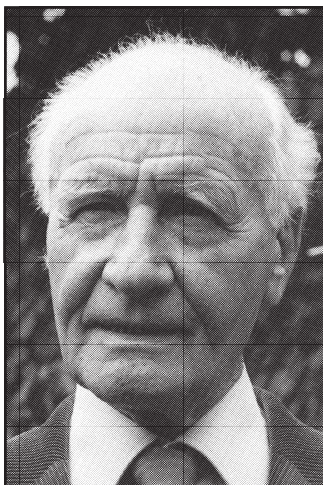


# LEISURE THE BASIS OF CULTURE

---



JOSEF PIEPER

# *Leisure*

THE BASIS OF CULTURE

---



JOSEF PIEPER

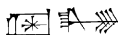
*Translated by Alexander Dru*

*With an Introduction by T. S. Eliot*



LIBERTY FUND  
INDIANAPOLIS

This book is published by Liberty Fund, Inc., a foundation established to encourage study of the ideal of a society of free and responsible individuals.



The cuneiform inscription that serves as our logo and as the design motif for our endpapers is the earliest-known written appearance of the word “freedom” (*amagi*), or “liberty.” It is taken from a clay document written about 2300 B.C. in the Sumerian city-state of Lagash.

Original German titles: *Musse und Kult*  
and *Was heisst Philosophieren?*

© 1952 by Pantheon Books Inc.

Reprinted by arrangement with Pantheon Books,  
a division of Random House, Inc.

Frontispiece photo © Hilde Schürk-Frisch, Münster.  
Courtesy of Kösel-Verlag GmbH & Co.

C 10 9 8 7 6 5

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Pieper, Josef, 1904–  
[*Musse und Kult*. English]  
Leisure, the basis of culture/Josef Pieper;  
translated by Alexander Dru;  
with an introduction by T. S. Eliot.  
p. cm.

Consists of a translation of the author's *Musse und Kult*,  
and of his *Was heisst Philosophieren?*

Originally published: New York: Pantheon Books, 1952.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-86597-210-9 (hardcover)

1. Leisure. 2. God—Worship and love. 3. Culture.  
4. Philosophy. I. Dru, Alexander. II. Pieper, Josef,  
1904–

*Was heisst Philosophieren?* English. III. Title.

BJ1498.P513 1998

175—dc21

98-40641

Liberty Fund, Inc.  
8335 Allison Pointe Trail, Suite 300  
Indianapolis, IN 46250-1684

## CONTENTS

---

Introduction by T. S. Eliot	xi
Author's Preface to the English Edition	xix

### LEISURE THE BASIS OF CULTURE

#### I

<i>Leisure the foundation of Western culture—‘We are “unleisurely” in order to have leisure’—Aristotle— The claims of the world of ‘total work’</i>	1
---	---

#### II

<i>‘Intellectual work’ and ‘intellectual worker’—Discursive thought and ‘intellectual contemplation’—Kant and the Romantics—Ratio and Intellectus: the medieval conception of knowledge—Contemplation ‘superhuman’—Knowledge as ‘work’: the two aspects of this conception—‘Unqualified activity’—Effort and effortlessness—Hard work is what is good—Antisthenes—Thomas Aquinas: ‘it is not the difficulty which is the decisive point’—Contemplation and play—Willingness to suffer—First comes the ‘gift’—‘Intellectual work’ as a social function</i>	6
---	---

III

*Sloth (acedia) and the incapacity to leisure—Leisure as non-activity—Leisure as a festive attitude—Leisure and rest from work—Leisure above all functions—Leisure as a means of rising above the ‘really human’* 23

IV

*The influence of the ideal of leisure—‘Humanism’ an inadequate position?—Excursus on ‘proletariat’—The philosopher and the common working man—Man ‘fettered to work’—Lack of property, State compulsion and inner impoverishment as the causes—‘Proletarianism’ not limited to the proletariat—artes liberales and artes serviles—Proudhon on Sunday—‘Deproletarianization’ and the opening of the realm of leisure—Leisure made inwardly possible through Divine Worship—Feast and worship—Unused time and space—The world of work and the Feast day—Leisure divorced from worship becomes idleness—The significance of Divine worship* 33

Notes 54

THE PHILOSOPHICAL ACT

I

*By philosophizing we step beyond the world of work—‘Common need’ and ‘common good’—The ‘world of total work’ rests on the identification of ‘common need’ and ‘common good’—The situation of philosophy in the ‘world of work’—The relation between religious*

*acts and aesthetic acts, between philosophizing and the experience of love or death—Sham forms of these basic attitudes in life—The everlasting misunderstanding between philosophy and the everyday world of work: The Thracian Maid and a figure in the Platonic dialogues (Apollodorus). The positive aspect of their incommensurability: the freedom of philosophy (its unusableness)—The knowledge of the functionary and the knowledge of a gentleman—The sciences ‘un-free’—Philosophy free, its theoretical character—The presupposition of theoria—The belief that man’s real wealth consists neither in the satisfaction of his needs, nor in the control of nature* 63

II

*Where does the philosophical act carry us when it transcends the ‘world of work’?—The world as a field of relations—The hierarchic gradations of the world—The notion ‘surroundings’ (v. Uexküll)—Spirit as the power of apprehending the world; spirit exists within the whole of reality—Being as related to spirit: the truth of things—The gradations of inwardness: the relation to the totality of being and personality—The world of spirit: the totality of things and the essence of things—Man not a pure spirit—Man’s field of relations: both world and environment, both together—Philosophizing as a step beyond our environment vis-à-vis de l’univers—The step as ‘superhuman’—The distinguishing mark of a philosophical question: it is on the horizon of the whole of reality* 81

III

*'World' and 'environment' are not watertight compartments—The world preserved in the environment: wonder—The 'unbourgeois' character of philosophical wonder—The danger of being uprooted from the workaday world—Wonder as 'the confusion of thought at itself'—The inner direction of wonder not aimed at doubt but at the sense of mystery—Wonder as the moving principle of philosophy—The structure of hope and the structure of wonder similar—The special sciences cease 'wondering', philosophy does not—Philosophia as the loving search for wisdom as it is possessed by God—The inner impossibility of a 'closed' system of philosophy—Philosophizing as the completion of man's existence*

98

IV

*Philosophy always preceded by a traditional interpretation of the world—Plato, Aristotle and the pre-Socratics in their relation to tradition—Plato: tradition as revelation—Its freedom vis-à-vis theology one of the marks of Plato's philosophizing—Christian theology the form of pre-philosophic tradition to be found in the West—The vitality of philosophy dependent upon its relation to theology—Is a non-Christian philosophy possible?—Christian philosophy not characterized by its ready answers but by its profounder apprehension of the mysterious nature of the world—Christian philosophy not intellectually simpler—The joy which goes with not being able to understand utterly and*



## CONTENTS

---

*completely—Christianity not, in the first place, doctrine but reality—The real soil of Christian philosophizing: the living experience of Christianity as reality* 117

Notes 135



## INTRODUCTION BY T. S. ELIOT

---

The complaint is frequently heard that our time has little to boast of in the way of philosophy. Whether this deficiency is due to some ailment of philosophy itself, or to the diversion of able philosophical minds towards other studies, or simply to a shortage of philosophers, is never made clear: these are divisions of the question which are apt to become confused. Certainly, 'Where are the great philosophers?' is a rhetorical question often asked by those who pursued their philosophical studies forty or fifty years ago. Allowing for the possibility that the great figures of our youth have become magnified by the passage of time, and for the probability that most of those who ask the question have not followed modern philosophical developments very closely, there remains some justification of the lament. It may be merely a longing for the appearance of a philosopher whose writings, lectures and personality will arouse the imagination as Bergson, for instance, aroused it forty years ago; but it may be also the expression of a need for philosophy in an older meaning of the word—the need for new authority to express *insight* and *wisdom*.

To those who pine for philosophy in this ampler sense, logical positivism is the most conspicuous object of censure. Certainly, logical positivism is not a very nourishing diet for more than the small minority which has been conditioned to it. When the time of its exhaustion arrives, it will probably appear, in retrospect, to have been for our age the counterpart of surrealism: for as surrealism seemed to provide a method of producing works of art without imagination so logical positivism seems to provide a method of philosophizing without insight and wisdom. The attraction which it thus offers to the immature mind may have unfortunate results for some of those who pursue their undergraduate studies under its influence. Yet I believe that in the longer view, logical positivism will have proved of service by explorations of thought which we shall, in future, be unable to ignore; and even if some of its avenues turn out to be blind alleys, it is, after all, worth while exploring a blind alley, if only to discover that it *is* blind. And, what is more important for my theme, I believe that the sickness of philosophy, an obscure recognition of which moves those who complain of its decline, has been present too long to be attributable to any particular contemporary school of thought.

At the time when I myself was a student of philosophy—I speak of a period some thirty-five to forty years ago—the philosopher was beginning to suffer from a feeling of inferiority to the exact scientist. It was felt that the mathematician was the man best qualified to philosophize. Those students of philosophy who had not come to philosophy from mathematics did their best (at least,

in the university in which my studies were conducted) to try to become imitation mathematicians—at least to the extent of acquainting themselves with the paraphernalia of symbolic logic. (I remember one enthusiastic contemporary who devised a Symbolic Ethics, for which he had to invent several symbols not found in the *Principia Mathematica*.) Beyond this, some familiarity with contemporary physics and with contemporary biology was also prized: a philosophical argument supported by illustrations from one of these sciences was more respectable than one which lacked them—even if the supporting evidence was sometimes irrelevant. Now I am quite aware that to the philosopher no field of knowledge should come amiss. The ideal philosopher would be at ease with every science, with every branch of art, with every language, and with the whole of human history. Such encyclopaedic knowledge might preserve him from excessive awe of those disciplines in which he was untrained, and excessive bias towards those in which he was well exercised. But in an age in which every branch of study becomes more subdivided and specialized, the ideal of omniscience is more and more remote from realization. Yet only omniscience is enough, once the philosopher begins to rely upon science. No one today, I imagine, would follow the example of Bosanquet, who in his *Logic* leant so heavily upon illustrations drawn from Linnaean Botany. But while the philosopher's exploitation of science is now likely to meet with severe criticism, we are perhaps too ready to accept the conclusions of the scientist when he philosophizes.

One effect of this striving of philosophy towards the condition of the exact sciences was that it produced the illusion of a progress of philosophy, of a kind to which philosophy should not pretend. It turned out philosophical pedagogues ignorant, not merely of history in the general sense, but of the history of philosophy itself. If our attitude towards philosophy is influenced by an admiration for the exact sciences, then the philosophy of the past is something that has been superseded. It is punctuated by individual philosophers, some of whom had moments of understanding, but whose work as a whole comes to be regarded as quaint and primitive. For the philosophy of the present, from this point of view, is altogether better than that of the past, when science was in its infancy; and the philosophy of the future will proceed from the discoveries of our own age. It is true that the history of philosophy is now admitted as a branch of study in itself, and that there are specialists in this subject: but I suspect that in the opinion of a philosopher of the modern school, the historian of philosophy is rather an historian than a philosopher.

The root cause of the vagaries of modern philosophy—and perhaps, though I was unconscious of it, the reason for my dissatisfaction with philosophy as a *profession*—I now believe to lie in the divorce of philosophy from theology. It is very necessary to anticipate the resistance to such an affirmation: a resistance springing from an immediate emotional response, and expressed by saying that any dependence of philosophy upon theology would be a limitation of the freedom of thought of the philosopher.

It is necessary to make clear what one means by the necessary relation between philosophy and theology, and the implication in philosophy of some religious faith. This I shall not attempt, because it is done very much better by Josef Pieper: I desire only to call attention to this central point in his thought. He is himself a Catholic philosopher, grounded on Plato, Aristotle and the scholastics: and he makes his position quite clear to his readers. But his writings do not constitute a Christian *apologetic*—that, in his view, is a task for the theologian. For him, a philosophy related to the theology of some other communion than that of Rome, or to that of some other religion than Christianity, would still be a genuine philosophy. It is significant that he pays a passing word of approval to the existentialism of Sartre, on the ground that he finds in it religious presuppositions—utterly different as they are from those which Dr. Pieper holds himself.

The establishment of a right relation between philosophy and theology, which will leave the philosopher quite autonomous in his own area, is I think one of the most important lines of investigation which Dr. Pieper has pursued. In a more general way, his influence should be in the direction of restoring philosophy to a place of importance for every educated person who thinks, instead of confining it to esoteric activities which can affect the public only indirectly, insidiously and often in a distorted form. He restores to their position in philosophy what common sense obstinately tells us ought to be found there: *insight* and *wisdom*. By affirming the dependence of philosophy upon revelation, and a proper respect for