

TAKE A VACATION.

BY DANIEL C. DENNETT

ONE OF THE chief virtues of money is that you can use it to buy time to do what you want. But if you are forced to break your precious spare time into relatively small chunks—waiting for the bus, a few evening hours after a hard day's work, two-day weekends—it's hard to do big projects or have great adventures that unfold over weeks or months. It's spare time, but it's garbage time. Garbage, after all, is mostly perfectly good stuff, just broken and mixed with other perfectly good stuff so it can no longer be readily put to use.

We academics have long summer vacations and even longer sabbaticals—glorious big chunks of green time in which to write books, spend months on end studying various phenomena, or just see the world or build a boat. We don't just enjoy recreation; we re-create ourselves.

What would it take to create a system of allocating work that maximized green time for everyone? In the developed world, most people are trapped in a work schedule that turns much of their spare time into garbage time ("prime time" for television, but not good for much else). Weekends are great, but many would love to work eight 10-hour days in a row and then have six full days off—or work every day for a month and then have a month off. Of course if your friends are all working 9 to 5, you probably find it more attractive to stay in lockstep with them. Like miles and inches or the QWERTY keyboard, a less-than-ideal system can persist because tradition is too deeply ingrained to be changed without a painful revolution.

The developing world, in contrast, is not yet cemented into such a rigid work life, and so would be an ideal environment in which to explore more flexible schedules. In much the way one-size-fits-all mass production is being replaced in many industries with made-to-order manufacturing thanks to computer-aided control systems, information technology can probably be harnessed to create "just-in-time" work scheduling that maximizes green time for

almost everybody. The more green time at your disposal, the more varied your desires beyond the bare necessities of life. Priming the economic pump with extra usable leisure, with no loss of productivity, could boost economic growth and create many wonderful things.

Factory owners in the developing world occasionally encounter the supposed paradox of "target workers" (not to be confused with Target workers): If you pay them \$2 an hour, they will work for 200 hours until they get enough money to buy the coveted motorbike—and then quit. If you pay them \$4 an hour, they will work only 100 hours before quitting, having reached their target sum sooner. How do you run a factory where the more you pay them the less they work? Instead of trying to turn them into Western-style wage slaves, let their preferences shape their schedules, with a fluid marketplace of skilled and unskilled workers selling their time to those who provide the best deals.

There is wisdom in these workers' refusal to obey the "laws" of wages, and if that wisdom could be harnessed, target workers wouldn't have to quit their jobs; they could take "sabbaticals" that fit their dreams and goals. In much the same way cell phones have permitted those same countries to leap over the costly infrastructure of land lines, perhaps technology can also spare the developing world the regimentation of work that turns so much human time into garbage time.

The developing world is full of smart, innovative people who, given time and opportunity, can amaze us—people like William Kamkwamba, the Malawian who as a 14-year-old boy designed and built his own electric windmills from scratch. When everyone—not just those of us in the ivory tower—can use green time better, the energies unleashed will astound the world. **DP**

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