

A Culture of Leisure

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Colloquially, “leisure” refers to rest or recreation through disengaging the mind and pursuing immediate satisfaction. This leisure is understood as valuable for the sake of an external goal, like resting to be more productive when returning to work. Thomistic philosopher Josef Pieper offers a different definition in his book *Leisure: The Basis of Culture* that describes it as an attitude of contemplation and celebration which allows humans to flourish. Leisure is an activity done for its own sake; leisure begins in wonder and issues in a fuller participation in reality. According to Pieper, education is meant to be leisurely. In fact, our word “school” derives from the Greek word for leisure: “schola.” However, in modern American society education has become focused on obtaining marketable skills and maximizing productivity, rather than contemplation of the world and the beauty of reality. People do not typically understand how to “do” leisure, or why leisure is good for its own sake. We tend instead to live for our work and to seek mindless entertainment as a respite from work. The attitude of non-leisure affects all disciplines and areas of life. To remedy these problems, we must re-develop an understanding of education that creates a culture of true leisure, as well as consider a proper philosophy of “gift” as a communicable antidote to this inverted shadow of leisure.