

A New View of Leisure **Une nouvelle conception du loisir**

David P. Ross

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Article abstract

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A New View of Leisure

Some Suggested Applications

David P. Ross

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In standard economic text-books and theory, leisure is treated synonymously with non-market, or off-the-job time, and work is treated synonymously with on-the-job, or market time.¹ And even those who recognize that off-the-job time may not be leisure at all, and conversely that on-the-job time may contain some leisure elements, cannot bring themselves to abandon the idea that leisure can only occur off-the-job.²

The distinction between off-the-job, and on-the-job time is important in economic theorizing, especially in the examination of labor supply and more particularly the notion of the backward bending labor supply curve. But why not stick to these terms, or employ the terms market and non-market time? There is certainly no serious objection to

ROSS, D.P., Program Director, Canadian Council on Social Development, Currently on leave — Associate Professor of Economics, University of Windsor (Ontario)
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¹ C.E. FERGUSON, *Microeconomic Theory*, Rev. ed., Homewood, Richard D. Irwin, 1969, p. 373 ; D. Watson, *Price Theory and Its Uses*, 2nd ed. (Boston : Houghton Mifflin, 1968), p. 100 ; A. Carter and R. Marshall, *Labor Economics*, Homewood, Richard D. Irwin, 1967, p. 287.

² Perlman is thus lead to construct three categories of time disposal ; work, non-market work, and leisure. But, if one is to take this approach, why not also sub-divide leisure, into market leisure, and non-market leisure ? R. PERLMAN, *Labor Theory*, New York, John Wiley and Sons, 1969, p. 14.

this distinction ; but what is objectionable, and it becomes increasingly so with the growth of the service — white collar sector is to simply label all off-the-job time as « leisure », and all on-the-job time as « work ».

Perhaps one reason why no serious attempt has been made to re-define terms and develop new definitions of leisure and work, is because of the non-operational nature of most alternative definitions. For above all, the grounding of work and leisure on the very observable concepts of on-the-job, off-the-job respectively gives operational content to the terms work and leisure. Compare this to some of the alternatives such as : utility-disutility, pain-pleasure, unhappy-happy, role playing — non-role playing to list a few examples and it becomes obvious why economists adhere to the on-the-job, off-the-job definition even though it often strains the meaning of work and leisure.

The purpose of this paper is two-fold. First an attempt is made to define work and leisure in operational terms : that is, in terms of phenomena that can be observed. Perhaps there is no easy way of measuring these observable phenomena precisely at present, but nonetheless they are measurable and even today could at best be roughly estimated.

Second, using the new definitions of work and leisure, several problems in economics are re-examined and an attempt is made to illustrate how the new definition may give us new insights into old and current problems. These two topics will be dealt with in turn.

A NEW VIEW OF LEISURE

What we seek is an operational definition of leisure that is not necessarily associated with off-the-job time, and consequently something you do not receive remuneration for. We need to admit to the possibility that leisure is something that can occur while on-the-job, and consequently be something that remuneration is received for.

Our first step in redefining leisure is to recognize that there are probably few activities that are pure work or pure leisure activities ; that is even the most work-like tasks are likely to have some leisure aspects, and even the most leisure-like activities are bound to have some work-like aspects. Hence what is necessary is not to seek an absolute definition of work or leisure but rather a definition that allows categorization of an activity as more, or less, leisurely than another.

As a beginning, we define activities as more leisurely (or less work-like) the less a person is bounded by routine, time, and space restrictions.

These three factors are briefly defined here and a more lengthy examination of them appears in the next section.

Routine — By routine, we mean that there exist few alternative ways of approaching and carrying out an activity. The more choice that is attached to an activity, the more leisure there will likely be associated with it.

Time — The fewer time dimensions there are bounding an activity, the greater will be the leisure content of that activity. So for example, if an individual is free to do the activity when he chooses, and then even carry out the activity at his own desired pace, then we would say that this activity has associated with its performance a high leisure content or more precisely, that this activity embodies more leisure than an activity that is more severely bound by time dimensions.

Space — If an activity does not always require the holder to remain in a specific space, either geographically or within a plant, then the activity is likely to embody more leisure than an activity that requires the holder to remain very fixed in space.

These are the three factors considered most important in defining leisure. The more an individual can pursue an activity with few bounds on his choice, time, and spatial movement the more we would consider him to be taking leisure. Of course, the concept is relative ; and the absolute level of leisure will vary from individual to individual. If one wants to test our definition very quickly against a real life situation, one could compare our determinants of leisure, with the determinants of annual vacation. That is, what makes one label the annual vacation as a leisure activity ?

SOME APPLICATIONS OF THE NEW DEFINITION

Three diverse applications are given here to indicate the range of problems that can be analyzed with the new definition. These three problems concern : the significant differential rates of growth in off-the-job time obtained by white and blue collar workers in Canada since the end of World War II ; wage theory and the measurement of inter and intra-occupational wage differentials ; measuring the welfare content of gross national product. These three applications are considered in turn.

Differential rates of growth in off-the-job time

If one calculates the growth of off-the-job time gained through a shorter work week, longer annual vacations, and more statutory holidays

in the Canadian manufacturing sector for the period 1949-69 he is faced with a somewhat puzzling result. White collar workers (i.e. office) have gained 119 hours off-the-job, while blue collar workers (non-office) have gained 230 hours.³

This result, however, can be plausibly explained if we refer to the new definition of leisure. It can be hypothesized, that on the average, white collar workers are less bounded by time, space, and routine than blue collar workers in the manufacturing sector. With the increased pace of mechanization in the production process, it is possible that the work content (newly defined) has considerably increased for blue collar workers over this twenty year period.

What this may mean, then, is that blue collar workers have had a greater demand for off-the-job time because the work content has increased more rapidly than that for the white collar workers. This could result in the blue collar workers preferring to take more of their gains in off-the-job time than the white collar workers.

There are of course alternate explanations as to the differential rates of growth of off-the-job time, but it is plain that this new approach offers insights into such problems as preferred compensation.

Wage Theory and the Measurement of Inter and Intra-Occupational Wage Differentials

A second area that we can apply the new approach to is wage theory and measurement. Dating at least back to Adam Smith it has been recognized that it is the « net advantage » among different occupations that determines the allocation of labour among the different occupations.⁴ Hence, one has to, in addition to the purely monetary determinants of net advantage, recognize the non-monetary or « psychic » determinants as well.

Now in theory, one can easily account for these « psychic » factors ; but when one moves over to the empirical task of estimating the determinants of intra and inter occupational (or industrial) wage differentials it

³ David P. Ross, « Leisure As A Response To Technological Change In The Economic System », in HAMEED and CULLEN (eds.) *Work and Leisure In Canada*, Edmonton, University of Alberta, 1971, pp. 19-37.

⁴ See, for example the discussion by Simon ROTTENBERG, « On Choice In Labor Markets », *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, Vol. 9 (June, 1956), 183 ; or the fine introductory chapter in A. REES and G. SHULTZ, *Workers and Wages In An Urban Labor Market*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1970.

becomes necessary, but very difficult, to find observable counterparts for these « psychic » determinants.⁵

It is proposed here that the leisure content of a job would be a good proxy for those generally unmeasurable psychic determinants that are often labelled « agreeable-disagreeable » conditions associated with work. Many of these conditions (i.e. freedom of many kinds, location,) can be subsumed under space, time and routine constraints ; and while leisure, newly defined may not as yet be precisely estimable it is founded on observable phenomena that are at least susceptible to ordinal ranking through a scaling process. Over time more precise methods may be developed for estimating space, time and routine constraints.

A particular application of the new approach could have been employed in the recent study by Rees and Schultz.⁶ In their study the authors searched, with the aid of regression analysis, for the primary determinants of individual wage differentials within finely disaggregated occupations within four broad strata : white collar, unskilled, semi-skilled, and skilled. While the authors include many individual (i.e. age, sex, education), and establishment (location, size, industry) explanatory variables they are able to explain, for example, in the white-collar group, only 44 to 61 percent of the variance in individual wage rates.⁷ An important major conclusion to be drawn from this study is that there appears to be outstanding variables that were not included in the regression analysis.

Perhaps if the authors had included a variable representing leisure on-the-job it may have enabled them to explain more of the variation in wages. Admittedly though, since the authors were concerned with intra-occupational differentials, a variable for leisure may not have been significant, because naturally the more homogeneous is the job skill under study the less likelihood there is that there will be serious differences in an occupations leisure content.

However, if one wanted to study inter-occupational wage differentials even among the occupations within each of Rees' and Schultz's four broad categories then one could easily allow for the inclusion of an independent leisure variable. And as the study of inter-occupational wage differentials

⁵ The classic article associated with this problem is by Richard LESTER, « A Range Theory of Wage Differentials », *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, Vol. 5 (July, 1952), 483 ; but a good review is found in REES and SHULTZ *op. cit.*, chap. 1.

⁶ REES, A. and SHULTZ, G., *op. cit.*, especially chapters 7-10.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 101.

moves to an even more aggregated level so that we want to examine wage differences among the four broad groups mentioned above, or white collar versus blue collar, or goods workers versus service workers then both the need and ease of including a leisure variable increases. For example, perhaps a leisure variable can help explain the relative movement over time between the wages of skilled and unskilled workers, or goods and service workers ?

G.N.P. and The Measure of Leisure

The final application of the new definition of leisure is associated with the old question of the accuracy of the national accounts in representing a community's welfare. It is generally accepted that the traditional accounting procedure excludes most « goods » that are not produced for the market, such as housewifery, and includes many « bads » such as medical services for curing smog induced emphysema. But another shortcoming of G.N.P. that is broadly accepted⁸ is that it makes no allowance for the gain in off-the-job time that is surely a good and is in fact an alternative to higher income as we present it in the form of backward bending labor supply curves.

There is little question then that if G.N.P. is to be regarded as a measure of welfare that an adjustment for increased « leisure » should be made. But why stop with the inclusion of gains in off-the-job leisure only ? Why not attempt to include all of the gains made in leisure — or at least explicitly recognize the possible gains made in on-the-job leisure ?⁹

In a short accounting period, the gain in on-the-job leisure would both likely be small, and in any event very difficult to estimate even as to direction of change. But over a longer accounting period, when significant structural changes in the work force have taken place it would be very shortsighted not to explicitly recognize the possibility of gains made in in-the-job leisure. Let us take an example.

In Canada, one of the most striking changes in the structure of the labor force has been the increase in employment in the service sector relative to employment in the goods sector. Between the years 1931-69 employment has fallen in the goods sector as a percentage of total employment from 60 to slightly less than 40, and the rate of change does

⁸ For example in the text-book field see : Martin BAILEY, *National Income and The Price Level*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1962, p. 283 ; and C. McCONNELL, *Economics*, Fourth ed., New York, McGraw-Hill, 1969, pp. 160-61.

⁹ McCONNELL has mentioned this also, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

not appear to be slowing down.¹⁰ What implication does this structural change have for welfare? Based on the new definition of leisure it is proposed here that this rapid growth in the service sector has led to an increase in leisure on-the-job. To illustrate, return to the new definition of leisure.

Space — Freedom from being place bound can be defined from both a broad, and narrow view point. Goods workers are broadly restricted by the fact that they must work where plants or resources commanding their specific skills are located. For example, fishermen must be near water, oil drillers near oil, and automotive workers near automobile plants. Goods workers are also narrowly restricted by the fact that even within a plant or resource area they are generally tied to tending, or working with a fixed piece of capital equipment.

Service workers on the other hand are broadly unrestricted in space because, by definition, services are provided for people, and therefore service workers are in demand wherever people are; they are not tied to specific plants and resources. Thus a doctor, lawyer, teacher, nurse, or waitress can work in virtually any place in the country, urban or rural. Service workers are also less narrowly restricted than goods workers since in most cases they are not tied to a fixed machine. There are exceptions; the typist and many office workers are more narrowly restricted; but salesmen, doctors, professors and lawyers can all perform their duties in several different physical locations.

Time — Freedom from being bound to time, or to a clock, and calendar, can also be defined from a broad, and narrow viewpoint. It should be observed here also that being time-bound usually implies being supervised; that is if one is bounded by severe time dimensions or deadlines there will usually be greater supervision to make sure the time bound is observed. The close supervision on an assembly line is a good example of this; that is a deadline approaches every minute.

Goods workers are broadly restricted in time by the fact that they have to work whenever management wants to operate the expensive fixed plant; and this is generally all year long, so that with the exception of vacations and holidays the goods worker is bound to work virtually every day. The goods worker is also narrowly bound to time because he is generally bound to the pace of his capital equipment or to the pace of other workers. He is unable to set his own pace even during the days he

¹⁰ Ross, D., *op. cit.*

does work, and he may even have little choice concerning the decision to work a day or night shift.

Service workers are broadly unbounded by time because they can more freely choose the number of days per year they wish to work ; but again there are exceptions, for example many government employees and typists. Service workers are also less narrowly bound by time because they are infrequently tied to on-going processes. Doctors can schedule fewer patients per day, salesmen can see fewer clients, and even mailmen can perform their duty quickly or leisurely.

Routine — Routine here refers to the absence of choice among various alternative approaches for fulfilling the job. Goods workers have little choice because of the narrow flexibility of the capital they are working with, the goods worker has to follow the same daily routine that the capital is programmed for.

Service workers have more choice, because dealing with people allows for more flexibility and choice of job techniques. For example, teachers can approach their job from various directions, there are no two teachers alike ; government or other researchers can certainly approach their job from different directions and can disseminate their findings in different ways ; and waitresses and clerks soon realize that customers are not homogeneous, and if they want to be rewarded on the job they must adopt and choose different approaches.

While there are exceptions, I think it is accurate to conclude that workers in the service sector are likely on the average to have a higher leisure component in their jobs than are workers in the goods sector. Because these jobs are more cerebral, service workers can perform at least some of their « work » anywhere and at any time, and consequently it is becoming increasingly difficult to even differentiate between off-the-job and on-the-job time for many service workers.

It would then seem reasonable to recognize gains in on-the-job leisure, even if we cannot estimate the gains in cardinal units, as gains in welfare and as a component of any new welfare oriented measure of G.N.P.

CONCLUSION

In past times when the vast majority of work may indeed have been of the physical, banal, and mindless variety, perhaps work and on-the-job time, and leisure and off-the-job time were closely synonymous. But in present times with the rapid growth of the service sector we should admit

to the possibility that leisure can be obtained on-the-job. The paper gives three examples where the recognition of this notion may lead to new solutions to old and current problems.

It should not be concluded that there is no use for the on-the-job, off-the-job dichotomy anymore. This is not so ; all that is argued here is that traditional economics texts should not represent on-the-job time exclusively as work, and then go on to show a trade-off between work and leisure when in fact they are trading on-the-job, and off-the-job time in their discussions of the individual labor supply curve.

Nouvelles perspectives en matière de loisir suivies de quelques applications pratiques

Dans les manuels courants d'économie et en théorie, on considère le loisir comme synonyme du temps où l'on n'est pas en disponibilité sur le marché ou du temps où l'on n'est pas à son poste ; le travail est, de son côté, synonyme du temps où l'on est disponible pour travailler ou du temps où l'on occupe son poste. En théorie économique, la distinction entre le temps libre et le temps engagé est importante, surtout quand il s'agit d'analyser l'offre de travail et, tout particulièrement, d'examiner une courbe d'offre de travail renversée.

Cet article vise un double but : d'abord essayer de définir la notion de travail et de loisir en termes *opérationnels*, c'est-à-dire en tant que phénomènes observables ; ensuite, chercher à réexaminer, à partir de définitions nouvelles du travail et du loisir, plusieurs problèmes qui se posent en économie et à tenter d'illustrer comment ces définitions nouvelles peuvent ouvrir des perspectives neuves à des questions anciennes et actuelles.

NOUVELLES PERSPECTIVES EN MATIÈRE DE LOISIRS

La première constatation à laquelle on arrive, quand on essaie de rebâtir une définition du loisir, c'est qu'il n'y a guère d'activité qui soit travail pur ou loisir pur. De là, ce qui importe, c'est de découvrir une définition qui permette la catégorisation d'une activité selon qu'elle est plus ou moins empreinte de loisir.

Au départ, nous affirmons qu'une activité est d'autant plus empreinte de loisir que la personne est moins gênée par la routine quotidienne et les contraintes de temps et d'espace.

La routine : Par routine, nous voulons dire qu'il n'y a que peu de façons d'entreprendre et d'exercer une activité. Plus une activité laisse de choix, plus elle se rapproche de la notion de loisir.

Le temps : Moins une activité est enfermée dans des limites de temps, plus on peut l'assimiler au loisir.

L'espace : Moins une activité oblige à demeurer sur place, plus elle s'apparente au loisir.

Plus une personne est en mesure d'exercer une activité sans se sentir contrainte par ses choix, dans ses mouvements dans le temps et dans l'espace, plus on considérera qu'elle dispose de loisir. Naturellement, il s'agit là d'une notion toute relative et le degré véritable de loisir pourra varier d'un individu à l'autre.

QUELQUES APPLICATIONS PRATIQUES DE CETTE DÉFINITION NOUVELLE

On peut considérer trois applications pratiques qui montrent la portée des problèmes qu'on peut analyser en regard de cette définition nouvelle.

a) *Les taux différentiels de croissance du temps passé hors du travail.* Si l'on estime la croissance du temps libre découlant d'une semaine de travail plus courte, de vacances plus longues, de jours fériés plus nombreux dans l'industrie manufacturière au Canada pour la période 1949-1969, on arrive à un résultat qui intrigue quelque peu. Au cours de cette période, les cols blancs ont bénéficié de 119 heures de plus de temps libre, tandis que les cols bleus en ont gagné 230. Cette constatation trouve une explication plausible si l'on se reporte à la nouvelle définition du loisir. On peut émettre l'hypothèse que, règle générale, dans l'industrie manufacturière, les cols blancs sont moins liés que les cols bleus à la routine ainsi qu'aux contraintes de temps et d'espace.

b) Un autre domaine où nous pouvons appliquer cette nouvelle forme d'appréciation, c'est lorsqu'il est question de la théorie du *fonds des salaires*, qui remonte au moins jusqu'à Adam Smith, où l'on s'est rendu compte que c'est le « gain net » parmi diverses occupations qui détermine la répartition du travail entre les différents métiers ou professions. À partir de là, outre les motifs déterminants du « gain net » d'ordre purement pécuniaire, on a aussi découvert l'existence de motifs déterminants « psychiques » qui n'ont rien à voir avec l'argent.

On peut donc soumettre ici que la part de loisir comprise dans un poste constitue une excellente source de motifs psychiques impondérables qu'on désigne souvent sous le nom de conditions favorables ou défavorables associées au travail. Plusieurs de ces conditions se retrouvent dans la routine et dans les contraintes de temps et d'espace. Même si le loisir, selon cette définition nouvelle, ne peut être encore estimé d'une façon précise, on peut le considérer comme un phénomène observable à qui on peut donner un rang ordinal dans une échelle graduée.

c) La dernière application de la nouvelle définition du loisir est reliée au vieux problème de l'exactitude des comptes nationaux en tant que reflet du degré de bien-être social d'une collectivité. Une des principales faiblesses du produit national brut dont chacun peut se rendre compte, c'est qu'il ne révèle pas le temps libre qui est certainement un avantage et qui, en réalité, compense pour un revenu plus élevé quand nous le présentons sous la forme d'une courbe d'offre du travail renversée. Il n'y a guère de doute alors, si le produit national brut doit être considéré comme une mesure du bien-être, qu'il faille la corriger de manière à tenir compte de l'accroissement du temps consacré au loisir.

Si l'on ne les observe que durant une période d'une durée restreinte, les avantages résultant du loisir associé au travail n'ont que peu d'importance et on pourrait à peine en percevoir le sens. Mais, considérés au cours d'une période plus longue, étant donné que des changements de structure significatifs se sont produits dans

la composition de la main-d'œuvre, il faudrait être très myope pour ne pas y déceler la possibilité des gains obtenus sous la forme du loisir associé au travail. Ainsi, au Canada, un des changements les plus frappants dans la structure de la main-d'œuvre a été l'augmentation de l'emploi dans le secteur des services par rapport au secteur de la fabrication. Entre 1931 et 1969, l'emploi est tombé dans le secteur secondaire de 60 à un peu moins de 40 pour cent de l'emploi total, et le taux de changement ne semble pas être près de se ralentir. Quelles répercussions ces transformations ont-elles sur le bien-être ? En se fondant sur la nouvelle définition du loisir, on peut soutenir ici que cette croissance rapide de l'emploi dans le secteur des services s'est traduite par une augmentation du loisir associé au travail.

Même s'il se trouve des exceptions, je crois qu'il est exact de dire que les travailleurs du secteur tertiaire sont censés, dans l'ensemble, disposer de plus de loisirs au cours de leur travail que ceux du secteur secondaire.

Parce que ces emplois sont d'une nature plus intellectuelle, les travailleurs du secteur tertiaire peuvent au moins exécuter une part de leur besogne n'importe où et n'importe quand, et par conséquent, il devient de plus en plus difficile pour nombre d'employés de ce secteur de faire le partage entre le temps où ils sont à leur poste et celui où ils ne le sont pas.

Il apparaîtrait dès lors normal de reconnaître les avantages du loisir associé au travail, même s'il n'est pas possible de les apprécier numériquement, comme des gains obtenus sous la forme d'un mieux-être et comme un composant de toute nouvelle mesure de bien-être du produit national brut.

CONCLUSION

Autrefois, lorsque le travail pour une large part consistait en une activité physique où l'esprit n'occupait que peu de place, peut-être que le travail et la présence au poste d'une part, et le loisir et l'absence du poste, d'autre part, pouvaient-ils être presque synonymes. Aujourd'hui, à la suite du développement rapide du secteur tertiaire, il faut nous rendre à l'évidence qu'on peut trouver le loisir au poste même.

Il ne faut pas en conclure, cependant, que la dichotomie présence au travail et absence du travail n'existe plus. Tel n'est pas le cas. Tout ce qui est soumis ici, c'est que les manuels d'économie politique traditionnels ne devraient plus affirmer que le temps de présence au travail est formé exclusivement de travail et, à partir de là, essayer de montrer qu'il y a entrecroisement entre loisir et travail quand, en réalité dans leurs exposés sur la courbe d'offre de travail individuel ils tiennent à la fois compte du temps passé au travail et du temps passé hors du travail.