

REMARKS ON RETIREMENT

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Abstract

This is a discussion of retirement as viewed from a scholar's standpoint. It pictures a true scholar as a self-ordained individual who does not look forward to a point at which he voluntarily abandons his life's work. He recognizes that part of his life is that of earning a living, but optimally in academia one's life work and earning a living can be two aspects of a single endeavor. He does recognize that human powers wane, but he rebels at segmenting his life into unlike periods as implied in the typical retirement concept, but holds to a single goal regardless of the vicissitudes of the workaday world. He believes that this ideal can actually be put into practice both from the standpoint of institutions and individuals. The first thing is getting this ideal understood from the institutional standpoint. There it is a task of how to identify and treat scholars.

Résumé

Cette étude discute la retraite du point de vue du savant. L'étude décrit le vrai savant comme étant un individu qui s'auto-dirige et qui n'anticipe pas le moment où il devra volontairement abandonner le travail de sa vie. Il reconnaît qu'une partie de sa vie se consacre à gagner son pain, mais de façon optimale, chez le savant, le travail de sa vie et son gagne pain sont deux aspects d'un même travail. Il reconnaît que les capacités humaines se détériorent mais il se rebelle à l'idée de segmenter sa vie dans des étapes très peu semblables, comme l'implique la conception typique de la retraite. Il s'en tient plutôt à l'idée d'un seul but bien au-delà des problèmes du monde du travail. Il croit que cet idéal peut être atteint, et du point de vue des institutions, et du point de vue des individus. Ce qui importe d'abord, c'est de faire comprendre cet idéal par les institutions. A ce niveau la tâche se résumerait à ceci: savoir identifier et savoir traiter les savants.

Retirement may be discussed from a variety of standpoints. The first decision to make is whether to discuss it from the personal or the institutional or societal standpoint. My first remarks will pertain to my own life and objectives, only after stating these will I relate myself to work situations, particularly those in the academic world.

In describing my own personal outlook, I must refer to the concept of ordination. Western society has only one formal ordination, namely ordination for the clergy, unless perhaps we include the expression of those finishing the training for medicine in taking the Hippocratic Oath.

I believe that there is such a thing as self-ordination, when a person decides to devote himself to a life work such as that of a scholar.

I would like to be considered an example of one in that category. In so being, I feel I have long known what my work is, better than anyone else. Naturally, one must have remunerative employment in order to eat and live. It has so happened in my case that my goals and my academic employment have not clashed. I have been involved in such employment ever since completing my graduate work. During the latter

years of that employment, I could say I did not feel like an employee. This may sound anarchical, but it did not happen to be, because I carried out my duties in a conscientious manner and no criticism ever arose regarding my conduct. I never asked for a raise in pay, nor did I participate in group activity in criticism of the university administration. All that kind of activity was foreign and obnoxious to me. I took what came, I was preoccupied with the activities of my life work.

I say these things because, I do not believe it is generally believed that an individual has the right to carve out for himself a path and consider other matters secondary to it. It looks as though an individual who would try to do so would be defying society, or at least trying to serve two masters. This need not be the case. I recall a kindly letter from a man who first was my department chairman, later my dean, and finally the provost. He wrote me that he was eager to help me as a faculty member in any way that he could. He said that he decided that the best way to help was not to interfere with what I was doing. Just let me alone.

This meant that he was convinced that I was doing my duty as far as university requirements were concerned and that I had insights regarding my work that those around me could not, off-hand, supply.

Now comes the matter of retirement. What is it that I am retiring or have retired from? I am an emeritus as far as my home university is concerned. The status of the emeriti is not understood by society in general and not too well understood by some who ought to know.

If one stays on the campus after retirement he may still retain his office. He may participate in research and carry on his writing. He simply does not get a salary. What he gets is his pension. He retains many privileges he already had.

The abruptness is not often exceedingly great, for prior to "retirement," he may have taught few classes, since he may have been devoted to research, and to guiding graduate students doing the research for their degrees. The master-apprentice relation holds there in some measure.

The problem that I am addressing in my remarks is one of hoping for a way to get institutional administrative officers, legislators and society in general to come to understand the life of a devoted scholar, and as a consequence to aid and abet him in every way they can. The problem here involves being able to discern and pick out scholars from those who only pretend to be and parade under the name.

For many years, as circumstances permitted, I have been interested in what I first called "science as a way of life." In it I did not want to portray a selfish pursuit in which the individual cared little for people around him, but rather to portray a blessed state that when once it was portrayed, more people would respect and understand it. I found that science has been defined or viewed in so many ways that too much space was being taken up in coming to the core of what I had in mind. I revamped the title several times recently, so as to indicate that it was scholarliness I was trying to depict. A scholar is "one who wants to know." Day-by-day he is concerned with reality, and this concern takes its highest form in wanting to know about the universe and the human's role in it. It is an ultimate concern, and accordingly, it becomes a religion if one uses Tillich's definition of religion as "ultimate concern."

In my case this ultimate concern engulfs me in aesthetics, an appreciation of the beautiful, so the concern becomes one in which the *True*, the *Good*, and the *Beautiful* are inseparable.

The scholar dislikes thinking of or using the word, retirement, for he does not see himself as abruptly setting out with new goals and occupations at some ordinarily predetermined age.

He is aware of the popular notion of retirement in which there is the implication that the individual must arbitrarily leave his life's work and enter into a period of incapacity or different activity if 65, or into a decidedly different occupation of his own if retirement is early. He thinks only of physical or mental incapacity as the determiners of an abrupt change in daily routine. Is he wrong when he eschews the shift that most people look forward to?

How much are the usual routine things of life around him going to determine what he does? Many men *are* worn out by the time they reach 65. They are not able to carry on the duties of their occupation. Many people's work is something that can concretely be judged by those around them, particularly those who employ them. This comes in, to some degree in a scholar's life. The only thing that I am suggesting is that whatever institutions and employers do in the name of retirement it should not be something hurtful to the employee. This caution pertains, of course, to the scholar.

Life possesses a competitive aspect. It often looms too large. While it takes competition to stimulate some individuals to action, it often becomes an objective in itself. That is to say, the individual's goal becomes primarily to surpass those around him rather than to engulf his resources in a loftier form of self-fulfillment. Of course, the other side of competition is that it is activity that demonstrates to the individual that he is engaged in an activity that numbers of people, if not society at large, think is worthwhile. But the scholar has already decided for himself what is worthwhile. He is a form of a leader in this respect.

As one grows older competition becomes decidedly obnoxious for it is seen as a sidetrack, and one's energies may have diminished and one's outlook does not allow for sidetracks. In fact, for some, one's whole life is so self-propelled and self-directed that competition is a foreign concept. Such individuals are possessed by what they are doing and not with getting ahead of someone else.

Not all universities have the same rules regarding their faculties and thus about retirement. Hence, what I shall say pertains more closely to some than others. I have picked the one in which I spent most of my career as an example of one of the better ones.

In it, those persons entering as full professors were given tenure. Those appointed as associate professors, were given tenure under certain conditions. Those hired as assistant professors gained tenure only after several years. So tenure was built into the system in that way instead of through some kind of promotion or through selection by the faculty.

Retirement could occur at one or the other of these ages — 65, 68, or 70. To go on from 68 to 70 one had to be in good health and active in one's duties. Faculty retirees were given the title, emeritus, when the department head approved.

The emeriti retained their rank and office space, and were treated in every other way as though still active prior to retirement except receiving salary. They could continue to do research. Of course, this was dependent upon financial support outside of the university budget. This meant that once a professor, always a professor.

Sometimes an emeritus was called to a position on a faculty in another university. That was my fate and I accepted, and was given the title of Distinguished Research Professor. The position did not entail any fixed duties. Thus, I continued my writing and when suitable taught classes and conducted seminars.

This situation makes one's activities rather difficult to explain to a non-academician.

The central question is, as far as the remarks I'm writing here are concerned, "Am I retired or am I not?" Or even if I am retired, am I doing much the same as I have done for many years? The essence of retirement for most people is a radical shift in kind and intensity of activity.

I would say that I have slowed my pace, but I have not changed my purposes and goals. Thus it can be said that I have fared very fortunately. I have been an emeritus seven years and occasionally wonder whether I am producing anything worthwhile. The alternative of not even trying seems pretty empty to me and I revolt from the idea.

My problems, it is evident, are different from the institutions' problems. What fraction of its academic retirees can an institution support with office space and other working facilities such as a secretary? If it can support only a fraction of its retirees, what is to be the basis for selection? This again is another situation for friction and hassle among the faculty. In the university I have reference to, it seems that so far, administrative selection has not been needed. Only a few of the emeriti elect to be active.

All I can say is that both universities have made it possible to continue my career activities as long as I wish or am physically or intellectually able. This is not the standard and universal picture of retirement, but it has been my lot; and I would hate to see this sort of treatment disappear from the scene.

Now we come to the employers' or institutions' concern for retirement or other arrangements for employees as they move into the sixties or seventies. That is, we come to dealing with *generalities* whereas I was dealing with the way

the "world of accomplishment," looked and pertained to me and to the minority who are like me.

I think I shall have to bow out at this point, primarily because a *group* of employees is a kind of spectrum rather than a group of similarly motivated and capable people. My ideal would be to take this variety or range into account in the employment situations. To follow this ideal would be a complicated matter and possibly not very successful these days when too many people are feeling mistreated regardless of circumstances. Standards that seem to have to apply are external despite the trend to deal with the individual. The notions of "equality" and what is appropriate for the individual clash, so the equality is applied to external matters such as wages, hours of work, etc., rather than to having employment conditions equally appropriate for each individual, the individuals being different from one another. So any attempt to discover what is true for the latter is called discrimination.

As I said earlier, I seemed to have been lucky and could report an ideal life as pertaining to myself, believing it ought to be made more general throughout academia when individuals can somehow be evaluated.

The fundamental aspect of aging is change. Change in the human can be observed or discovered in many ways. People see changes in the appearance of others. It shows in the face, the posture, the speed and manner of movements, in speech and in other overt ways. Change that is considered as improvement is called development, maturation or some other term. It is only after a number of years of life have been lived that the changed are generally spoken of as aging. It is only after the bloom is fading, or the behavioural functions deteriorate that description turns into details categorizable as aging.

Biologists also speak of aging and while some of their concerns may overlap the common ones just mentioned, they go down even to cellular considerations.

Once categorization is established, the factors that make for the changes called aging are our next concern. Since these are the several categories of human existence or activity, the question arises as to whether all aspects of aging begin at the same point and progress at the same rate. Or is aging such an unanalyzable matter that the question just asked is inappropriate? I think not. Some individuals continue to function pretty well "mentally" while failing in body process. This gap reaches a detectable limit. At some point in dealing with retirement, the aging process cannot be overlooked. Individuals do become unable to carry on. Some degree of disability occurs in

everybody as time passes. Society has long used the age of 65 as the common point at which relief from job duties is appropriate. In some industries or occupations, this has been raised to 70.

It is difficult to set a chronological age that applies to everyone equally well in terms of work capacity. The moving of the chronological age to 70 may involve greater diversity in degree of incapacity among employees, for as time elapses, they probably differ more greatly from each other than earlier.

The ideal from one standpoint would be to have no fixed retirement point in years, but only in terms of the worker. The ideal would also include

a way of testing who would be working only for the salary or who would continue because he wanted to keep on working. Of course, in some situations in which the wages are low, it may be that most would continue working for the wages because pensions would be even lower.

On the other hand perhaps a tapering off of hours worked, etc., after a certain age is reached, would be preferable for all.

One seldom hears the factors of experience and ability being stressed as a function of years spent on a job. This ought to have a bearing on chronological retirement age.