

THE PHILOSOPHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF AUTOMATION

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Listening to Mr. Huff is like listening to Casals play the Bach Unaccompanied on the cello. So I'll give you a bar of "Chopsticks," and then we can get back to Hoffer.

Now, what he said is entirely in line with what I'd been thinking about here. Certain students of mine here know that I've often said that 90% of the work that's being done right now doesn't need to be done. It's all 'made' work. Over a hundred years ago, when Brigham Young led the Saints into the valley at Salt Lake, there was a small population with vast work to be done. Yet Brigham Young recognized that there would be a large number of the unemployed all the time. We all know about the wall around the Temple block. That was built as one of his projects. He recognized that society would always have to make work. There would have to be jobs that don't necessarily need to be done. But how few jobs really do need to be done – necessarily?

Brigham's theory was that God provides everything in abundance, and all man has to do is to take it, with a minimum of effort. He says it's embarrassing. He says, "I've lost everything I've had five times." Everything. And within a few years, he'd be a millionaire again, he said, without half trying. The stuff is all there, he says. The world is there, and it's rich. And he believed that wealth exists to be spent. He often used to say – and this may surprise people – not *wasted* but *spent*. He was very frank on that subject of waste. His policy was, when you need something, don't count the cost. That doesn't sound familiar around here, but that was Brigham's policy. He also used to say – and this is a thing that some people don't like – "We eat too much, we wear too much, we work too much. If we all ate less, wore less, and worked less, we'd be a better, a happier, and a wiser people." "Worked less" – imagine Brigham Young saying that! He saw that there is no virtue in mere drudgery. What a machine can do, a machine should do, including digging coal or anything else. Man must be made for something better than that. But what shall it be? Brigham Young quotes Mr. Hoffer: "It is to develop our talents."

This was a pet theme of his. He says we are here to develop our talents. That's it. He would say, "Don't let your children go out and herd sheep." He says they can do it, it's economical, it will save you money. Don't let them do it. It requires no talent. Don't let your children herd sheep. Don't let them go out in the field, he used to say. What? In a pioneer economy? He knew what he was talking about.

So what shall we do? Ancient societies were largely sacral. That is, an enormous amount of the wealth and energy of Egypt, for several thousand years, was poured into rites and ordinances. It had no practical value whatever. Yet here you have one of the most stable and happy societies the world has ever seen, with a few brief periods as exceptions. Everybody was employed and happy. But half the work they did was just ritual stuff. It didn't need to be done.

Building pyramids: who needs to build a pyramid? *They* did. It was a project – a public works project. Herodotus tells us that.

Now we Mormons have a concept of work which is rather unique. We talk about temple ‘work.’ And it is work – you get through with a day at the temple, you’re exhausted. But it’s not the kind of work that the world understands at all. What is temple work, when you *work*? It hasn’t the remotest resemblance to ordinary work, and yet it is the sort of thing that will engage our energies in the millennium, perhaps, when machines do all the dirty work, as they should.

A while ago Brother Harold B. Lee said he’d been to a conference the week before. He said he was talking to the authorities of the stake: an insurance man, a banker, a dentist, and so forth. One of them remarked, “Well, what will I do in the millennium? What is there for me to do in a perfect world? I’m not going to be selling insurance there?” No, that’s right. The doctor wouldn’t be healing anyone, and nobody would need money from the banker. All these men decided they were wasting their time here. What is it that really needs to be done? Well, Adam’s curse put us under the restraint of eating bread by the sweat of our brow. That was Adam’s curse, but is it an economic or a spiritual restraint? The Doctrine and Covenants, section 49, tells us that the earth provides enough for everybody to begin with. It was so before the Fall. It was so in Eden. And it will be so hereafter. That is the normal, eternal state of things – that you won’t have to do that kind of work at all. The curse is not that man cannot eat without sweating, because he can: millions of men have lived happy lives without working for it at all. But the curse is that he can’t feel good about it. That shows he’s under a curse. It’s quite possible to eat your bread without the sweat of your brow. Many of us do it. But you don’t feel good about.

During the period of our misery, while we’re under this curse, so to speak, the blight is not that we have to do dull and rather mechanical things, but that we can’t think of anything else to do. That’s the trouble. We should think of something else to do. Now the Latter-day Saints believe the curse is soon to be taken away. These are the latter days. Automation may be a prelude to that. We believe we were all made for something better. But one thing is certain – and this is a basic lesson in the Book of Mormon – that the indispensable pre-requisite to discover what kind of work it is to be and how we are to do it requires first of all fulfilling the principles and conditions of the Gospel. That’s why we have this plan, to prepare the world for the millennium. Ready any of Joseph Smith or Brigham Young. They talk about that all the time. We are not yet prepared for the work of eternity, but when we are, we will be told what to do. And I think it’s right around the corner. (Incidentally, with a reference to something Mr. Hoffer said: remember Joseph Smith prophesied a number of times that the time would come when this country would be overrun from end to end by mobs. He said, “You’ll get your fill of mobs. You will see when the whole country will be full of them. There will be such a time of stress ahead.”) So we can expect these things, but the basic problem is this moral and spiritual one: what are we to do forever and ever? What do you want to do when you do it forever and ever?

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