

## Book Review

**Idee di lavoro e di ozio per la nostra civiltà.** Edited by GIOVANNI MARI et al. Pp. 1862.  
Firenze: Firenze University Press, 2024.

This collection is a worthy addition to any library, private or public, because it examines an important part of our lives: our relationship with our work. It does so from a multitude of disciplinary perspectives: sociological, economical, social-historical, and philosophical. The sum is a cultural history, a history of ideas, “una ricognizione [...] delle molteplici concezioni che il lavoro, l’ozio e la contemplazione hanno avuto ed hanno per la vita delle persone” (XXI). Ultimately, it provides the basis for a rethinking of what the term “work” means in a post-pandemic world of remote work and Artificial Intelligence. Work and leisure are the key elements of the title because by joining them the one hundred sixty-seven chapters that comprise the two tomes help us contemplate a life in which vocation and avocation imbricate and complement each other.

The editors opted for “ozio” over “tempo libero” in order to engage with “il tempo di non lavoro come un tempo attivo e creativo” (XXI) and with an idea of work with “un preciso senso personale e sociale dell’attività svolta,” something not provided by income and consumption (XXIII). Thus, the overarching scheme is an interrogation of how “il lavoro, nei secoli, sia passato da un’attività necessaria ad un’attività, a certe condizioni, desiderabile;” of how work and “ozio” need not be at loggerheads (XXIII). In other words, it broaches the possibility of non-alienated work.

Work, of course, is a permanent characteristic of our civilization. So, the first three sections (“Il mondo del lavoro servile e dell’ozio intellettuale,” “Lavoro e ozio nel canone biblico e nel cristianesimo” and “Lavori manuali e lavori intellettuali, sviluppo e apogeo delle arti meccaniche tra il medioevo e l’*Encyclopédie*”) analyze periods of history (going back 2500 years) when economies were driven by slave, serf, and menial labor, and intellectual activity appertained to the leisure classes. The Industrial Revolution, the subject of fourth section (“La rivoluzione industriale e il proletariato. L’invenzione del tempo libero”) delves into how work came to be increasingly central to Western culture and politics; Socialism, Marxism, and bourgeois culture, according to the collection’s editors, all needed to valorize work while continuing to consider it subordinate to more lofty activities.

The fifth section analyzes the causes and effects of the waning and end of industrialism, wrought by the Digital Revolution and the “Rinascita dell’idea dell’ozio.” The sixth and last, “Uno sguardo dall’Italia e sull’Italia,” brings the collection to its culmination, “una considerazione a sé dell’Italia tra Otto e Novecento” (XXII), especially the end of what the editors and contributors consider the end of ‘work-centric’ (if I may be allowed a neologism) society.

This ambitious collection is especially timely, given that it addresses a fracture even deeper than the one in the relatively recent past which intellectuals labeled, for lack of a better term, “post-modernism.” I am referring to the period—corresponding roughly to the 1990s, when we knew Modernity had ended (hence, “post-”) because the Digital Revolution forced a rethinking of age-old, inherited, common-sense perceptions of time and space, but we did not know where we were headed—between “Modernity” and “Globalization” (a topic this work does not directly engage).

This latest rupture, catalyzed by Artificial Intelligence, has made its effects felt in the past few years and is of even greater consequence. Not only are evermore manual tasks being transferred to machines (putting sectors of the labor force at risk, thus providing

fodder for anti-migrant politicking), but now the same can be said of what has heretofore been considered quintessentially human, our thinking processes. Consequently, in the future work will either be an enhancement of the worker's knowledge or will be the cause of their new, downgraded status as controlled workers, when not unemployed and in need of retraining.

Each section (the third is articulated in two parts: "Il Medioevo" and "Dal Rinascimento all'Illuminismo") is preceded by an introduction by its editor.

The chapters are of varying length. They run an interdisciplinary gamut that goes from (to provide a very small sampling, so as to give an idea of the broad array of topics engaged), in "Parte prima, "Lavoro, tecnica e società in Platone" (Franco Ferrari) to, in "Parte seconda," "Il lavoro nella tradizione ebraico-cristiana, tra valorizzazione ascetica e civilizzazione" (Tiziana Faitini). In the first section of "Parte terza" Amalia Salvestrini comes forth with "Classificazioni e paragone delle arti tra Medioevo e Rinascimento" while the second section includes "Il lavoro pratica arriva alla letteratura" (by Paolo Cherchi). Among the chapters that comprise "Parte quarta" we find essays on Benjamin Franklin (Salvatore Cingari), Max Weber (Dimitri D'Andrea), Freud (Mauro Fornaro) and Lukács (Antonino Infranca). Among the contributions to *Parte quinta* are "Robert Reich: Tecnologia, lavoro, distribuzione, e rappresentanza" (Renato Giannetti) and "Libero, liberato, liberatorio, liberticida: I mutamenti del *leisure time* tra modernità e postmodernità" (Fabio Massimo Lo Verde). Among the titles that make up *Parte sesta* are chapters on Antonio Labriola (Luca Basile), Adriano Olivetti (Bruno Lamborghini and Federico Butera) Bruno Trentin (Giovanni Mari), Italo Calvino (Giovanni Falaschi) and Antonio Gramsci (Guido Liguori), and "Il lavoro flessibile nelle transizioni ecologica e digitale" (Tiziano Treu).

This collection, of course, need not be read cover-to-cover. At the same time, its value as a reference volume is high, as is the quality of the individual contributions.

*Michigan State University emeritus*

JOSEPH FRANCESE

