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Business 1050

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REFLECTION 1: Henry David Thoreau's Waldon/Economy

Americans have always valued hard work as a virtue, arguing that through hard work Americans can achieve the "dream" of owning their own home, being their own boss, having lots of physical comforts. Thoreau, however, argues that too much work can lead to a kind of self-imposed slavery and to a life of "quiet desperation." When he expresses that too much work can lead to a life of "quiet desperation" I think he is meaning that with more work, comes more responsibility; and then with more responsibility, come an increased worry. Eventually this leads to our work enslaving us. I fully agree with what he says, but unfortunately, I think that in order to be successful I fear that this has to be the only way. Our society has slowly evolved into this. If this isn't how you live, you will quickly become replaced. Employers don't just want the minimum, they expect the extra mile. In some instances, employees are too scared to take a vacation thinking that if they are gone too long that they will be replaced, or at least come back with a pile of work. For some people, vacations become a normal workday out of the office, sometimes even out of the state or country. Personally, if I ever take a vacation longer than two days I always come back with angry bosses. I end up taking my vacation days 1-2 days at a time scattered throughout the year. Even when I do take a short vacation I take my laptop with me and expect to do some form of work on my trip, or at least get a phone call requiring assistance on how to do something.

Unfortunately, I think that in this day and age that it doesn't really matter what you do, we all live in quiet desperation. Whether you are financially sound or you are living freely. Those financially sound have more responsibility; those that live freely are possibly low income or homeless. Their worry doesn't necessarily come from employment responsibilities but worry of where they will stay or how they will feed their family. This is becoming universal for everyone.

I like though the element of hope in Thoreau's views. He believes it is possible for a right "balance" to be reached regarding work and a more fulfilling life. When Thoreau talks about a life of too much work that leads to "quiet desperation," I don't think he means he is against hard, productive work in and of itself. Rather, the problem is when too much work comes at the expense of the "finer fruits" of life, such as intellectual and spiritual refinement. Basically, Thoreau is saying that work becomes a problem when the goal becomes to gain material prosperity and luxury at the expense of spiritual growth. As a result, too many men choose work they are not particularly suited for or that they dislike and then suffer because they only see the ends; namely, the way it will help provide for the luxuries they want. To avoid this kind of life, Thoreau advocates a philosophy of simplifying your needs so that you do not get corrupted by greed and the desire to turn wants into necessities, finding joy in the simple and natural things of life, and focusing on improving your spiritual and intellectual life. There is always time to make these last pursuits a priority in one's life.