From Millennium to Malaise:
Reflections on Modern Work

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... idleness is natural to man.
—Smollett

I

Studies in the sociology of modern work are almost invariably disappointing in one respect: they fail to make distinct the process by which the traditional attitude toward work underwent an enormous transformation and became the radically different attitude now held not only in the West but almost everywhere. In some of these studies the distinct outline fails to emerge because it is obscured by a multiplicity of detail, whether close documentation, tangential reference, or leisurely illustration. More commonly there is a missing link, and without that link the historical process of transformation is not really intelligible.

History, properly told, is largely a history of work, and common sense suggests why: not battles and treaties, war and peace, but the work that goes on in both, has been the first fact of every civilization because without it no one eats and nothing can be kept up, let alone advanced. Until quite recently, men worked in order to live, and work was a matter of hand tools and handcrafting. Then work “moved forward” to become machinisme, that is, mechanized, generally scientific work in the progressive spirit—and then men lived to work. But science, machines, and the spirit of progress are not the missing link: they are the new mode itself. How—through what historical particulars—were they mediated to the tradition?

The influence of a still esoteric figure, the twelfth-century biblical exegete Joachim of Flora, may well be the link we are looking for. The intellectual commonplace which tells us that the Reformation and the advent of democracy reshaped the traditional conception—and of course the actual modes—of work is perfectly sound; but we do not often enough remember that Joachim precedes both Reformation and democracy, and that their indebtedness to him has been clearly established.² But though this link has been discovered and duly cataloged in the history of ideas, it has been placed, partly perhaps for political reasons, in an inconspicuous corner there, and its implications for the transformation of the world’s work exist in unpublished or unreadable dissertations, or in notes, asides, and innuendos, rather than in a statement that achieves the not ignoble virtues of an outline: distinctness and easy access.

The modern exaltation of work, the religion of work, resulted from the convergence of several cultural developments but
it originated in the millenarist spirit that had been reinvigorated by Joachim's heretical teachings on the meaning of history. It was the Joachitic spirit that established work as a religion, and the religion continued even though the shockwaves of subsequent historical events were to split the religion into various sects. The Joachitic spirit, modified here into Calvinism, there into Anabaptism, again into secular progressivism, triumphed sufficiently to influence habits of mind and practical habits even where the full Joachitic eschatology was not actually accepted as gospel and where Joachim's name was unknown.

The modern work malaise—of which industrial malaise is only one aspect—is not viewed in true perspective unless one also understands the millenarist expectations that shaped the new conception of work. Millenarist enthusiasm was sufficient to carry the religion of work to totalitarian status: the dogma of Socially Useful Work invaded all orders and classes, all institutions, all spheres of experience. And it is this totalitarianism which is at the core of our modern work malaise. Whatever may happen, from one fiscal year or Five Year Plan to another, in trade balance, Gross National Product, wage-price ratios, working conditions, or fringe benefits, there remains the constant pressure of the totalitarianism, the imperious demand that all values and all behavior be justified by their bearing upon socially useful work. It is a pressure that keeps innocence from bearing fruit, a pressure under which the soul collapses—but not without a protest that takes the form of anxiety, neurosis, social disruptions, hatred, and violence.

II

There is of course a misunderstanding to the effect that the religion of work no longer exists. The expansion of "leisure time," the dilettantism of the contemporary middle class, and the carnival atmosphere of many modern offices have had something to do with creating an impression of freedom. But these developments operate well within the framework of the religion of work. Vocables like "the leisure society" and "liberation from the work ethic" may obscure but do not alter the facts: in all modern societies work remains an obsession, a mania. Unemployment embitters the electorate, and every major modern political ideology has made the perennial promise: "full employment" for the people. Indeed, tacitly or explicitly guaranteed—and "meaningful" or even "dignified"—work is boasted as a contrast with the "old" way of life, which our proud politicians and journalists, bending the knee neither to history nor to logic, describe as having been rigid yet unorganized and insecure, idle and yet strenuous. In the totalitarian or "people's" democracies, work has remained a form of fanaticism, and even in the sybaritic West idleness is still not respectable except on the job.

In the "people's" democracies, which undertake the radical and immediate reconstruction of society, exaltation of labor is unremitting. State holidays in these happy egalitarian realms are sometimes "celebrated" by festivities that undoubtedly appeal to righteous and practical people even in our decadent West: the workers celebrate by donating a day of pay-free work to the state. All labor is conceived as "building the revolution," and the revolution is all-important. The promotion of "revolutionary labor" in itself constitutes an immense industry where media people, bureaucrats, and voluble factory foremen are the workers. Work is more dogmatically world-salvific than in the liberal democracies and is vastly more involuntary since it is directed by an all-encompassing puritanical and fanatic state.

The totally secularized, world-salvific nature of the revolutionary ideal is aptly described by Erik H. Erikson in his Childhood and Society:

Their state of salvation is not determined by the inner glow of faith and of love for the believers, but in disciplined success in this world, in a deter-
mined alignment with contemporary economic forces. Their damnation and their death is not the consciousness of sin and the certainty of hell, but the exclusion from the community, and even the self-exclusion from the historical process, a moral annihilation compared with which death from whatever hand is a mere biological trifle.

The full employment guaranteed by the left-totalitarian societies has always been immensely attractive to liberals in the West. Their admiration for it helps explain their usual policy of pas d'ennemi à gauche and gives credence to the conservatives' charge that in a crisis modern liberalism cannot be trusted to choose liberty if the choices narrow down to liberty on the one hand or craven economic security on the other. Eulogizing the New Order in collectivized Cuba, George Slaff, a prominent figure in the American Civil Liberties Union, became poetic over the Castro constitution's prosaic “guarantee not found in ours: the right of every [i.e., each] person to work to a job.” (One would have to be as naive as Candide before his travels to believe that the liberals' fascination with guaranteed employment reflects only their “concern for humanity”: guaranteed employment is socially ameliorative but behind the respectably humanitarian motive lie ancient demotic hatred and envy, the desire to strengthen the hand of “the people”—the vulgus mobile—in their perennial battle against the aristocratic virtues, which include scorn for envious demotic mediocrity.)

Erikson's description applies with equal aptness to the liberal democracies. One need only change “self-exclusion from the historical process” to “self-exclusion from social prestige and economic success.” Our progressivist devotion to enterprise, free or otherwise, may not sound so much the old Victorian note, but status continues to imply career. Between 1950 and 1974, according to Census Bureau figures released in 1976, the number of women employed in the work-force nearly doubled (the 1974 figure was 35.9 million). For our electorate and our political parties alike “the proper study of mankind” is not man but wages and purchasing power: “technical decision-making by the economic expert now shapes the politician’s pronouncements.” The prestige of “social action”—implying intense activity, i.e., work—remains immense. The young people who have discovered “the environment” and “ecology” and claim to be opposed to further advances in technology and urbanization are not at all opposed to the kind of work that goes into social action. Health, Education and Welfare shows no signs of establishing an agency for the large numbers of workaholics in need of rehabilitation.

III

This obsessive character of modern work, developing despite the idleness “natural to man”—a “natural right” if there ever was one, but paradoxically destroyed by “rights” activism—is the consequence of work's having become a religious surrogate. Long before the industrial revolution the Western concept of work was being transformed, and this transformation constituted a psychological preparation for the industrial revolution itself.

Traditionally, work had been an unself-conscious and matter-of-course activity. In the Middle Ages—as in the ages that preceded them—there had been a healthy scorn for work as well as a practical recognition of its necessity and of its value as a sacred offering. Medieval man had enough of a balanced view of things to remember, on occasion, that work was in some respects a curse: it had been made necessary by the Fall: “In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread.” Orthodoxy has always clearly recognized the benevolent potential of plain hard work, especially of work on the land or of hand construction and handcrafting. But the attempt to force—or even to urge—mankind into an all-embracing work ethic was foreign to the old regimes. St. Benedict, for example,
praised manual labor as being of immense value; but it is worth remembering that he prescribed it for monks, not for the generality, and that he made no attempt to make work do the work of devotion.*

From Joachim’s time forward, work increasingly became a self-conscious dedication within the framework of a world-plan—a plan for universal salvation within history. The plan or vision came to be called variously “the Third Realm,” “the New Order,” “Progress,” “the classless society,” “the Global Village.” In time the humblest trade would feel obliged to adopt the proper pretensions to making its socially useful “contribution” to the New Order. Work became world-salvific and thus implied intensification of purely secular labors.

Why it implied this intensification is not at all obscure. In the first place, the Joachimistic vision generated a new enthusiasm, at times a hysteria; stated mundanely, this means that vast resources of human energy and emotion were being newly released as activity of one sort or another—activity directed toward preaching and building the New Order which was inevitable yet somehow required building and of course universal participation. Our perennial Western energy and élan, formerly channeled into feast-day madness or muted into contemplative habits and acts of quiet personal construction, would be diverted into the stream of world-salvific enterprise and career.

As secularization proceeded—for Joachimism deemphasized the importance of institutionalism, that is, of doing things within the framework of the Church; and Renaissance commercial expansion, affluence, and skepticism assured that work would increasingly have a secular context—the locus of present and future fulfillment would no longer be the beatific vision, but the life—materially secure, comfortable, affluent, bright and smart—being shaped by ambitious entrepreneurs, industrialists, financiers, middlemen, advertisers, scientists, technicians, and bureaucrats; and these shed their grace on work, not on prayer and poetry. The vigorous expansion of secular enterprise was in effect largely a shift toward practical materialism (which was compatible with vestigial religion); and materialism, whether of the selfish or of the welfareist type commonly mistaken in the contemporary world for “idealism,” necessarily implies preoccupation with things—especially mass-useful things—and with their manipulation; in short, with the goods and services that cater to the affluent society’s material well-being on the one hand and to its self-indulgence on the other. Obviously both things and manipulation imply work.

With the advent of “democracy” and relative “equality of opportunity,” material ambition, social climbing, the scramble for position, became universal. In the socially and technologically mobile society, not just a handful of noblesse and wealthy bourgeois, but an entire population devotes itself to the strategy of keeping up with and getting ahead of. The implications of this vast competition and coercion, with its characteristic stress, confusion, and disappointment, were so profound that Balzac made them the subject of what is still the greatest series of stories in modern letters, La Comédie humaine.

Scientism, industrialization, mechanization, democracy, and the materialist outlook, all of which underlie the modern exaltation of work, did not develop in an ideological vacuum. Their rapid advance in the post-medieval era is a complicated story but one in which Joachimism—which gradually underwent generalization into perfectibilitarianism or modern secular millenarism—is, so to speak, the inspiration. From the 1200’s onward there gradually spread a millenarist vision; man could perfect his nature and his culture. Scientific advances throughout the late Renaissance gave Joachimism a scientistic coloration: through the advance of industry, science, and techniques, the affluence and security formerly possible for a few would be extensible to all. Millenarism, an age-old but intermit-
tent and never—until the modern era—universal disease of Western Man, became epidemic in thirteenth-century Europe—and held on—as a result of the charismatic teachings and numerous charismatic disciples of Joachim.

Joachim had reinterpreted Scripture to mean that there would be a steady progression toward a Third World, a perfected society of brotherhood presided over by the Holy Spirit, just as the first two ages or worlds had been presided over by the Father and then by the Son. Orthodox eschatology understood salvation to be individual and to occur at the end of the world; Joachim took Scripture to mean that salvation would be en masse, universal, and would occur within history. The Joachitic vision was that of a triumphalism without the Church, for in the Third World sanctity would prevail while the trappings of institutional religion would wither away. The advent of the Third World would be marked by the appearance of a dux (duce) or great leader; and after 1200 history added to its pageant of false Messiahs many a false dux. Contemporaries of Joachim did not fail to see that this millenarist vision was a radically immanentist reinterpretation of traditional Christian teaching on the Last Things, but despite refutation by Thomas Aquinas and censure from Church hierarchy, the Joachitic enthusiasm was spread by the Franciscan "Spirituals" and by other groups (like the Flagellants) and shaped the spirit in which the scientific and technological advances of the Renaissance were received and the ends toward which they came to be directed. Science and technics, it came to be widely believed, would provide the means, at least the chief means, to the end, that is, to the Third World. The Joachitic certainty about the meaning of history filled a profound need: it met the great uncertainties that were developing in the late Middle Ages and throughout the Renaissance; it meant a renewal of faith—a faith conveniently placed more in the future than in the troubled present and more in tangible history than in the intangibles that transcended it. The Joachitic vision thus appealed equally to idealism, whether ascetic or poetic, and to the rapidly developing sensuous, secularist, naturalist temper of the Renaissance. The vision gained adherents on all sides; orthodoxy was forced onto the defensive. The goal gradually secularized as a postulated strife-free, problem-free, and generally effort-free (yet not work free) life—the "religion of non-doing," Spengler called it—and whether seen as isolated commune, global society, or higher standards of living, this goal has been central in capitalism and socialism alike (how a society in which machines "supplied all wants and did all work" would be compatible with the human need for creative expression including the whole body or body-and-mind was never convincingly spelled out).

IV

The tendency to exalt and politicize work was powerfully reinforced by two concurrent developments both of which owed more than a little to Joachim: the Reformation and the advent of democratic competitiveness.

In at least three ways, Reformationist zeal contributed strongly to the creation of a highly competitive society where the supremacy of work was increasingly more apparent than the supremacy of God.

First, the sanction which Reformationism gave to individualism and "freedom" worked out (in a way unforeseen by Luther, the "father of all later revolutions") as a stimulus for divisiveness and social fragmentation, that is, for the individual's obsession with his own salvation, and the competition of one individual and one sect against another. The moral self-sufficiency of the Puritan, as Tawney says, corroded his sense of social solidarity . . . he drew from his idealization of personal responsibility a theory of individual rights, which, secularized and
generalized, was to be among the most potent explosives that the world has known.8

Second, the great enterprise of world-reform offered unlimited opportunities to compete for the prizes of reconstruction, and this competitiveness was assured because early Protestantism drew its main support, in both numbers and economic power, from the opportunistic mercantile classes, to whom the skills of economic competitiveness were neither unfamiliar nor ungenial.

Third, what obtained in world-reform also obtained in self-reform: the ethical fanaticism of many of the sects encouraged the individual not only to acquire "the habit of perfection" but also to display the outward evidence (or what might be interpreted as such) of this "election": since conduct, though availing nothing to attain the free gift of salvation, is a proof that the gift has been accorded, what is rejected as a means is resumed as a consequence, and the Puritan flings himself into practical activities with daemonic energy. Apparently it occurred to many that the readiest way to this demonstration—this socialization of "election"—was the rites of respectability, which gradually came to be known as the pursuit of "higher standards of living," and finally as "making it." The Reformation originals of these mundane rites cost money even in the sixteenth century and were therefore best assured by competitive economics with the attendant implication of mass social climbing.

Calvinism in particular stripped the old faith down to its ethical bones, revealing God as stern Righteousness. Where this Hebraic or ethical element in religion is made supreme, Duty becomes tyrannical, and the tyranny of Duty is bound to mean not innocence and spontaneity but a regime of self-serious busyness, of utilitarian, essentially graceless work. In the Puritan context, when work as overt act ceases for a while it nevertheless continues as attitude: the mind orders itself and all things around it toward restless utilitarian activity—in deed, often enough, no doubt the hardest part of the Puritan's work was the effort of emotional and poetic suppression together with the effort entailed by habitual self-scrutiny, dutiful introspection; the burden of anxiety had to be carried even when the arms were at rest.

But the origins of Calvinism do not lie entirely in stern ethicalism. Behind Calvinism there is something more poetic or at least more visionary; and again this proves to be Joachimism. As Eric Voegelin and others have shown, the ambient and heady Joachitic atmosphere was there to be breathed by all, including John Calvin and his followers. It was the numerous and widely distributed followers of Joachim who, from the thirteenth century onward, had been chiefly responsible for preparing a climate of feeling that would be receptive to the idea of communal ethical perfection in this world, this life—of a "holy community"; and it was the Joachitic enthusiasts who seeded the mind for that other Protestant propensity, the desacralization of—and even, sometimes, disregard for—the institutional church. Joachitic influence undoubtedly helped make Calvin and Calvinism what they were. Perhaps the psychology of transformation here—the transformation from the visionary and proto-anabaptist mode of Joachim to the trembling, Predestination-haunted sensibility of Calvinist congregations—is not inexplicable. In the erudite, very cerebral, and meticulous personality of Calvin, the Joachitic enthusiasm for ethical perfection realizable in this life was transmuted into austere insistence on building and maintaining the Holy Community, i.e., the ethically meticulous society.

But whatever the respective proportions of Hebraic and Joachitic ingredients may have been in the Calvinist compound, the obsession with Duty and Righteousness—"obession," rather than "emphasis upon," which is too mild and sane a phrase for this phenomenon that has all the characteristics of a well-developed compulsion neurosis
—led inevitably to work: to the work that builds and polices the Holy Community, and to the work that leaves no time or energy for the Devil’s invitations, for the temptations of spontaneity, play, and imagination. Mistrust of the sensuous, together with truncation of the emotional life, made the Calvinist the ideal worker, the superworker; the rationalism and the habit of neglecting the emotional life could disadvantage no one for intricate ratiocination in the service of science and industry, for commercial expansion, mechanical occupations, or long hours, in other words, for this great workshop of the modern world.

The Puritan or Calvinist devotion to homo faber was of course carried on by the other sects too, only, in most cases, with less intensity. Like their fellow saints in the Calvinist chapels, the non-Calvinist congregations were made up mostly of “the people”—the workers—and this class orientation toward the labor of plough or ledger book was likewise supported by a zealous ethicalism. Luther, who had no faith in the civil authority, and the effect of this was to diminish the spiritual restraints on secular labors, i.e., to augment the quantity and the intensity of secular work by allowing the getters and spenders a new freedom to preach from the lively pulpit of the marketplace the virtues of wheeling and dealing. The radically antinomian anabaptist sects that sometimes thought themselves as far above labor as they were above sin are only footnotes—if vivid ones—in the text of the Reformation.

As for the Quakers, they were fond of a counsel that sounds like something straight out of a Presbyterian homily: “Gather the flowers of pleasure in the fields of duty.” As we have noticed, when Duty is summoned, Work appears.

V

THE ELEVATION of the Worker to paradigmatic status in the civil religion of the West was a logical corollary of the democratic theorem. Before it meant anything fancier or more specialized, democracy simply meant a plain historical fact: the Third Estate in ascendence. And the Third Estate was “the people,” the masses, in other words, the whole body of the working classes: peasants, proprietors, and proletariat. There had always existed the possibility that “the people” would one day come into their own politically; and when they did they could be expected to insist on the nobility of work and worker. Democracy—the vote, the rule of numbers, and the romancing of “majority,” “equality,” and “the common man” (i.e., the worker)—was a natural political institutionalization of the penchant, the forte, the habit, of the Third Estate. The masses’ exaltation of work, especially of manual or otherwise obvious material work, reflects on the one hand their biological fitness for it (a fitness often paid for in insensitivity), and on the other the limitations of popular imagination—manual, directly useful work is something present, tangible, quantitative, measurable; its performance and appreciation make no demands on the imagination. If proficient work is “proof of merit,” the hallmark of praiseworthy character, it is a hallmark with which any fool can stamp himself.

The historical particulars of how Protestantism in general and Calvinism in particular acted to liberate and empower the Third Estate—hence, ultimately, to establish democracy—are complex, but the democratic germ indigenous to the Protestant movement is large enough to be seen by the naked eye. The various aspects of freedom and individualism indigenous to Reformationist thought—freedom or individualism in exegesis and in “conscience,” freedom to bend the knee to no prelate or prince, freedom to secede from traditional authority be it religious or civil—all this, as has been universally recognized, predisposed the Calvinist toward “democracy,” toward relative equality, rather than toward hierarchy. These penchants and their attendant doctrines would have sufficed, no doubt, to liberate “the people”
and bring forth political democracy. But there was more: the mystique of work. From the earliest period, Calvinists, though they put no stock in the “efficacy of good works,” were recognizable by their practical belief that proficient work was the proof, or at least the probability, of election. This elevation of work naturally made Calvinists think of those who worked—the masses, “the people”—as the legitimate repository of political power. Hence the short step from Calvinist “freedom” to secular democracy was made even shorter by the Calvinist mystique of work and workers. Calvin himself had, of course, subscribed to a democratic rather than to the traditional monarchic political theory.

The exaltation of work made for democracy and then democracy in turn made for further intensification of the work ethic because democracy implied competitiveness—and in fact a competitiveness from which both Calvinism and Lutheranism had tended to remove spiritual restraints. Democracy is popularly assumed to imply a concern for solidarity, unity, common cause; but historical analysis warrants no such assumption. The unity or solidarity is largely an illusion created in the process of trying to put together a majority for an election. There is also of course a negative solidarity in republican and democratic sentiment: the common cause of fear and hostility toward the institutions and characteristic sentiments of the ancien régime (the strongest element of “solidarity” in Protestantism was similarly negative: bristling opposition to the Roman Catholic Church). Much of the internal history of modern democracies and republics is a history of bitter factionism. The mere preaching of “equality”—the preachers naively assume their homily to be pious—is a potent stimulant of self-centered competitiveness. In egalitarian and quasi-egalitarian societies (strictly speaking, in countries that profess to believe in “equality”) the citizen is told he is “equal” or “as good as.” But just by looking about him he sees he is obviously not the equal of his teacher, who has brains and learning, or of his neighbor who is witty and strong, or of his other neighbor who has money. Still, our citizen is proclaimed to be “equal,” and the continual din of the proclamation makes him feel obliged to have a go at becoming “equal.” The scramble to catch up—the democratic free-for-all—is on; and in the context of devotion to Higher Standards of Living this means developing and acquiring things; it means, in other words, a materialism of clutter and a totalitarianism of work. As the middle class democracies developed, the main form secularized Joachimism took was not outright utopianism but this bemused economic opportunism, and whether conceived as economic self-interest or rationalized as progress—the bourgeois-democratic ideal of a smooth-running, amenity-laden world—it could be realized only through augmenting both the scale and the intensity of work. Democracy does not always mean freedom but it invariably means work.

VI

To be sure, Joachimism and Calvinism were not the only developments that contributed to the deification of secular work. The world of worldly labors expanded impressively in Venice and Genoa as a result of the Crusades and the subsequent quickening of trade with the East. Later, important rare metal mines were discovered in Bavaria, and still later immense gold mines were found in Brazil. These and other economic developments of an essentially fortuitous and external nature unquestionably contributed to the expansion of the secular work world—and to its prestige. But these developments implied little except traditional mainchancing, greed, and hustle. Such developments cannot in themselves account for the evolution of a new concept of work. They merely complemented that concept.

More significant were the Copernican discoveries and subsequent intellectual developments that shattered traditional im-
ages. In Modern Woman: the Lost Sex, Lundberg and Farnham point out that the reverberations of the Copernican revolution extended into the work world:

The modern drive to achievement of all sorts, in a panic-stricken way never before seen in human history, derives originally from a single event: the portrayal of the heliocentric universe by Copernicus in persuasive mathematical terms. The Copernican outlook set European man back on his haunches in mingled astonishment, wonder, and fear. He felt devalued as well as frightened, and slowly set about recapturing his sense of personal worth through achievement. He set out to do and to find out about things...to lift himself by his bootstraps.11

One may quarrel with the word “originally,” as two centuries of fervent Joachimism had preceded Copernicus. But the Copernican revolution was the first of a series of intellectual shockwaves—Darwinism and the Higher Criticism were others—that were to shake the faith and hurry great numbers of people into the congenially unmetaphysical and nicely delimited refuge of secular labor. In a splendid short study, Daniel Bell makes the point that this great refuge became all the more attractive as declining belief in personal immortality faced people with a spectre—the absoluteness of death—that could be escaped temporarily, if not completely exercised, by absorption in career and routine. Fears of the finality of death, the terror of the abyss...were staved off by work...One could eliminate death from consciousness by minimizing it through work...One can challenge death by emphasizing the omnipotence of a movement, like the "inevitable" victory of communism...The modern effort to transform the world solely or chiefly through politics (rather than the transformation of the self) has meant that all other institutional ways of mobilizing emotional energy would necessarily atrophy. In effect, sect and church became party and social movement.12

The follow-up point is necessary but often neglected: although the effect of a series of intellectual shocks was to cause men to seek refuge in the world of secular work, what made that refuge accessible was the prior firm establishment through Joachimism and Calvinism, of a religion of work. For those who were troubled and who in their troubles might at last have turned all the more fervently to the faith of their fathers, a new and seemingly less demanding faith was ready to hand; the availability of an alternative faith facilitates the shaking of the original.

Millenarism, revived and reinvigorated by Joachim of Flora, and variously modified—into Reformationist ethicalism and zeal and into political egalitarianism: here is the great development that assured the creation of our Martha society, the society of incessant and constantly proliferating mass activity that implies the politicizing of work and that brings intense competitiveness and insecurity with their ineluctable complex stresses and anxieties.


Gustave Thibon's Back to Reality (1955) is valuable on the urbanization of work and on the spiritual implications of work on the land. Josef Pieper's Leisure: the Basis of Culture (1952) measures culturally destructive force of the modern work ethic and distinguishes its false "leisure" from the true leisure necessary for the support of all spiritual activity. A balanced as well as trenchant analysis of the nature of machinisme and its political economy is Marcel Malcor's Au
delà du machinisme (1937). No English translation of this undeservedly forgotten study has appeared. Nor are there any reliable English translations of Gina Lombroso's interesting critique of machinisme; for a faithful rendering of her Italian one must go to the French translation by Henri Winckler, La rançon du machinisme (1931).

Eric Voegelin's The New Science of Politics (1952) traces the neo-gnostic, world-salvific quality of much modern work to its historical sources and thus constitutes an exception to the opening generalization of the present essay. The "flight into work"—the neurotic and neuroticizing tendencies of much modern work—is described capably, though not systematically analyzed, in various studies by Karl Jaspers, Hans Selye, Rollo May, Karl Stern (The Flight from Woman, 1965), Ferdinand Lundberg and Marynia F. Farnham (Modern Woman: the Lost Sex, 1947), and Karl Bednarik (The Male in Crisis, 1970, esp. pp. 140-156).

Joachim's name fails to crop up in the works of Weber, Sombart, Spengler, Tawney, and other seminal modern historians and sociologists. Voegelin's New Science of Politics was the most intellectually ambient of the studies that led to the general rediscovery of Joachimism. An equally sound but briefer and more readily accessible treatment of Joachim's importance in the history of ideas is Erich Kahler's Meaning in History (1964, pp. 109-117). Karl Löwith's Meaning in History (1949, pp. 145-159) offers a similar and not inferior analysis. Hans Urs von Balthasar's Man in History: A Theological Study (1968, 131 ff.) is also insightful. A very detailed study is M. Bloomfield's long paper "Joachim of Flora, A Critical Survey of His Canon, Sources, Biography and Influence" (Traditio, Vol. 13, 1957, pp. 249-311). A brief but impressive refutation of Joachim's heretical exegycheology occurs in the Summa Theologiae, qu. 106, a. 4. E. Benz provides an interesting article on St. Thomas' rebuttal: "Thomas von Aquin und Joachim de Fiore" (Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte, LIII, 1934, 52 ff.). One of the first and most energetic disciples of Joachim was Gerard of Bordo San Donnino. The story of Gerard and of influential early Protestant Joachimites like Giacopo Brocardo, James Maxwell, and David Joris, is well told in Marjorie Reeves' splendid volume The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages: A Study in Joachimism (1969). Most of the important English, German, and Italian essays on Joachim are collected in the two volumes of Joachim of Flora in Christian Thought, ed. Delmo C. West (New York, 1975).


Of course quite orthodox writers have sometimes overstated the case for manual labor. Gustave Thibon in his excellent Back to Reality scorns the dilettantism of much of the work perpetrated in the modern world and notes with approval the traditional prestige of hard work among farmers and country people in general; but he is misleading in emphasis because he fails to balance his portrait of the hard-working countryman by noting the leisurely pace of much of the work and the long seasonal vacations afforded by traditional agriculture.

In America one's subjective impression that disappointment is the rule is bolstered by statistics: according to the Department of Labor's most recent figures, more than 80% of Americans over 65 live "at or below the poverty level."


In Work, Society and Culture (New York, 1971, p. 41) Yves Simon remarks that "it is indeed no wonder that when it consciously came into being the modern working class proclaimed through its spokesmen that it should be the ruling class."

The intellectual counterpart of this atomized—or analyzed—economics was the mania for analytic knowledge, a mania motivated sometimes by sheer intellectual curiosity but generally by a gnostic passion for power. The escutcheon of the modern West bears the motto Knowledge Is Power (a common school inscription in America and the title of a magazine in the U.S.S.R.). But behind this grand-sounding phrase is the implication that knowledge is neither its own reward nor a means for defending and spiritualizing innocence, but a means to that perennial gnostic obsession, power gained by mastering the secrets of things. A sound and lucid brief study of the modern gnostic obsession is Nicolas Berdyaev's The Meaning of History (trans. George Reavey, 1936, 1962).


Daniel Bell, Work and Its Discontents (Boston, 1956), p. 56.