystery”? Have you, for example, ever been sitting somewhere, perhaps thinking about something entirely different, and all of sudden, in a flash, some great realization came to you? As though there were a dawning of sorts – a light coming on or the sun coming up – and things that had been muddy and confused before all of sudden seemed clear?

Now ask yourself this: Did that moment – that flash of insight – always happen in a school classroom? (Let’s be honest; did it *ever* happen in a school classroom?) If such events don’t always happen in the classroom, then perhaps you will need to be aware that “education” is something that will often happen *outside* of class – perhaps during conversations with others or in a quiet moment reading under a tree somewhere. Is there ever enough quiet and stillness in your life – enough “leisure” – to allow such moments of insight to come? Or is “education” for you only something that happens inside of a classroom – indeed, something to be scrupulously avoided like the plague *outside* of the classroom? Let me suggest that if education isn’t happening outside of the classroom, then it probably isn’t happening at all. What probably *is* happening isn’t “education,” but merely the training of a functionary. (I could be wrong, of course. Is it worth taking the time to think about whether I am or not?)

9. What, according to Pieper, is the relationship between “leisure” and celebration? How does this view of leisure help to counteract the modern notion that only things that are hard or unpleasant are worthwhile?

\* Leisure is the condition of considering things in a celebrating spirit. The inner joyfulness of the person who is celebrating belongs to the very core of what we mean by leisure.

10. “Leisure is only possible,” says Pieper, “on the assumption that man is not only in harmony with himself,” but also what else? In a similar vein, what, according to Pieper, does leisure “live on”?

\* but also that he is in agreement with the world and its meaning.

\* Leisure lives on affirmation.

11. Why, for Pieper, is leisure “not the same as the absence of activity; it is not the same thing as quiet, or even as an inner quiet”? What is it like instead?

\* It is rather like the stillness in the conversation of lovers, which is fed by their oneness.

12. On p. 33, Pieper gives his reader a prime Scriptural example of leisure – of someone resting “from all the works that He had made” – namely, God’s rest on the Seventh Day of creation. How, according to Pieper, is man’s rest to be like God’s?

\* just like God, who on the seventh day, saw all that He had made, and saw that it was “good, very good,” so the leisure of man (should) include within itself a celebratory, approving, lingering gaze of the inner eye on the reality of creation.”

13. If, as Pieper says, “the leisure of man includes within itself a celebratory, approving, lingering gaze of the inner eye on the reality of creation,” what then, according to Pieper, is the highest form of celebration – of affirmation of the basic goodness of the world? Thus, what is it that, according to Pieper, “is the origin of leisure”?

\* The highest form of affirmation is the festival.... The holding of a festival means: an affirmation of the basic meaning of the world, and an agreement with it....

\* The festival is the origin of leisure.

14. Let’s reflect a bit more on this idea of *the festival* being the “origin of leisure.” Your first reaction at this point might be to ask, “But I thought leisure wasn’t about *partying*?” Well, yes and no. Think about it: Have you ever noticed a difference between a “celebration” (that is, an event that can truthfully be described as “festive”) and “partying”? It is, admittedly, getting more and more difficult to find a real *celebration* these days and not merely the pale imitation – people getting drunk because they’re so bored they hardly know what else to do with themselves – but *sometime* in your life you may have experienced it, especially if you’ve ever had the chance to attend a Greek or Latino wedding feast, for example, or an African American worship service, where people really know how to *rejoice*.

Consider this: Is there a difference between “pleasure” and “joy”? Have there been parties you’ve attended where you experienced a number of various *pleasures* (you needn’t list them), but which didn’t leave you necessarily feeling “joyful”? Have there been occasions, on the other hand, when you’ve experienced a deep sense of *joy* being

with other people, but which didn't necessarily involve bodily pleasure – indeed, which might even have involved a lot of hard work? If so, then you'll understand that “pleasure” and “joy” aren't necessarily linked – although they aren't necessarily mutually exclusive either.

There are parties that leave you feeling wonderful, and there are parties that leave you feeling, well, sick to your stomach – or worse. What is the difference between them? Not necessarily the quantity of alcohol or the quality of the snacks. What is it? Some people know how to *celebrate*, and some people only know how to get drunk. The first, “celebration,” may or may not include alcohol, but the second, “getting drunk” definitely does. Indeed, at certain parties, when the alcohol runs out, so do the guests. No one stays around to, what – talk? About what – life? What would be the point? People who go to such parties usually do so precisely because they don't want to talk – or even think – about their lives. They go to escape – to *forget*. But when there is *celebration*, how is it different? Does it, for example, have anything to do with affirming the basic goodness of life and of the world – in spite of all the obvious limitations and problems?

15. Josef Pieper has, in fact, written another wonderful book that takes up many of the same themes you are encountering in *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*. The other book, which I recommend highly, is entitled *In Tune with the World: A Theory of Festivity*. In that book, he asks: “On what grounds does a specific event become the occasion for festival and celebration?”

His answer: “No single specific even can become the occasion for festive celebrations unless – unless what? Here is where we must be able to name the reason underlying all others, the ‘reason why’ events such as birth, marriage, homecoming are felt as the receiving of something beloved, without which there can be neither joy nor festivity.... Underlying all festive joy kindled by a specific circumstance there has to be an absolutely universal affirmation extending to the world as a whole, to the reality of things and the existence of man himself. Naturally, this approval need not be a product of conscious reflection; it need not be formulated at all. Nevertheless, it remains the sole foundation for festivity, no matter what happens to be [the event] celebrated *in concreto* [in the concrete situation].”

Think about that claim for a moment. It may seem a bit too radical, but isn't there some truth to it? *Is it possible* to “rejoice” at the birth of a child or the marriage of a good friend or a soldier's safe return from war if, in the end, life is empty and meaningless anyway. Think about it. Think about the person who says: “Sure, it's a cute, happy baby now, but eventually it will grow up and be wretched and miserable just like everyone else in this world of misery and woe.” If the world is empty and meaningless, then it's empty and meaningless, and all attempts at joviality are just pathetic attempts to get us to avoid the grim truth of things. How can there be *celebration* for a person who holds such a view of the world?

Josef Pieper believes, in fact (returning to *In Tune with the World*) that “man cannot have the experience of receiving what is loved, unless the world and existence as a whole represent something good and therefore beloved to him.... Whereas, on the other hand, whoever refuses assent to reality as a whole, no matter how well off [financially] he may be, is by that fact incapacitated for either joy or festivity.” And finally: “Festivity lives on affirmation.... a festival becomes true festivity only when man affirms the goodness of his existence by offering the response of joy.”

Okay, so now here's the question: Let's suppose for a moment that you bought into the idea that things like “leisure” and “festivity” depend on *affirmation*, that is, on affirming the goodness of the world and one's own existence. Do you suppose that education similarly depends upon affirmation? Consider this: There are a lot of students who have worked their whole lives to “get into college,” who have in addition paid a lot of money to study at the institution in which they are currently enrolled, and yet who are miserable as can be. Why do you suppose that is? Could it be because they just don't find what they are studying *meaningful*? Could it be because they haven't found what they *love*? When you *love* something, is it a burden to study it? But for people who don't find anything in life *interesting* or *meaningful* or worth *being loved*, then it's hard to imagine how studying – or working or going to parties or how life itself, for that matter – *wouldn't* be an intolerable burden.

This isn't just a problem with colleges and universities, of course. There are plenty of people who spent their whole lives working to become doctors or lawyers, who, now that they *are* doctors or lawyers, are completely miserable. Just as there are plenty of people who thought that winning the lottery would make them happy, but it didn't. Why do you suppose that is? Could it be because they too haven't found what they *love*? And without that, all the rest is just emptiness.

Are you resolved to “grit your teeth and bear it” through four boring years of sitting through classes so that you can (you hope) get some kind of a job (you know not what), make some money, and then – then what? Have you even thought that far? Or do you think college is about *discovering what you love*? What *do* you love?

Look, no one at the University of St. Thomas wants to make you miserable. None of us wants bored students.

But there isn't much anyone can do for people who don't find anything in the world interesting or meaningful. And rarely do people find something interesting or meaningful if they don't consider it worthy of being loved. Leisure, festivity, celebration, and most of all, the liberal arts – all of them live on affirmation.

If, on the other hand, you're filled with questions – questions about *everything*: about the world, the meaning of life, the nature of the human person, how financial markets work, how people from different cultures understand the world differently, how the Constitution is supposed to protect human rights, how laws should be made, how atoms combine to form molecules, how molecules combine to form tissues and organs, how tissues and organs keep us alive – then you're definitely in the right place. What are you interested in? What do you find meaningful? What do you love? (Don't just sit there and say to yourself, "Hmm, I wonder whether he'll put that on the quiz? Don't turn a useful question into an abstract and useless question. *Make a list* of things you find interesting, of things you find meaningful, of things you *love*.)

16. What does Pieper mean when he says that "the break from work is there for the sake of work"? If "leisure" shouldn't be understood as merely a "break from work," how, on the contrary, should "leisure" be understood? What is leisure *for*?

\* A break from work is there for the sake of work: We take a break from work so that we can be refreshed *for* more work.

\* "Now leisure is not there for the sake of work, no matter how much new strength the one who resumes working may gain from it; leisure in our sense is not justified by providing bodily renewal or even mental refreshment to lend new vigor to further work – although it does indeed bring such things!

\* "... nobody who wants leisure merely for the sake of 'refreshment' will experience its authentic fruit..."

\* "Leisure is not justified in making the functionary as 'trouble-free' in operation as possible, with minimum 'downtime,' but rather in keeping the functionary *human* .. and this means that the human being does not disappear into the parceled-out world of his limited work-a-day function, but instead remains capable of taking the world as a whole, and thereby to realize himself as a being who is oriented toward the whole of existence.

17. At the bottom of p. 35 and top of p. 36, Pieper claims that the ability to be "at leisure" is "one of the basic powers of the human soul": "Like the gift of contemplative self-immersion in Being, and the ability to uplift one's spirits in festivity, the power to be at leisure is the power to step beyond the working world and win contact with those superhuman, life-giving forces that can send us, renewed and alive again, into the busy world of work." Compare this statement with the quotation from Plato that makes up the first epigraph of the book? (As a reminder, it reads: "But the gods, taking pity on human beings – gave them regularly recurring divine festivals, as a means of refreshment from their fatigue; they gave them the Muses, and Apollo, and Dionysius as the leaders of the Muses, to the end that, after refreshing themselves in the company of the gods, they might return to an upright posture.")

18. Let's continue our reflection on this notion of human beings "refreshing themselves in the company of the gods," so that "they might return to an upright posture." What do you suppose is the result – physically – of a lifetime slaving behind a plough – or, as more often in our case, in front of a computer screen? Have you ever seen the cartoon of "man's evolution" that shows mankind evolving from a hunched over ape to full, upright posture, back to someone hunched over in front of a computer? (See below.)



What do you suppose is being suggested by this cartoon? Is it merely the *physical* deformation that is a problem? What do you suppose are the psychological and spiritual consequences of living one's life burdened in this way? What does Pieper mean when he speaks of humans "refreshing themselves in the company of the gods," so that "they might return to an upright posture"? Is it merely physical? Or do you suppose he has something more profound in mind? Explain.

19. What is interesting about Pieper's work is that he, following a long set of Greek and Christian traditions, believes that the way to restore our "upright posture" – the way, in other words, to restore our full *humanity* – is by "refreshing ourselves in the company of the gods." So, for example, on p. 36, he says that, "In leisure – not *only* there, but certainly there, if anywhere – the truly human is rescued and preserved precisely because the area of the 'just human' is left behind over and over again.... As Aristotle said of it: 'man cannot live this way insofar as he is man, but only insofar as something divine dwells in him.'"

This is odd, is it not? On this view, to become *fully human*, we need to go beyond the *merely human* – to the divine. What do you suppose that means? Do you think this "refreshing ourselves" in the company of God (or the gods) is possible? Or should we just keep our back to the plough? If not, what else is there? Anything?



**The University of St. Thomas**

**Odyssey Program**

### Questions to Guide Your Reading

#### Josef Pieper, *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*, Chapter IV

1. At the beginning of Chapter IV, Pieper asks the following: “Will it ever be possible to keep, or reclaim, some room for leisure from the forces of the total world of work? And this would mean not merely a little portion of rest on Sunday [and who really does that anymore anyway], but rather a whole ‘preserve’ of true, unconfined humanity: a space of freedom, of true learning, of attunement to the world-as-a-whole? In other words, will it be possible to keep the human being from becoming a complete functionary, or ‘worker’? What would have to be done beforehand in order for this to succeed?” Okay, so: Is it possible? And what would have to be done beforehand in order for this to succeed? Are people just *naturally* going to resist becoming mere functionaries and preserve a space of freedom, of true humanity? Or do they need help? Will they need training? education? discipline? a miracle?

2. The remainder of this chapter involves an “excursus” (that is, a “digression”) on certain key terms that were subject to much discussion in Germany after the Second World War – terms such as: *proletariat*, *proletarian*, and *de-proletarianization*. Now *those* are words you can use to impress people at cocktail parties. But first you’ll have to know what they mean.

Some of you may know that Karl Marx set up a famous contrast between two groups he labeled the *bourgeoisie* and the *proletariat*. The *bourgeoisie* were those who owned the sources of capital and production, whereas the *proletariat* were the ones who worked in the fields and factories of the owners. Many of you will also probably know that Marx believed the age of the *bourgeoisie* was coming to an end and that it would be replaced by the age of the *proletariat*.

The word *proletarian* is merely the adjectival form of the noun *proletariat*. So, for example, a Marxist might describe a Rolls-Royce as a disgustingly *bourgeois* automobile, whereas he might describe a Volkswagen Beetle as fairly *proletarian* – a vehicle more appropriate to the income and needs of the working classes (the *proletariat*).

So what is *de-proletarianization*? Please remember that Pieper was writing in 1948 to a German society that had suffered through the horrors of the Nazi regime, but was also struggling against the ideology of the Soviet Union to its East.

*Proletarianization* is a concept in Marxism and Marxist sociology. For Marx, the process of *proletarianization* was the other side of capital accumulation. The growth of capital meant the growth of the working class. Marx theorized that, with the development of capitalism, private property and the sources of capital would be concentrated into fewer and fewer hands and an increasing mass of the population would be reduced to dependence on wage labor for their income, that is, they would be forced to sell their labor to employers for a wage or salary because they lacked assets or other sources of income. Marx believed the proletariat would eventually grow so large (that is to say, so much of the population would be “proletarianized”) that it would overthrow the *bourgeoisie* and establish itself as the “last class in history.”

To *de-proletarianize*, then, would be to attempt through various means to reverse this process, by making sure that fewer and fewer people were becoming “wage slaves” to capitalist owners. In general, it is an attempt culturally to minimize the class distinctions between the *bourgeoisie* and the *proletariat* or “working class.” *De-proletarianization* was thought to be an important project given the intellectual and cultural threat that was being posed by the Soviet Union and its communist satellites in Eastern Europe after World War II. If Marx was right, and *proletarianization* was the road to the communist revolution, then for those who wished to resist that revolution, *de-proletarianization* seemed to be the order of the day – at least to certain parties in Germany at the time.

One way in which it was thought that the division between the “workers” and the *bourgeoisie* could be overcome was by more closely identifying some of the traditional activities of the *bourgeoisie* (such as intellectual study) with “work” and “the workers.” Do you get the picture? All of these college and university professors could defend themselves against the charge of being hopelessly *bourgeois* (they didn’t work in the fields; they didn’t produce anything by the sweat of their brow; they just sat around all day like a bunch of lazy aristocrats) by claiming that, “No, we’re workers too! We’re *intellectual* workers. We work in the fields of intellectual labor” (whatever that would

mean).

Bottom line: Because of his cultural and historical context, Pieper feels the need to defend his notion of “leisure” and “the liberal arts” from the charge that it is too “aristocratic” – too *bourgeois*. It is important to note, however, that although Pieper is in this chapter defending “the liberal arts” against the communist demand that everything be associated with “work” and “the workers,” the same arguments could be used against the laissez-faire capitalist demand that everything be associated with “work” and “what makes profit.” On this score, from the point of view of a Catholic social critic such as Pieper, the communist and the capitalist are united by having made the same mistake: namely, seeing and judging all of human life in utilitarian, economic terms.

Now let’s turn to Pieper’s text for some questions. Does Pieper believe that the class-opposition in society between “workers” and “owners” can be overcome at the level of “working”? That is to say, can this opposition ultimately be overcome simply by altering one’s notion of the “worker”? Or by turning everyone into a “worker” – including students in colleges and universities? (Another way of saying the same thing would be to ask: Does Pieper believe in the “proletarianizing” of education?)

\* No. I suppose the point would be: it doesn’t help workers, it just screws up education. And as we will see on the next few pages, what would really help workers is precisely making available to them a “liberal arts” education.

3. In the middle of p. 41, Pieper asks: “What is it to be *proletarian* really?” What is his answer? So, for example is being *proletarian* the same as being poor? Why or why not? If not, what *is* it to be proletarian?

\* On p. 42, top: Being proletarian is being *bound to the working-process*.

\* Note: This is why being proletarian is not the same as being poor. Beggars in the Middle Ages were poor, but were not “wage-slaves” tied to certain work. Whereas, even rich executives in the modern world, who are loaded up with personal debt, are entirely dependent upon their wages and their employers. Thus, says Pieper, the “negative aspect of the proletariat, the aspect we need to remove from it, does not consist in the fact that the condition is limited to a certain social class.” Rather, the problem is deeper: it is seeing human beings primarily or solely as “functionaries” within the system, and not as full and complete human persons who are *capax universi* [capable of grasping the whole] – that is to say, potentially infinite – and who thus transcend any finite bureaucratic, economic, or political system.

4. There are two parts of Pieper’s definition of what it is to be proletarian: that is, *being bound to the working-process*. Let’s take the second part first. What does Pieper mean by “the working-process”?

\* In this definition, “working-process” does not refer in general to the entire complex of human action that never comes to a stop; proletarianness is not simply the orientation of man to activity as such.

\* “Work” is meant as *useful* activity, which means that by definition, work does not have its meaning in itself, but is directed toward something socially advantageous, a *bonum utile*, the realization of practical values and needs.

\* Note: Pieper distinguishes the “common use” from the much broader term “common good.” The “common good” includes even non-material goods, like the common appreciation of beauty or the sharing of a common tradition. “Common use” means just those things that people might find “useful” in a utilitarian sense: roads, airports, bridges, post-offices, factories, office buildings, malls – and schools *maybe*, but only if they teach their students *useful* things, like electrical wiring, plumbing, accounting, engineering, and the like. “Appreciating beautiful works of art” would probably *not* qualify as “useful.”

5. Next, how and why are people “bound” to the “working-process”? Pieper lists three ways. Please list them.

\* To be bound to the working process is to be bound to the whole process of usefulness, and moreover, to be bound in such a way that the whole life of the working human being is consumed.

\* CAUSES OF BINDING: This “binding” can have various causes.

(i) “The cause may be lack of ownership” (thus the worker must sell his labor).

(ii) “But such binding can also be caused by the demands of the total-working state. The proletarian is one who, whether or not he owns property, is constantly on the move ‘because of the practical necessities of the absolutely rational production of goods.’” So, for example, modern “managers” and “executives” are often as “bound” and “enslaved” by the demands of work as their workers because they have production quotas to meet, meetings to go to, and stock-holders to satisfy.

(iii) A third way: “the binding to the working-process can have its roots in the inner poverty of the person: the proletarian is one whose life is fully satisfied by the working-process itself because this space has been shrunken from within, and because meaningful action that is not work is no longer possible or even imaginable.”

6. How are the last two of the three mutually reinforcing?

\* **MUTUALLY REINFORCING:** The latter two are mutually encouraging: the total-working state needs the spiritually impoverished functionary, while such a person is inclined to see and embrace an ideal of a fulfilled life in the total “use” made of his “services.”

\* That is to say, the world of total work (whether communist or capitalist) needs people to see themselves primarily as “workers” whose lives are fulfilled by fulfilling their “functions” in the state.

7. On p. 43, Pieper asks: “And in regard to this internal binding to the work-process, a further question may be posed: whether or not [it] is a symptom that characterizes *all* levels of society...; indeed, the question is whether we are not all proletarians ... all ripe and ready to fall into line as ready functionaries for the collective working-state”? What do you think? Is he right? That is to say, is he right about most Americans? How about you?

8. I’ll be honest: When I ask my students the previous question, almost *all* of them reply something like this: “Yes, it’s true of most Americans, but it’s not true of me. *I* am not, nor am I going to become, a mere functionary.” Most of them say that – except, of course, for the honest ones, who are self-aware enough to realize that they’re not *really* all that different from everyone else. But okay, let’s suppose for a moment that you really *don’t* want to become a mere “functionary” for the collective. How do you intend to accomplish this genuinely unique feat? Not work? Not likely. Sit in bohemian coffee shops, drink dark coffee (free-trade, of course), and complain about the bullsh\*t of society? That’s the same as not working – unless of course you work in the coffee shop, in which case you *really will* have become a functionary. Or will you work all day in a demanding job and then go to a bar, have a few too many beers, and complain about the bullsh\*t of society? That’s a common-enough practice. But if none of those options seems particularly appealing to you, then what will you do? Think about it: If your entire education is precisely to become a “functionary” – to serve the ends of “work” – then what do you suppose will dominate your life and your activities? Do you have any idea what you would do with your life outside of work? Do you have any idea what you would do with yourself if money weren’t an issue at all? Consider again what Pieper had said above: “the binding to the working-process can have its roots in the inner poverty of the person: the proletarian is one whose life is fully satisfied by the working-process itself because this space has been shrunken from within, and because meaningful action that is not work is no longer possible or even imaginable.” Is he right? Does that happen, do you suppose? Will it happen to you? What will you fill yourself with instead so that the “space” will not be “shrunken from within”? (Perhaps that’s what a liberal arts education is for. Just a thought.)

9. Indeed, on this question of the relationship between “de-proletarianization” and the “liberal arts,” Pieper suggests (on p. 44) that: “Proletarianism [contrary to what Marx thought] would consequently be equivalent to the narrowing of existence and activity to the realm of the *artes serviles* [the “servile arts”] – whether this narrowness be caused through lack of ownership, compulsion of the state, or spiritual poverty. ‘De-proletarianization,’ then, would consequently be the widening of one’s existence beyond the realm of ‘merely useful,’ ‘servile’ work ....” Perhaps a “liberal arts” education is precisely one which is meant to “widen one’s existence beyond the realm of merely useful, servile work. If so, what do you suppose such an education be like? Do you want an education like that? (Note, by the way, that such an education needn’t *avoid* preparing you for the world of work; it’s just that it should prepare you for a whole *life* within which work plays its proper role as a means to an end, and not as the be-all-and-end-all of life.

10. On p. 45, Pieper suggests that the distinction between the “servile” and the “liberal” arts can be related to the distinction between an “honorarium” and a “wage.” “The liberal arts,” he says, “are ‘honored’; the servile arts are ‘paid in wages.’” What, according to Pieper, is the difference between an “honorarium” and a “wage”? (To clarify that last question, consider this: How much would be “enough” to pay Beethoven for his nine symphonies?) Why does Pieper believe that, even with regard to the “servile arts,” insofar as they are the acts of a free human person, we should probably think more often in terms of an “honorarium” rather than a “wage”? (To clarify that question, consider this: How much would be “enough” to pay a mother for loving and caring for her child?)

Consider also this: The “honorarium” is understood to be something that contributes to the life-support of the artist – not something that is, at it were, “equivalent” to the money – whereas a wage (in the strict sense) means payment for an isolated piece of work, without regard for the life-support of the working person. But what if we, with Pope Pius XII in *Quadragesimo Anno* held that, even with regard to wages: “In the first place, the worker is entitled to a wage that should suffice for the life-support of himself and his family.” How do we “honor” workers? (A) By paying them a living wage. And (B) By doing much more than that – that is, by treating them as human persons

having a unique and infinite dignity. How we accomplish the first is a question for economics. How we accomplish the second is a question for a liberal arts education.

\* The concept of the honorarium implies a certain lack of equivalence between achievement and reward, that the service itself cannot *really* be rewarded. So, for example, the poet reads her poetry, and we give her some money. But we don't think the money is somehow equal to the poetry – as though we were paying her by the word.

\* “Wages,” on the other hand, mean payment for work as an article or commodity: the service can be “compensated” through the wage, there is a certain “equivalency.” Professors spend so many hours in the classroom, so they get a certain amount of money. *But*, and this goes to the final question in the list, we should realize that teaching, *as a human action* (or accounting or banking or digging trenches) – that is, as the freely-chosen action of a free human being – is always something to be “honored” because there is really no equivalence between the “service” being rendered *by the person* and the money being paid.

11. In the last paragraphs of chapter 4, Pieper begins his transition to the topic of chapter 5, which deals with the relationship between “leisure” and “worship.” So, for example, on p. 47, Pieper talks about how, in the total-work state (that, by the way, would be a pretty good description of the United States) – but in a total-work state, there is a tendency to define all non-useful activity as “undesirable” and to absorb even leisure time into the service of useful work. Thus we find in the United States that “weekends” and “holidays” are justified not because they are in accord with the dignity of the human person, whose life should not be taken up entirely by work, but because giving “workers” these “breaks” helps them to be more “productive” in the long run. (Which is, by the way, a totally unproven thesis. Which is why there are workers in the Third World who haven't had a day off in over six years – literally. Why give them a break if (A) there's no evidence that vacations make them more productive, and (B) giving them no breaks makes me, the owner, more money? Why give them a break, that is, unless (C) human dignity demands it – whether or not it makes them more “productive” or not?). In the context of this discussion, Pieper asks the following question: “can we not see what it means for there to be an institution in the world that prohibits useful actions, or the “servile arts” [that is to say, “work”] on certain days” [as, for example, on the “Sabbath”]? Explain what he means. Similarly, he quotes the socialist author P. J. Proudhon who says concerning the social significance of the celebration of the Sabbath: “The servants regain their human dignity for a day, and put themselves on a level with their masters.” Explain what he means. Is having a “Sabbath-day” (that is, a day free from “servile work”) a good idea, in your view? Why or why not?

12. Pieper sums up the discussion of this chapter on pp. 48 and 49 of his text. There he says this: “We can now sum up what has been said in this *excursus*: when ‘being proletarian’ means nothing other than being bound to the work-process [which is how Pieper defined it], then the real key to overcoming the condition – that is to say, a *true* de-proletarianization – would consist in...” – in what? Why, in the same vein, does Pieper consider “political measures which expand life economically” insufficient to achieve true freedom for the *proletariat*? Is it significant, for example, that 3/4 of the people in America who have vacation-days from work, don't take them all?

\* True de-proletarianization would consist in making available for the working person a meaningful kind of activity that is *not* work – in other words, by opening up an area of true leisure.

\* Political measures which expand life economically are good, but not enough, because “the decisive thing would still be missing: it is not enough merely to create the external conditions for leisure; the main question is with what activity one's leisure is fulfilled. Or as Pieper says elsewhere (quoting Nietzsche): “The trick is not to arrange a festival, but to find people who can *enjoy* it.”



**The University of St. Thomas**

**Odyssey Program**

### Questions to Guide Your Reading

#### Josef Pieper, *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*, Chapter V

1. At the beginning of the previous chapter (chapter 4) Pieper asked: “Will it ever be possible to keep, or reclaim, some room for leisure from the forces of the total world of work? And this would mean not merely a little portion of rest on Sunday, but rather a whole ‘preserve’ of true, unconfined humanity: a space of freedom, of true learning, of attunement to the world-as-a-whole? In other words, will it be possible to keep the human being from becoming a complete functionary, or ‘worker’? What would have to be done beforehand in order for this to succeed?”

What followed in chapter 4, however, was not exactly an answer to the question, but rather an “excursus” on whether talking about “leisure” and the “liberal arts” would end up being far too *bourgeois* – and thus not sufficiently attuned to the needs of the *proletariat* – for the Germany of his day? Pieper’s answer, as we have seen, was *no*. Quite the contrary, he argued that the *problem* with being “proletarian” was not merely the external condition of the work, but the fact that no matter what one’s job or income, the worker is “bound to the work-process.” The real key to overcoming this problem, argued Pieper, is not to turn *everything* (including the intellectual life) into “work” (remember that the intellectuals were defending themselves against the charge of being too *bourgeois* by insisting: “Hey, we’re *workers* too, just like you guys out in the factories!”), rather the real key to the problem is to make available for the working person “a meaningful kind of activity that is *not* work” (and not directed to work as its end) – “in other words, by opening up an area of true leisure.”

Fine so far, but the obvious next question would be: “Okay, so what *is* this meaningful activity that is *not* work and that opens up an area of true leisure for people? And indeed, that is the question Pieper will spend his final chapter attempting to answer. But he is not beginning from scratch. Pieper had outlined a series of very important points in chapter 3 before he went on his little “excursus” about what it really means to be *proletarian* in chapter 4, so it would be worthwhile for us to review some of those points briefly before we begin our survey of chapter 5.

Recall that in chapter 3, Pieper had argued that “leisure” is not the same as “idleness” or “laziness.” “Idleness,” argued Pieper, is caused ultimately because a person “is not at one with himself”; it consists in someone “despairingly not wanting to be oneself.” “Sadness has seized him,” declares Pieper, because he does not realize the divine Goodness that lives within him. There can only be true leisure, then, “when man is at one with himself,” and “when he is in accord with his own being.” Leisure, thus, on this view, is primarily a condition of the soul, not a break from work. Leisure is only possible, then, “on the assumption that man is not only in harmony with himself ... but also that he is in agreement with the world and its meaning.”

If, as Pieper says, “the leisure of man includes within itself a celebratory, approving, lingering gaze of the inner eye on the reality of creation,” what then, according to Pieper, is the highest form of celebration – of affirmation of the basic goodness of the world? Thus, what is it that, according to Pieper, “is the origin of leisure”? “The highest form of affirmation,” he replies, is the festival.” “The holding of a festival means: an affirmation of the basic meaning of the world, and an agreement with it.” Thus: “The festival is the origin of leisure.”

That brings us to the top of p. 50 and the beginning of chapter 5, where Pieper says the following (as if picking up right where he left off): “But if celebration and festival is the heart of leisure, then leisure would derive its innermost possibility and justification from the very source whence festival and celebration derive theirs.” That brings me to my question: What is the source, according to Pieper, from whence leisure, festival, and celebration derive their innermost possibility and justification?

\* But if celebration and festival is the heart of leisure, then leisure would derive its innermost possibility and justification from the very source whence festival and celebration derive theirs. *And this is worship.*

2. Okay, so let’s put some of the strands of the argument together. At the beginning of chapter 4, Pieper asked: “Will it ever be possible to keep, or reclaim, some room for leisure from the forces of the total world of work? And this would mean not merely a little portion of rest on Sunday, but rather a whole ‘preserve’ of true, unconfined

humanity: a space of freedom, of true learning, of attunement to the world-as-a-whole? In other words, will it be possible to keep the human being from becoming a complete functionary, or ‘worker’? What would have to be done beforehand in order for this to succeed?” His answer to that question, ultimately (by the end of chapter 4), was that we would need to make available for the working person “a meaningful kind of activity that is *not* work” (and not directed to work as its end) – “in other words, by opening up an area of true leisure.” Okay, so what *is* this meaningful activity that is *not* work and that opens up an area of true leisure for people? What is Pieper’s answer here at the beginning of chapter 5? [Hint: Look at your answer for Question #1.] Another way of putting the same question would be to reverse it, and ask this: On Pieper’s view, why is the Sabbath important? Yes, it provides a break from work; that is an external good. But why else? What is the internal good that Pieper sees resulting from this day of *worship*?

\* Again, the meaningful activity that is *not* work and that opens up an area of true leisure for people – precisely because it is the ultimate source of festival and celebration, and because it is the ultimate affirmation of existence – is *worship*.

3. There is one more theme we need to take note of here at the beginning of chapter 5, which is a continuation of something begun in chapter 4. In answer to that question, “Will it ever be possible to keep, or reclaim, some room for leisure from the forces of the total world of work?” Pieper suggests (starting at the bottom of p. 37), that “certain forms of resistance [to the world of total work] have proved inadequate.” These “inadequate” forms of resistance include the notion of “art for art’s sake,” the idea of our duty to “tradition,” and finally, the concept of “humanism.” It’s not that Pieper is against any of these things – quite the contrary! – it’s merely that he doesn’t consider any one of them *sufficient* to protect human beings from becoming “functionaries” in the world of total work.

Perhaps the most interesting of these three is the concept of “humanism.” Let me briefly explain why. The term “humanism” and “humanist” arose during the Renaissance, and it was the self-designation of certain thinkers beginning with Francesco Petrarch (1304-1374), and later thinkers such as the Italian humanist Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), the Dutch humanist Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536), as well as his English friend (and Roman Catholic saint) Thomas More (1478-1535), who wanted to revive the study of the Latin and Greek classics from the period *before* the Middle Ages. One of the things these thinkers disliked about the Middle Ages was their lack of appreciation (or what *they* thought was a lack of appreciation) for beauty – especially the beauty of the human form. These Renaissance “humanists” understood themselves to be engaged in an intellectual project of focusing renewed attention on the dignity and importance of the “human” *as well as* the things God. Indeed, for them, man had an infinite dignity *precisely because* he was in the image of God. A favorite text, for example, was Psalm 8:4-6: “What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou hast made him a little less than angels, thou hast crowned him with glory and honour; and thou hast set him over the works of thy hands: thou hast put all things under his feet.”

And yet, as the Renaissance gave way to the Enlightenment, and certain influential thinkers became more and more skeptical about what could be known about God – if anything – and about what value knowledge of God would have for human beings, “humanism” became more secular. A nice example can be found in a famous text from Alexander Pope’s 1734 essay called, appropriately enough, “Essay on Man.” At the beginning of Epistle II, Pope writes:

“Know then thyself, presume not God to scan  
The proper study of Mankind is Man.”

By the end of the Nineteenth Century, the movement toward what is now called “secular humanism,” or more dramatically “atheist humanism,” was well under way. For many secular humanists, the study of God was not only thought to be irrelevant to the study of man, it was increasingly considered downright harmful. To glorify God, it was thought, was to diminish man and human accomplishments. Indeed, for thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx, the idea of God was a dangerous delusion that kept human beings from focusing on what was necessary for health and well-being *in this life*.

There have been a number of responses to this challenge in the Twentieth Century, but perhaps the most interesting has been the intellectual movement that is often identified by the term “Christian humanism.” For “atheist humanists,” the term “Christian humanist” seems something like a contradiction in terms: to talk about “Christianity” is to talk about things like “God” and “heaven” and therefore *not* to talk about things like “man” and human welfare in this world. In reply, Christian humanists have attempted to show that such a view is based on a false dichotomy between “God” and “man.” If, as the Book of Genesis suggests, man is made in the “image of God,” then by paying attention to God’s revelation of Himself to us, we can learn not only more about *God*, but also more about what it is to

be authentically *human*. We might put it this way: "God has revealed Himself to man, so that man might be revealed to himself."

An even better statement of this Christian ideal can be found in the Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (often called by its Latin title, *Gaudium et Spes*), which was published in December of 1965. Pope John Paul II was at the Council and participated extensively in the drafting of this text. Indeed, there are two passages from *Gaudium et Spes* that Pope John Paul II quoted *in every one of his encyclicals*. The first is from *Gaudium et Spes*, 22. It is very beautiful, so allow me to quote it to you in full:

**22. The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of Him Who was to come, namely Christ the Lord. Christ ... by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear....**

**He Who is "the image of the invisible God," is Himself the perfect man. To the sons of Adam He restores the divine likeness which had been disfigured from the first sin onward. Since human nature as He assumed it was not annulled, by that very fact it has been raised up to a divine dignity in our respect too. For by His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man. He worked with human hands, He thought with a human mind, acted by human choice and loved with a human heart. Born of the Virgin Mary, He has truly been made one of us, like us in all things except sin.**

**As an innocent lamb He merited for us life by the free shedding of His own blood. In Him God reconciled us to Himself and among ourselves; from bondage to the devil and sin He delivered us, so that each one of us can say with the Apostle: The Son of God "loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20). By suffering for us He not only provided us with an example for our imitation, He blazed a trail, and if we follow it, life and death are made holy and take on a new meaning.**

**The Christian man, conformed to the likeness of that Son Who is the firstborn of many brothers, received "the first-fruits of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:23) by which he becomes capable of discharging the new law of love. Through this Spirit, who is "the pledge of our inheritance" (Eph. 1:14), the whole man is renewed from within, even to the achievement of "the redemption of the body" (Rom. 8:23): "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the death dwells in you, then he who raised Jesus Christ from the dead will also bring to life your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who dwells in you" (Rom. 8:11). Pressing upon the Christian to be sure, are the need and the duty to battle against evil through manifold tribulations and even to suffer death. But, linked with the paschal mystery and patterned on the dying Christ, he will hasten forward to resurrection in the strength which comes from hope.**

**All this holds true not only for Christians, but for all men of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way. For, since Christ died for all men, and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery.**

**Such is the mystery of man, and it is a great one, as seen by believers in the light of Christian revelation. Through Christ and in Christ, the riddles of sorrow and death grow meaningful. Apart from His Gospel, they overwhelm us. Christ has risen, destroying death by His death; He has lavished life upon us so that, as sons in the Son, we can cry out in the Spirit: Abba, Father.**

The second text is from *Gaudium et Spes*, 24:

**24. God, Who has fatherly concern for everyone, has willed that all men should constitute one family and treat one another in a spirit of brotherhood. For having been created in the image of God, Who "from one man has created the whole human race and made them live all over the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26), all men are called to one and the same goal, namely God Himself.**

**For this reason, love for God and neighbor is the first and greatest commandment. Sacred Scripture, however, teaches us that the love of God cannot be separated from love of neighbor: "If there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.... Love therefore is the fulfillment of the Law" (Rom. 13:9-10; cf. 1 John 4:20). To men growing daily more dependent on one another, and to a world becoming more unified every day, this truth proves to be of paramount importance.**

**Indeed, the Lord Jesus, when He prayed to the Father, "that all may be one. . . as we are one" (John 17:21-22) opened up vistas closed to human reason, for He implied a certain likeness between the union of the**

**divine Persons, and the unity of God's sons in truth and charity. This likeness reveals that man ... cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.**

With such texts, the Church wishes to make clear that Christian revelation is not meant to *detract* from concern for human dignity and human well-being, but to *reinforce* it.

Josef Pieper was certainly an important figure in this movement dedicated to articulating for the modern world a true “Christian humanism.” It is in this context that we must read his question on p. 38, for example, about whether “Humanism” (and by this he means “humanism” alone, *apart from* God) is adequate to protect the dignity and freedom of, for example, the human worker? He notes, for example, that in communist East Germany (which no longer exists), the term “Humanism” was being used to describe “economic materialism” – that is to say, Marxism. But was “Humanism” in this sense sufficient to protect the working person from being subsumed into the “total world of work”? History suggests the answer is *no*. Marxism was founded on the hope that it would protect the “worker,” but it ended up treating human beings as *nothing more than workers*. And from the point-of-view of Christian humanism, treating a human being as *nothing more than a worker* is not to appreciate his or her infinite dignity as a creature who is “made in the image of God.”

Back now – finally! – to chapter 5, where Pieper starts out by asking the following: “Let us now pose the question again: is recourse to the ‘human’ really enough to preserve and firmly ground the reality of leisure?” What is his answer? (That was a long way to go for a fairly simple answer, I know, but sometimes the journey is as important as the destination.)

\* His answer: “I intend to show that such recourse to mere Humanism is simply not enough.”

4. This is a theme that goes back to the very first page of Pieper’s book: namely, that the “truly human” requires our participation in the divine. Remember the epigraph to the whole book? “But the gods, taking pity on human beings -- a race born to labor -- gave them regularly recurring divine festivals as a means of refreshment from their fatigue; they gave them the Muses, and Apollo and Dionysus as the leaders of the Muses, to the end that, after refreshing themselves in the company of the gods, they might return to an upright posture.” And again later, at the end of chapter 3, on p. 36, he says: “In leisure – not *only* there, but certainly there, if anywhere – the truly human is rescued and preserved precisely because the area of the “just human” is left behind over and over again.... this is the paradox that reigns over the attainment of leisure, which is at once a human and super-human condition. As Aristotle said of it: ‘man cannot live this way insofar as he is man, but only insofar as something divine dwells in him.’” (Actually, Aristotle said this about the life of contemplation, but his point is similar.) Indeed, let’s remember what the Trappist monk Thomas Merton said about contemplation and our need for the divine:

“Man was made for the highest activity,” says Merton, which is, in fact, his rest. That activity, which is contemplation, is immanent and it transcends the level of sense and of discourse. Man’s guilty sense of his incapacity for this one deep activity which is the reason for his very existence, is precisely what drives him to seek oblivion in exterior motion and desire. Incapable of the divine activity, which alone can satisfy his soul, fallen man flings himself upon exterior things, not so much for their own sake as for the sake of the agitation which keeps his spirit pleasantly numb. He has but to remain busy with trifles; his pre-occupation will serve as a dope. It will not deaden all the pain of thinking; but it will at least do something to blur his sense of who he is and of his utter insufficiency.... ‘Distraction [says Pascal] is the only thing that consoles us for our miseries and yet it is, itself, the greatest of our miseries.’

“Why? Because it ‘diverts’ us, turns us aside from the one thing that can help us to begin our ascent to truth. That one thing is the sense of our own emptiness, our poverty, our limitations, and of the inability of created things to satisfy our profound need for reality and for truth.”

Odd, is it not, that on this view, by attaching ourselves to the divine, we become *more*, not *less*, human. And this is true not only for Christians, but for pagans of the ancient world like Plato and Aristotle.

So what is my question? Plato, Thomas Merton, Pope John Paul II, and Josef Pieper all share the notion that we are made *more* human by our participation in the divine. Please be able to describe the position of each one of these thinkers.

5. Okay, so let’s review the argument again. At the beginning of chapter 4, Pieper asked: “Will it ever be

possible to keep, or reclaim, some room for leisure from the forces of the total world of work? And this would mean not merely a little portion of rest on Sunday, but rather a whole ‘preserve’ of true, unconfined humanity: a space of freedom, of true learning, of attunement to the world-as-a-whole? Mere “humanism,” thinks Pieper, will not be adequate to the task. Human beings, it seems, are a “race born to labor” – or at least many people have treated human beings as if they were. So where must we turn instead? What does Pieper say? Again, his answer is: *worship*.

But be careful! When you hear the word “worship,” you may be importing all sorts of ideas that Pieper does not have in mind. Whenever you read an author, you are allowed (indeed, encouraged) to disagree, but you should do the author the justice *you* would wish done for you: namely, to try to understand the person’s words in the sense he or she is using them, and not to import all your own prejudices into the text. When you hear the word “worship,” you may be thinking, “Oh, so I’m supposed to spend a boring hour at church on Sunday.” Or worse yet: “Worship: that’s something I do so that God won’t hit me with a bolt of lightning, and if I’m really conscientious, maybe he’ll reward me with a BMW or a new stereo or something.” But think about it: From everything you’ve read in Pieper’s book so far about “leisure” and “affirmation” and “celebration,” does it really seem likely that Pieper has *that* idea in mind when he says “worship”? Not really.

So what *does* he mean? And why, according to Pieper, is there no real *holiday* “without the gods”? (Remember, please, that the word “holiday” is simply a shortened form of the word “holy day.” Our question might be restated thus: Why is a holiday not really a holiday unless it retains its character as a “holy day” – that is, something dedicated to worship?)

\* To experience and live out a harmony with the world, in a manner quite different from that of everyday life – this, we have said, is the meaning of “festival.” But no more intensive harmony with the world can be thought of than that of “Praise of God,” the worship of the Creator of this world.

\* Even this statement, says Pieper, “is often received with a mixture of discomfort and various other feelings.”

\* Why does “worship” in Pieper’s sense require the gods? Because “artificial holidays” made up by nation-states are totally lacking in the essential quality: **true and ultimate harmony with the world.**

6. Let’s think about Pieper’s argument for a moment. Has he got a point? Has the celebration of Christmas, for example, gotten *better* the *less* it has to do with Christ? Or has the celebration gotten *worse*? If you come from a tradition that doesn’t celebrate Christmas, you might ask yourself the same thing about Ramadan or Yom Kippur: Is the holiday *better* when it is *less religious* and less about God, or does it lose something somehow? (This is one of those questions you won’t be tested on. You’re just supposed to *think* about it. For those of you who consider “thinking” a waste of time, you have my apologies.)

7. On p. 52, Pieper says the following: “Worship is to time as the temple is to space.” Please explain what he means.

\* “Temple” has a certain meaning [related to the word “to cut”]: a definite physical space has been ‘cut off’ by enclosure or fencing from the rest of the land, whose surface was divided up for farming or other uses. These sectioned-off spaces were handed over to the possession of the gods and were not inhabited or planted but were removed from all practical use.

\* Just so, through religious festival, and for the sake of religious festival, or ‘cult’ ... *time*, a definite period, was separated off, and this period of time, no otherwise than the ground-surfaces of the temple and places of sacrifice, would *not* be used, and would likewise be kept from use

8. Why, on Pieper’s view, can there be no real “festival” in the world of total work? In other words, what happens to unused time and/or unused space in the total world of work?

\* Now there can be no unused area of ground nor an unused time; nor can there be a space for worship or festival: for this is the principle of rational utility [that is, the principle that *everything* must have some rational “use”]

\* Within the world of total work, the “festival” is either a “break from work” (and thus only there for the sake of work), or a more intensive celebration of work (as in “Labor Day”)

\* In the world of total work, wherever something is left over, this excess will be subjected again to the principle of rational utility. [I.e., how can we “use” it? How can we make money off of it? How can it help the economy? Or how can it support the governing regime?]

9. In the middle of p. 53, Pieper makes the following blunt comment about life in the world of total work (I’ve retranslated it a bit): “There will naturally be ‘games’ – like the Roman *circenses*” [i.e., the Roman “circus,” where, for

example, the gladiators fought or chariot races were held or Christians fed to the lions] – but, asks Pieper: “who could dignify these amusements-for-the-masses with a true ‘festival’”? What do you think? In the modern world, we have football games and basketball games and baseball games. Indeed, we have a lot of “amusements for the masses.” You’ve probably been to a few. So what do you think? Would you describe these events as “festive”? Would you describe them as “joyful celebrations of human life and human existence”? (What if your team *loses* the game, for example? Is the event still “festive”?)

10. Note the great “old Russian saying” that Pieper recounts in the middle of p. 53: “Work does not make you rich; it only makes you bent over.” Compare this saying with the epigraph at the beginning of the book. How, on Pieper’s view, does “the worker,” the one who becomes “bent over” because of his or her work, return to an upright posture?

\* “after refreshing themselves in the company of the gods, they might return to an upright posture.”

11. At the bottom of p. 53, Pieper makes the comment that “*sacrifice* is at the center of the festival.” Now at first glance, you might think he is talking about the sacrifice of bulls and goats on an altar, or even the sacrifice of the Eucharist at mass. But he isn’t. Not primarily, at least. What kind of “sacrifice,” is Pieper talking about, and why is it “the very opposite of usefulness”?

\* A *sacrifice* is a voluntary gift that is offered; in this case, the voluntary gift that must be offered by us is *time* – time that might otherwise be spent making more money, planting more crops, fixing more cars, working overtime, etc.

\* Worship demands a “space of uncountable giving, untouched by the ever-turning wheel of buying and selling, an overflow released from all purpose, and an authentic wealth: it is festival time.

12. Let’s think about this comment for a moment – that worship involves “a space of uncountable giving, untouched by the ever-turning wheel of buying and selling, an overflow released from all purpose, and an authentic wealth: it is festival time!” Have you ever had that experience? If so, when? Describe the circumstances.

13. According to Pieper, “When separated from worship,” what happens to “work” and “leisure”?

\* When separated from worship, leisure becomes toilsome, and work becomes inhuman.

14. Why, when separated from worship, does “leisure become toilsome”?

\* Without the “joyful affirmation of existence” that characterizes true leisure, leisure becomes “mere time-killing” and “boredom gains ground.” Then “Despair” rears its ugly head. [Despair, you will remember, comes from “despairingly not wanting to be oneself” – an idea drawn from the work of Soren Kierkegaard’s *Sickness Unto Death*.]

15. Charles Baudelaire, whom Pieper mentions on p. 54, was a famous Nineteenth Century poet, critic, and translator, who was well-known among the Bohemian artists who lived in Paris at the time. At one point, shortly before attempting suicide, he wrote in his diary that “the fatigue of falling asleep and the fatigue of waking are unbearable.” Fortunately, his suicide attempt failed, but his expressions of *ennui* [general boredom] and the weariness of life have become legendary among sophisticated Bohemians and *artistes* ever since. Pieper offers one quotation from Baudelaire’s *Journals*: “One must work, if not from inclination, at least from despair, since, as I have fully proved, to work is less wearisome than to amuse oneself.” What do you suppose he meant? And what would Thomas Merton or Blaise Pascal say in response to poor Baudelaire, the bored, sophisticated *artiste*?

\* Merton: “Man was made for the highest activity,” says Merton, which is, in fact, his rest. That activity, which is contemplation, is immanent and it transcends the level of sense and of discourse. Man’s guilty sense of his incapacity for this one deep activity which is the reason for his very existence, is precisely what drives him to seek oblivion in exterior motion and desire. Incapable of the divine activity, which alone can satisfy his soul, fallen man flings himself upon exterior things, not so much for their own sake as for the sake of the agitation which keeps his spirit pleasantly numb. He has but to remain busy with trifles; his pre-occupation will serve as a dope. It will not deaden all the pain of thinking; but it will at least do something to blur his sense of who he is and of his utter insufficiency.... ‘Distraction [says Pascal] is the only thing that consoles us for our miseries and yet it is, itself, the greatest of our miseries.’

16. On p. 57, Pieper says that, “Culture lives on ‘worship,’” and by that the means that “culture” depends on

“leisure,” and “leisure” depends upon having forced open this space (within the world which is otherwise the world of total work) for activities that “go beyond mere means-to-an-end-considerations.” Now you might not consider yourself especially “religious,” and you may not really have any belief in “God” or “heaven,” but consider this: Doesn’t everybody have *something* in their lives that, at least for him or her, goes beyond a mere means-to-an-end, profit-on-investment calculus? So, for example, let’s say that you and your father are really big Houston Astros fans, and for some reason (you’ll have to really use your imagination here), Houston makes it to the World Series, and your father gives you a ticket to Game 7 of the Series! Now let’s say that someone offers you 1500 dollars for that ticket. Do you take it? I mean, it’s cold hard cash! And your father doesn’t really *need* you there anyway, does he? Does Game 7 of the World Series with your father somehow transcend a mere means-to-an-end, profit-on-investment calculus? What if someone offered you a million dollars to have sex with your wife? (Yes, there was a movie with Robert Redford and Demi Moore based on this idea.) Would you (and your wife) take it? Does the sexual union between a husband and wife somehow transcend the mere “means-to-an-end” calculus? Indeed, is there *anything* in your life that somehow transcends that mere “means-to-an-end” calculus? Friends? Family? Someone you love? Or would you sell out your own grandmother if the price were high enough?

17. Do you understand now what Pieper means by saying that “worship” involves *sacrifice*? And that “culture” lives on “worship”? Can there be “culture” – art, beauty, theater, baseball, a gathering of friends – if there is nothing “sacred,” nothing beyond (or “above”) the mere “means-to-an-end” rational utility of the world of total work and the endless profit motive? Does it make any more sense to you now why a university interested in the “liberal arts” – let’s say, for the sake of argument, a *Catholic* university, but it could be a Moslem university or Jewish university or a Hindu university – might wish to put “worship” (at least in Pieper’s sense) at the center of its educational project? (Indeed, why it might even want to put a big ‘ol *chapel* as a living, visible *symbol* at the center of its campus?) Does it make any more sense to you now why such a university – if it is interested in the kind of fundamental questions about the meaning and purpose of human life we have been discussing – might feel that “worship” (at least in Pieper’s sense) is not *at odds* with its dedication to research and rational inquiry, but rather could be *complementary* to it? Does it make any more sense to you now, in other words, why Pieper says that “culture” lives on “worship,” and “leisure” (properly understood) is “the basis of culture”?

18. On p. 57, having laid out in these five chapters his view of the problem, Pieper asks (with a mere three pages to go in the book): “But now, what are we *to do*?” In what follows, he admits, first of all, that “the intention of this essay was not to give advice or provide guidelines for action but only to encourage reflection.” (Great. *Now* he tells us!) “This essay, then, was not designed for an immediately practical purpose.” But *of course* it wasn’t. Indeed, hasn’t the whole book been about not needing absolutely everything to be “useful”? Well, at least “useful” in a certain sense. It’s not meant to be “useful” in the sense that a “how-to” book is meant to be “useful.” (We’ll be reading a “How To” book in a couple of weeks – *How to Read a Book* by Mortimer Adler and Charles Van Doren – so we’re not entirely opposed to “How To” books here at UST.) But is Pieper’s *Leisure, the Basis of Culture* “useful” in some other way? Did you find it “useful” (interesting? worthwhile? important? educational?) to ponder any of these major questions? Might it be the case, as I mentioned before, that the journey is sometimes as important as the destination? Isn’t correctly *thinking through the problem* sometimes the best first step to getting the right answer? We all know people who know all the answers. We call them “teenagers.” But perhaps it’s just as important to *ask the right questions*. Perhaps there are more important issues to think about than “where do I buy this sort of perfume at the mall?” or “how do I get over this sort of obstacle in *Grant Theft Auto IV*”?

So, here’s your question: *Are* there more important issues to think about than “where do I buy this sort of perfume at the mall” or “how do I get over this sort of obstacle in *Grant Theft Auto IV*”? Are there important issues to think about that transcend the mere “means-to-an-end” utility of the world of total work and the endless profit motive? If so, like what? Make a list.

19. Although Pieper has no immediate useful guidance for the reader about *what to do now*, he does seem to hold out one hope about how “leisure” might be restored in our modern culture. What is it?

\* (58) “The celebration of God’s praises cannot be realized unless it takes place for its own sake. [Although leisure may be “healthy,” the paradox is that it is impossible to be truly at leisure merely for the sake of health.] But this [namely, the celebration of God’s praises] – the most noble form of harmony with the world as a whole – is the deepest source of leisure.

\* Worship is “given,” – that is, by God or the gods – or it does not exist at all. You cannot just “make it up.”

20. If you were to ask Josef Pieper what lies at the very heart of a liberal arts education, what do you suppose he would say? If he answered, “worship,” would you understand what he meant? Or would you suppose he meant merely that you had better go to church – in the sense of a purely external observance – or you’ll be a “bad person” and thus a “bad student”? Let me assure you, he *doesn’t* mean that. What more is involved, then, in Pieper’s understanding of “worship”? Why is some form of “worship” important (on his view) to a liberal arts education?

21. At the very end of chapter 1, Pieper suggested that, “An altered conception of the human being *as such*, and a new interpretation of the meaning of human existence *as such*, looms behind the new claims being made for “work” and the “worker.” Here he is probably thinking about the view of man as *homo economicus*: “economic man.” On this view, man is defined primarily in terms of what he adds to the economic system of production. (This view of man, by the way, is the one that underlies *both* the Marxist view of man, *as well as* the laissez-fair capitalist view of man.) Thus, getting at the problem of “work” and “leisure,” says Pieper, necessarily will involve “digging more deeply to the very roots of a philosophical and theological understanding of the human person.” Now that you have reached the end of his text, how would you describe Pieper’s understanding of the human person?

- \* the human person seeks to *understand* – to understand the truth about both himself and the world;
- \* the human person is questioning: we question the meaning of our existence;
- \* the human person is *capax universi*;
- \* the human person becomes more fully human “in company with the gods”;
- \* the meaning of being human is not fully realized in “work” or in “production” or in the economy: the meaning of being human is related to celebrating and affirming one’s existence in *worship*.

**Final Note:** Okay, so you’ve finally *finished* the questions on Josef Pieper’s *Leisure, the Basis of Culture* – for now. We’ll be coming back to the book, so don’t throw out your notes.

But right about now (if not before), you might be thinking: “What was *that*? We, like, read and analyzed that book with a fine tooth comb. And *all those questions!* What was his deal? Is he *obsessed* with that book? Or does he just enjoy tormenting students?”

Answer to those final two questions: No, and no. Am I obsessive? Yes. But I’m obsessive about *your education*. And this assignment was the first step in a process of showing you that *reading is a skill* – a skill you will need to develop like any other: like basketball, tennis, painting, or sculpture. Many of you probably think you have that skill already. And *to a certain extent*, you probably do. But we will be challenging you to develop your reading skills to an even deeper and more profound degree. And you have to be ready for that. The first thing you have to learn is that “reading” involves more than just having your eyes pass across a page. Reading involves *comprehension*; it involves *remembering key points*; and above all, it involves *thinking* and *analysis*. And *reading well* involves bringing to bear while you read insights from your own experience, as well as perspectives drawn from all the different disciplines. You may have noticed that in my questions on even this short text, I mentioned art, philosophy, theology, science, history, sociology, politics, and psychology. *All* of those disciplines can help illuminate your reading of a text – any text.

Please understand that there was nothing in those “Questions to Guide Your Reading” that you shouldn’t be able to do for yourself eventually. Those questions do no more than indicate the kind of analysis you should be able to do *by and for yourself* – when you need to. But by the same token, these are not skills that can be mastered in a week. Indeed, they are skills that often take a lifetime to develop fully. But the journey of a million miles begins with the first step. And you have taken that first step.

But above all, *don’t panic*. First of all, we’re here to teach you. If you already knew everything you needed to know, there would be no reason to spend a lot of money to go to college. It may sound strange, but undoubtedly the most important skills we will be trying to teach you during college will be the skills of *reading, writing, and thinking clearly*. We have found from long experience that nothing will serve you better in your future life and career than having and developing these skills.

The second reason not to panic is that not every book or article you are assigned will require this same level of analysis (thank God). There are many things that you can “scan” -- if you do it intelligently. This sort of reading is sometimes called “Inspectional Reading.” But all of these are issues that we will be covering as we read and discuss our next book, entitled (appropriately enough): *How to Read a Book*. It will impart many important lessons about how

to read a book intelligently.

But we hope you've already learned one important lesson: namely that the reading we will be requiring at the college level is definitely going to be more demanding and challenging than any of the reading you've ever had to do in the past. Don't panic, but *be ready*. If the education at UST weren't demanding and challenging, it wouldn't be worth paying the money, now would it? You're paying us to help you achieve *excellence*. Please don't hand over all that money and then ask us not to do our jobs. No one *says*, out loud: "Oh, oh, please, please, *I want to be mediocre!*" But people can say it with their actions. Don't say it. You deserve the best education we can possibly give. And we'll do everything we can to deliver it – even if it means students saying about us: "What is their *deal*? Are they, like, obsessed or *what*?"

Yes, we are. Get used to it. It's called education.