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THE VIRTUOUS LIFE

We spend a third of our lives sleeping. Many people spend hours everyday traveling to and from work. We spend our days thinking about trivial matters of gossip and television dramas, and dreaming to be famous like some footballer or movie star. In total, the time spent actually doing what we want is often considerably smaller than we like to think, because we spend so much time doing something else. And this is true especially for those tasks we must accomplish, but also for those tasks and activities we want to accomplish. Most people want to have a better physique or a slimmer figure, and naturally they should want to exercise. People who want to be smart know they should read books, but they never read a single page. Someone not working on a task they *must* accomplish is understandable in some ways, but why do we also avoid those tasks we should want to do? Even though Seneca writes in a poetic language, our lives are spent doing nothing, in the sense that we are not working to become better human beings tomorrow or next week or next year. We would rather sit and watch television for several hours a day, than educate ourselves. And having wasted so much time on the couch, we complain to our boss and our spouse and our teacher that we do not have any time at all to do what we want to do. How come some people are extremely successful while others are not? By comparing successful people to unsuccessful people, I will try to find the answer in this text, and especially in regards to time consumption.

In Ancient Greece the ultimate goal was to be a virtuous man. Aristotle even based his ethics on the virtues, and advocated following the example of a virtuous man. In most of the time following the rise of Christianity (at least in the western world) the meaning of life has been closely tied to doing God's will and being worthy of ascension into heaven. Since the Age of Enlightenment the latter meaning has lost a lot of its content to many, and many experienced an existential crisis. Yet today the fear of death and the wish for something bigger than ourselves brings us back to religion, trying to find meaning in the word of God(s). Others are devout to a sport or an occupation, spending all their time trying to find a cure for AIDS, without necessarily being believers *or* virtuous. Clearly there is no one task that is considered "living" but a multitude of task depending entirely on the subjective experience of each individual person. We can conclude that what some people consider *living* is to others what Seneca labeled "merely time". *Living* is different things to different people. There is no special action that is the ultimate act, but there are some commonalities those activities people *would* like to do.

No one is born the greatest in anything. Some children are gifted, but they still have to do the work. Some of life's paths are more difficult than others and require an array of different skills. Other people only need to work on one facet of their life to stay at the top level. If you wish to be the President of the United States, you will need to master several difficult skills such as composure and temperance, rhetoric, economics and ethics. You need to be a strict boss and a caring leader, a decisive military commander as well as a relatable person. You need to convince voters as well as foreign leader. On the other hand, a bodybuilder can get away with proper exercise, diet and pose training. What is not necessarily true though, is that the President because he needs to have expertise within so many different subjects, is working *more* or *harder* than the bodybuilder. Barack Obama must have spent many, many hours in the library to become such an enlightened man, and probably practiced his oratory skills for hours on end achieving his current level of skill. Bodybuilders

spend several hours in the gym every single day to achieve their trophy-winning physique. Monks will dedicate themselves completely to the study of God. The commonality between these different occupations is that it requires practice and time. The majority of hours are spent on the journey, and not on the podium receiving a prize or in the Oval Office. Barack Obama spent two decades preparing for the presidency. Arnold exercised every day for a few annual events. Monks spend their entire life in expectance for a place in heaven. So while many people want to jump straight to the prize and the glory and the achievement, they do not want to do the work needed to get there. The common factor between those who actually *live* is that they are not afraid to walk the walk, and actually work on their craft. Not only do they know what to do, but they also do it.

When Aristotle postulated his ethics based on the virtues, he gave some requirements for the virtuous man. He should not only *know* the right action, but he would also *do* the right action. In contrast, many people who today spend their time whining about their lack of time often *know* what they have to do; they have to stop snacking and start exercising. They know they have to start reading for their next exam, or start writing that novel they have wanted to write. Most people have the necessary knowledge, but lack the action, and without the action they are nowhere. Having the knowledge does not count as starting. Most people can explain why they are overweight or why they cannot run the marathon or why they *can*, and it is a result of action the lack thereof. So now I can conclude this essay so far what is considered living is different from person to person, but that these different actions have something in common, namely the combination of knowledge and action. Now though it is clear to us that most of the time is not spent winning trophies or being inaugurated, so does that mean that even successful people are wasting their time?

Obviously, successful people would not be successful if they had not worked as hard as they have, as hard work is a criterion for success. The problem occurs when we only measure success, and then refer to success when we refer to meaning and *living*. Consider that without the hard work, success would be worthless. If the winner was decided by lottery, there is no glory or honor in winning. Your victory was the result of pure luck. Success is the recognition of hard work, but those individuals who are willing to endure long hours and hard work often thoroughly enjoy their work. Observe sports stars who retire and then come back a year or two later simply because they cannot live without the sport. They love the long hours on the batting range or in the gym perfecting their technique. To them success is a bonus, because they would hard even if there were no trophies to win or prizes to collect. Hard, enjoyable work becomes an end in itself, as you are realizing your own potential as well as doing something you love. And if spending the majority of your days doing something you love is not living life, what is?

To end this essay, it is clear that most people live in a vegetative-like state where they do not try to use the amazing potential of the time available to them to achieve their utmost potential. They walk in a daze through life more worried about what the neighbors think about their new car, or whether they will go to heaven or hell. They are afraid of the uncertainty of following their dreams and realizing their latent possibilities, and choose to continue with their habits and then whine about their lack of time. Those who really want to achieve will find a way, and they will find the time they need, if that means giving up sleep or giving up something else. In every occupation we know of, someone is the best, and they have become the best because they have been willing to work hard and spend their time wisely. Consider the knowledge of Aristotle or the combined works of Shakespeare, and it is clear that time is not the issue, we are.