

Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture
Fall 2017 Course Syllabus

WHY WORK?

Instructor: Jonathan Malesic, Ph.D.

Many of us are conflicted about work. We expect it to fulfill us, but we also hate our jobs. This conflict sparks questions that touch on the highest ideals about the purpose of our lives. Does each person have a calling – some line of work for which they are naturally suited? Who are we working *for* – our bosses, ourselves, our society? Which is more important, work or leisure? Should you aim to do what you love? Or is a job just a job, and fulfillment something to seek elsewhere? These questions are worth taking seriously. And if work truly is harmful to our life's meaning, then the class itself, as a space for the leisurely exchange of ideas for their own sake, may be the right cure.

Reading List

Josef Pieper, *Leisure, the Basis of Culture* (Ignatius)

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (Princeton Classic Edition)

Miya Tokumitsu, *Do What You Love and Other Lies About Success and Happiness* (Regan Arts)

Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery* (Norton Critical Edition)

Note: There are many editions available of *Walden* and *Up from Slavery*, including many available free online. Feel free to use whichever edition is most convenient for you.

Schedule

In all cases, read as much as you can, but please come to class regardless of how much you've read. Class meetings will feature a mixture of lecture and discussion. Once you get into the reading and class discussion, you'll notice news articles about work coming out every day. Work is a major topic of public debate; we will bring some of that debate into our meetings.

- Sept. 7 The social, moral, and spiritual conditions of work in 21st century America
 Read Tokumitsu, *Do What You Love*.
 If pressed for time, read Tokumitsu, "In the Name of Love," *Jacobin*, Jan. 12, 2014: <http://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/01/in-the-name-of-love/>
- Sept. 14 The Protestant ethic and the American ideology of work
 Read Washington, *Up from Slavery*, especially ch. 1-5, 8-12, 14, 16-17.
- Sept. 21 How to live the good life working six weeks a year
 Read Thoreau, *Walden*, especially "Economy" & "Conclusion," and if possible "Where I Lived," "The Bean-Field," & "Higher Laws."
- Sept. 28 The leisure ethic
 Read Pieper, *Leisure, the Basis of Culture* (it's fairly short).

Instructor

Jonathan Malesic, Ph.D., is an award-winning author, scholar, and teacher of religion and philosophy. He holds a Ph.D. in religious studies from the University of Virginia and taught at King's College in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, for 11 years before moving to Dallas. His essays on the meaning of work have appeared in *The Washington Post*, *The New Republic*, *America*, *Commonweal*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *The Wilson Quarterly*, and several academic journals. His teaching and research on this topic have been supported by grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Louisville Institute. As a former professor and parking lot attendant, he has experienced a wide range of what work offers people today.

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