

Giving, Getting and No Parking 2022

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It is Labor Day 2022 in America – an event celebrated once a year mainly to honor those who work at hourly wages for what is most often a very moderate living. This is a worthy moment of recognition in a society that otherwise rewards those who are salaried and living at a considerably higher standard. And then, there are those 50 hyper wealthy American individuals and families whose returns on investments bring them mega millions and economic celebrity status [Forbes list of the wealthiest]. In all of these iterations, work, success and productivity are conceived in mostly economic terms! Where is the holiday honoring those who give most of their time and energy to benefit others? Yes, there are those grand philanthropists who are celebrated for giving the greatest number of dollars – often out of the embarrassment of riches that have piled up on their doorstep or to otherwise avoid taxes. In America, it seems that even where giving is recognized, it gets celebrated in economic terms!

So, our first challenge is to retire our excessive focus on the economic results of work/labor – this before we fulfill the trend of becoming a fully monetized society.

Now, let's look at the other end of the work/labor spectrum – those who depart work at retirement. As modern societies focus on the goal of increasing longevity, the period of retirement from work has expanded greatly for more and more older citizens. In retirement, some 22% of older adults elect to transition to less demanding jobs or volunteer part time in various social benefit capacities. But, the great majority of retired citizens spend what can be a third of their lives relying on pensions, social security, personal retirement accounts, and Medicare to pursue initially some form of recreation and then to live a mostly isolated, sedentary existence – sitting, coddling a pet, absorbed in some form of fiction, or watching the days go by on television and the internet. This is the ever growing “twiddle your thumbs” life of the American elderly who will spend their final days in separate senior communities, assisted living facilities, nursing homes, and intensive care wards.

Neither the core of adult life conceived in mostly economic terms, nor elder life divorced from some form of productivity is satisfactory. High quality human life is achieved in societies where the individual is a) productive throughout life and b) balances giving socially with getting personally. For core adults in American culture, society must do a better job of emphasizing and rewarding the cooperative values of giving. At the same time, elders must be supported to remain meaningfully engaged and to obey the “No Parking” sign.