

Business and Philosophy

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1.

There are few words that seem to have less to say to one other than business and philosophy. One seems the epitome of hard-headed pragmatism, the other the home of all that is unrealistic, other-wordly and irrelevant in human affairs.

I feel this incompatibility deeply. It pains me because some of the people I most admire on the planet are involved in philosophy on the one hand and business on the other – and both camps are unusually convinced that they have nothing to say to one another. My dream is of a world where they would start to be in dialogue, and would realise how much they could derive from the opposing camp. Plato famously said that the world would improve only when philosophers became kings or kings philosophers. Change kings to business people, and you have my view on the subject.

Philosophy should start to be more interested in changing reality rather than merely interpreting it. And business should start to focus on the ultimate ends of life, rather than simply the road to profit (though the two are not as far apart as philosophers can sometimes suggest).

This rapprochement would lead to uncomfortable questions for both parties. Business would ask philosophy why it had not managed to stimulate desire in its audience. Why has philosophy so easily persuaded itself that it is a minority pursuit that cannot hope to engage with ordinary people's dilemmas? At the same time, why has business resigned itself just to fulfilling people's desires, rather than - more ambitiously - trying to shape them? Capitalism has been phenomenally successful at delivering goods to people. It has been less talented at getting us to ask what goods we need – and in the process, investigating with greater subtlety the true relationship between fulfilment and prosperity.

2.

Introducing philosophy and business to one another means starting to ask fundamental questions about the directions of our societies, and most immediately, about the role of money within them.

When we think about what we currently understand by a successful person, it is hard not to imagine the acquisition of money playing a central role in the portrait. The category of the successful person comprises both men and women, of any race, who have been able to accumulate money through their own activities (rather than through inheritance) in one of the myriad branches of the commercial world (including sport, art and scientific research). Because societies are practically trusted to be meritocratic, financial achievements are understood to be 'deserved'. The ability to accumulate wealth is prized for reflecting the presence of at least four cardinal virtues: creativity, courage, intelligence and stamina. The presence of other virtues – humility or godliness for example – rarely detains attention. Achievements are not attributed, as in past societies, to 'luck', 'providence', or 'God' – a reflection of modern secular societies' faith in individual will-power. Financial failures are, correspondingly, judged to be merited, with unemployment bearing some of the shame of physical cowardice in warrior eras. Money is invested with an ethical quality. Its presence indicates the virtue of its owner, as do the material goods it can buy. A prosperous way of life signal worthiness, while the ownership of an ancient car or threadbare home may spark suppositions of moral

deficiency. Aside from offering high status, wealth is promoted on the basis of its capacity to deliver happiness, through its capacity to grant access to a range of ever-changing consumer goods – whose absence may fill us with pity and wonder when we consider the restricted lives of previous generations.

3.

However natural such a vision may appear, it is of course – a philosophical perspective alerts us – only the work of humans; a recent development dating back to the middle of the eighteenth century, brought into being by a host of identifiable factors. Furthermore, the philosophical perspective would add, the ideal is occasionally simple-minded, at times unfair and perhaps not wholly unchangeable.

No aspect of the modern ideal has come under greater scrutiny than the association it constructs between wealth and virtue – and poverty and moral dubiousness. In *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), Thorstein Veblen described how money had in the early nineteenth century emerged as the central criterion in shaping the way commercial societies evaluated their members: '[Wealth has become] the conventional basis of esteem. Its possession has become necessary in order to have any reputable standing in the community. It has become indispensable to acquire property in order to retain one's good name... Those members of the community who fall short of [a relatively high standard of wealth] will suffer in the esteem of their fellow men; and consequently they will suffer also in their own esteem'.

In a commercial society, it would, Veblen implied, be almost impossible to hold on to the thought that one was virtuous and yet poor. The most unmaterialistically minded person would sense an imperative to accumulate wealth and demonstrate possession of it to escape opprobrium, and would feel anxious and to blame as a result of a failure to do so.

Accordingly, the possession of a great many material goods becomes necessary not principally because these goods yield pleasure (though they may do this too), but because they confer honour. In the ancient world, a debate had raged among philosophers about what was materially necessary for happiness and what unnecessary. Epicurus, for one, had argued that simple food and shelter were necessary, but expensive houses and luxurious dishes could safely be bypassed by all rational, philosophically minded people. However, reviewing the argument many centuries later in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), Adam Smith wryly pointed out that in modern, materialistic societies there were no doubt countless things which were unnecessary from the point of view of physical survival, but at the same time a great many more things had, practically speaking, come to be counted as 'necessaries', because no one could be thought respectable and so lead a psychologically comfortable life without owning them:

'By necessaries I understand not only the commodities which are indispensably necessary for the support of life, but whatever the custom of the country renders it indecent for creditable people, even of the lowest order, to be without. A linen shirt, for example, is, strictly speaking, not a necessary of life. The Greeks and Romans lived, I suppose, very comfortably though they had no linen. But in the present times, through the greater part of Europe, a creditable day-labourer would be ashamed to appear in public without a linen shirt, the want of which would be supposed to denote that disgraceful degree of poverty which, it is presumed, nobody can well fall into without extreme bad conduct. Under necessaries, therefore, I comprehend not only those things which nature, but those things which the established rules of decency have rendered necessary to the lowest rank of people'.

Since Smith's day, economists have been almost unanimous in subscribing to the idea that what defines, and lends bitterness to, the state of poverty is not so much direct physical suffering as the shame that flows from the negative reactions of others to one's state, from the way that poverty flouts what Smith termed 'the established rules of decency'. In *The Affluent Society* (1958), J.K. Galbraith proposed, with a bow to Smith, 'People are poverty-stricken whenever their income, even if adequate for survival, falls markedly behind that of the community. Then they cannot have what the larger community regards as the minimum necessary for decency; and they cannot wholly escape, therefore, the judgement of the larger community that they are indecent'.

4.

It is this idea that 'decency' should be attached to wealth – and 'indecent' to poverty – that forms the core of one strand of sceptical complaint against the modern idea of success. Why should a failure to make money be taken as a sign of an unconditionally flawed human being rather than of a fiasco in one particular area of a far larger, more multi-faceted project of leading a good life? Why should both wealth and poverty be read as the predominant guides to an individual's morals?

The reasons are not mysterious. To earn money frequently calls upon virtues of character. To hold down almost any job requires intelligence, energy, forethought and the ability to cooperate with others. Indeed, the more lucrative the job, the greater the merits it may demand. Lawyers and surgeons not only earn higher salaries than street cleaners, their occupations typically involve more sustained effort and skill.

A day-labourer would be ashamed to appear in public without a linen shirt, wrote Adam Smith, because not having such a shirt would imply a degree of poverty which, Smith's contemporaries presumed: 'nobody can well fall into without extreme bad conduct'. Only if a man was a congenital drunk, unreliable, thieving or childishy insubordinate would he be refused the modest employment that buying a linen shirt requires – in which case, one can appreciate how the ownership of a shirt might safely be taken as a minimum guarantee of good character.

It is a short step from here to go on to imagine that extreme good conduct and many virtues must lie behind the acquisition of cupboards full of linen shirts and yachts, mansions and jewels. The notion of a status symbol, a costly material object that confers respect upon its owner, rests upon the widespread and not improbable idea that the acquisition of the most expensive goods must inevitably demand the greatest of all qualities of character.

5.

However, opponents of an economic meritocracy have long argued that true merit must be a more elusive, complex quality than anything that could neatly be captured by the parameters of an end-of-year salary – a scepticism analogous to that of certain educationalists who will deny that the 'intelligence' of a group of students can ever be measured properly by making them sit an examination.

Which is not a way for these critics to argue that merit or intelligence is equally distributed or indeed immeasurable, but simply to insist that you or I are unlikely ever to know how to do the measuring properly and hence should display infinite care before acting in ways that presume we can; for example, in the economic sphere, by abolishing taxes for the wealthy (who, it is occasionally said by extreme defenders of economic meritocracy, deserve to maintain all their earnings) or removing state benefits (so that

the poor, these same defenders would add, can more fully experience the depths of the deprivation they too must deserve).

Such scepticism does not sit easily with the demands of everyday life. It is easy to understand the wish for a system, be it educational or economic, that assures us that we can pick out the worthy candidates from a classroom or society and, in turn, can walk past the suffering of the losers with good conscience.

However, an urgent wish is no guarantee of a sound solution. In *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism* (1928), George Bernard Shaw argued that modern capitalist societies had fallen prey to a particularly obtuse system of determining a hierarchy: they had settled for a system operating under the belief that, 'If every man is left to make as much money as he can for himself in his own way, subject only to the laws restraining crude violence and direct fraud, then wealth will spontaneously distribute itself in proportion to the industry, sobriety and generally the virtue of the citizens, the good men becoming rich and the bad men poor'.

But in fact, continued Shaw, it is clear that any ruthless, ambitious man 'can grab three or four million pounds for himself by selling bad whiskey or by forestalling the wheat harvest and selling it at three times its cost or by running silly newspapers and magazines that circulate deceitful advertisements', while 'men who exercise their noble faculties or risk their lives in the furtherance of human knowledge and welfare' can end up in poverty and insignificance.

That said, Shaw did not wish to align himself with sentimental voices on left or right who might claim that, under the current arrangement of society, it was always the good men who became poor and the bad men rich – a piece of reasoning no less simplistic than the one it challenged. Rather, he sought to imbue us with a sense of the limitations of judging anyone morally on the basis of salary; and an attendant desire to soften the many consequences that might flow from differences in wealth.

In *Unto This Last* (1862), John Ruskin, as concerned with challenging meritocratic ideas, described in sarcastic tones the conclusions he had reached about the characters of rich and poor on the basis of hundreds of encounters with both groups in many countries over four decades: 'The persons who become rich are, generally speaking, industrious, resolute, proud, covetous, prompt, methodical, sensible, unimaginative, insensitive and ignorant. The persons who remain poor are the entirely foolish, the entirely wise, the idle, the reckless, the humble, the thoughtful, the dull, the imaginative, the sensitive, the well-informed, the improvident, the irregularly and impulsively wicked, the clumsy knave, the open thief and the entirely merciful just and godly person'.

In other words, an unclassifiably wide range of people ends up both rich and poor – which means, to follow the message first articulated by Jesus Christ and repeated in secular language by political thinkers across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, that it is not our prerogative to start to ascribe honour principally on the basis of income. A multitude of outer events and inner characteristics will go into making one man wealthy and another destitute. There are luck and circumstance, illness and fear, accident and late development, good timing and misfortune.

Three centuries before Ruskin and Shaw, Michel de Montaigne had in a similar vein stressed the role of contingent factors in determining the outcome of lives. He had advised us to remember the role played by 'chance in bestowing glory on us according to her fickle will: I have often seen chance marching ahead of merit, and often outstripping merit by a long chalk'. A dispassionate audit of our successes and failures should leave us feeling that there are reasons at once to be less proud and less embarrassed of ourselves, for a thought-provoking percentage of what happens to us is not of our own doing. Montaigne asked that we keep a rein on our excitement when meeting the

powerful and wealthy and on our judgements when encountering the poor and obscure. 'A man may have a great suite of attendants, a beautiful palace, great influence and a large income. All that may surround him, but it is not in him... Measure his height with his stilts off: let him lay aside his wealth and his decorations and show himself to us naked... What sort of soul does he have? Is his soul a beautiful one, able, happily endowed with all her functions? Are her riches her own or are they borrowed? Has luck had nothing to do with it?... That is what we need to know; that is what the immense distances between us men should be judged by'.

Uniting the many challenges to the commercial meritocratic ideal is a plea that we cease investing something as haphazardly distributed as money may have been with moral connotations; that we cut the doctrinaire connections routinely made between wealth and virtue – and that we attempt to ensure that we have taken the stilts off before we begin to judge.

6.

Aside from the connection it posits between making money and being good, the modern ideal of a successful life imputes a further connection: between making money and being happy.

This idea in turn rests on three assumptions. First, that to identify what will make us happy is not an inordinately difficult task. Just as our bodies typically know what they need in order to be healthy and hence direct us towards smoked fish when they lack sodium or peaches when blood sugar is low, so too, the theory goes, our minds can be relied upon to understand what we should aim for in order to flourish; and so they will naturally push us towards certain careers and projects. Second, that the enormous range of occupational possibilities and consumer goods available in modern civilization is not a gaudy, enervating show responsible for stoking up desires with little relevance to our welfare but rather is capable of satisfying some of our most important needs. And, third, that the more money we have available to us, the more products and services we will be able to afford, and so the greater our chances of happiness will be.

The most suggestive and readable adversary of this group of assumptions remains Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (1754). Rousseau began by claiming that, however independent-minded we might judge ourselves to be, we are dangerously poor at understanding our own needs. Our souls rarely articulate what they must have in order to be satisfied, or, when they do mumble something, their commands are likely to be misfounded or contradictory. Rather than comparing the mind with a body correct in its sense of what it should consume in order to be healthy, Rousseau invited us to think of it more like a body that cries out for wine when it needs water and insists it should be dancing when it should in truth be flat on a bed. Our minds are susceptible to the influence of external voices telling us what we require to be satisfied, voices that may drown out the faint sounds emitted by our souls and can distract us from the careful, arduous task of correctly tracing our priorities.

Rousseau went on to sketch the history of the world not as a story of progress from barbarism to the great workshops and cities of Europe, but as one of regress away from a privileged state in which we lived simply but had the chance to sound out our needs, towards one where we were apt to feel envy for ways of life with few connections to our own characters. In technologically backward pre-history, in Rousseau's state of nature, when men and women lived in forests and had never entered a shop or read a newspaper, the philosopher pictured people more easily understanding themselves, and so being drawn towards essential features of a satisfied life: a love of family, a respect for nature,

an awe at the beauty of the universe, a curiosity about others, and a taste for music and simple entertainments. It was from this state that modern commercial 'civilization' had pulled us, leaving us to envy and yearn and suffer in a world of plenty.

For those who might interpret this as an absurdly romantic story to be explained away as the fancy of a pastoral author unreasonably angered by modernity, it is worth adding that, if the eighteenth century listened to Rousseau's argument, it was in part because it had before it one stark example of its apparent truths in the shape of the fate of the native Indian populations of North America.

Reports of Indian society drawn up in the sixteenth century had described it as materially simple, but psychologically rewarding: communities were small, close-knit, egalitarian, religious, playful and martial. The Indians were certainly backward in a financial sense. They lived off fruits and wild animals, they slept in tents, they had few possessions. Every year, they wore the same pelts and shoes. Even a chief might own no more than a spear and a few pots. But there was reputed to be an impressive level of contentment amidst the simplicity.

However, within only a few decades of the arrival of the first Europeans, the status system of Indian society was revolutionized through contact with the technology and luxury of European industry. What mattered was no longer one's wisdom or understanding of the ways of nature, but one's ownership of weapons, jewellery and alcohol. Indians now longed for silver earrings, copper and brass bracelets, tin finger rings, necklaces made of Venetian glass, ice chisels, guns, alcohol, kettles, beads, hoes and mirrors.

These new enthusiasms did not come about by coincidence. European traders deliberately attempted to foster desires in the Indians, so as to motivate them to hunt the animal pelts that the European market required. By 1690, the English naturalist the Reverend John Banister was reporting that the Indians of the Hudson Bay area had been successfully tempted by traders to want 'many things which they had not wanted before, because they never had them, but which by means of trade are now highly necessary to them'. Two decades later, the traveller Robert Beverley observed, 'The Europeans have introduced luxury among the Indians which has multiplied their wants and made them desire a thousand things they never even dreamt of before'.

Unfortunately, these thousand things, however ardently sought, didn't appear to make the Indians much happier. Certainly they worked harder. Between 1739 and 1759, the two thousand warriors of the Cherokee tribe were estimated to have killed one and a quarter million deer to satisfy European demand. In the same period, the Montagnais Indians on the north shore of the St Lawrence river traded between 12,000 and 15,000 pelts a year with French and British merchants at Tadoussac. But happiness did not increase in line with levels of trade. Rates of suicide and alcoholism rose, communities fractured, factions squabbled among themselves over the European booty. The tribal chiefs didn't need Rousseau to understand what had happened, but they unknowingly concurred with his analysis nevertheless. There were calls for Indians to rid themselves of dependence on European 'luxury'. In the 1760s, the Delawares of western Pennsylvania and the Ohio valley tried to revive the ways of their forefathers. Prophecies were heard that the tribes would be wiped out if they did not wean themselves from dependence on trade. But it was too late. The Indians, no different in their psychological make-up from other humans, succumbed to the easy lures of the trinkets of modern civilization and ceased listening to the quiet voices that spoke of the modest pleasures of the community and of the beauty of the empty canyons at dusk.

7.

Defenders of commercial society have always had one answer to American-Indian sympathizers, and anyone else who might complain of the corrupting effects of an advanced economy: that no one forced the Indians to buy necklaces made of Venetian glass, ice chisels, guns, kettles, beads, hoes and mirrors. No one stopped them living in tents and made them aspire to owning wooden houses with porches and wine cellars. The Indians left behind a sober, simple life of their own accord – which might indicate that this life was perhaps not as pleasant as has been made out.

This defence is similar to that used by modern advertising agents and newspaper editors, who will assert that they are not the ones responsible for encouraging undue concern with the lives of the famous, with changes in fashion or the ownership of new products. It is simply that certain branches of the media lay out information related to these topics for anyone who might be interested – while, the implication goes, many more people will spontaneously prefer to help the needy, examine their souls, read Edward Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall* or reflect upon the short passage of time before their own extinction.

This response illuminates why Rousseau wished to place so much emphasis, unedifying though it might have been, on the difficulty humans have in making up their own minds about what is important, their predisposition to listen to other people’s suggestions about where their thoughts should be directed and what they should value in order to be happy, particularly when the suggestions are accompanied by the authority of a newspaper or the visual charms of a billboard.

It is ironic that it should be advertising agents and newspaper editors themselves who are typically the first to downplay the effectiveness of their own trades. They will insist that the population is independently minded enough not to be overly affected by the stories which they themselves lay before the world, or to be taken in for long by the siren calls of billboards they have themselves so artfully designed.

They are, unfortunately, being too modest. Nothing more sharply illustrates the extent of their deprecation than reports of the rapid way in which what was once a possibility will, with sufficient prompting, come to seem a necessity.

Consider this chart:

Per centage of North Americans Declaring the Following Items to be Necessities

	1970	2000
Second car	20	59
Second television	3	45
More than one telephone	2	78
Car air-conditioning	11	65
Home air-conditioning	22	70
Dishwasher	8	44

Criticisms of consumer society have focused not only on the shortcomings and inadequacies of products (a point easy to exaggerate, for it takes a curmudgeonly spirit not to appreciate, for example, the beauty of a cashmere pullover or a car’s dashboard on a night-time drive along a motorway) but also, more fairly perhaps, on the distorted picture of our needs that ensues from the way these products are presented to us. They can appear essential, blessed with extraordinary powers to bestow happiness on us, because we understand neither their actual identities nor our own functioning.

A car advertisement will, for example, be careful to ignore aspects of our psychology and of the overall process of ownership that could spoil, or at least mitigate, our joy at coming to possess a featured vehicle. It will fail to mention our tendency to cease appreciating anything after owning it a short while. The quickest way to stop noticing something may be to buy it – just as the quickest way to stop appreciating a person may be to marry them. We are tempted to believe that certain achievements and possessions will guarantee us an enduring satisfaction. We are led to imagine ourselves scaling the steep sides of the cliff face of happiness to reach a wide, high plateau on which to continue our lives; we are not reminded that soon after reaching the summit we will be called down again into fresh lowlands of anxiety and desire.

8.

The essence of the philosophical charge made against the modern commercial ideal is that it is guilty of a gigantic distortion of priorities, of elevating to the highest level of achievement a process of material accumulation which should be only one of the many things determining the direction of our lives under a more truthful, more broadly defined conception of ourselves.

Incensed by the distortion of priorities, John Ruskin excoriated nineteenth-century Britons (he had never been to the United States) for being the most wealth-obsessed people who had ever emerged in the history of the world. They were, he wrote, at all times, never far from a concern with who had what and from where ('The ruling goddess may be best generally described as the "Goddess of Getting-on"'). They felt shame at their lack of wealth and jealousy at the wealth of others.

But Ruskin made a confession. Contrary to expectations, he too was frantic to become wealthy. The thought of wealth preyed on his mind from breakfast till dinner, he admitted. Yet he was only sarcastically toying with an ambiguity in the word 'wealth' to bring home more forcefully how far he felt his fellow countrymen had strayed from virtue. For the dictionary tells us that wealth means not only, or historically even primarily, large amounts of money. It means an abundance of anything, from butterflies to books to smiles. Ruskin was interested in wealth, he was obsessed by it even. However, it was wealth of an unusual kind that he had in mind: he wished to be wealthy in kindness, curiosity, sensitivity, humility, godliness and intelligence – a set of virtues he referred to simply as 'life'. In *Unto This Last*, he therefore entreated us to set aside our ordinary monetary conceptions of wealth in order to take up a 'life'-based view, according to which the wealthiest people in the land would no longer automatically be the merchants and the landowners, but those who most keenly felt wonder beneath the stars at night or were best able to interpret and alleviate the sufferings of others. 'There is no wealth but life,' he intoned: 'life, including all its powers of love, of joy and of admiration. That country is richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings; that man is richest who, having perfected the functions of his own life to the utmost, has also the widest helpful influence, both personal, and by means of his possessions, over the lives of others... Many of the persons commonly considered wealthy are, in reality, no more wealthy than the locks of their own strong boxes, they being inherently and eternally incapable of wealth'.

Ruskin was uttering the plain, childlike truths of the prophets – and, when people did not guffaw (the *Saturday Review* described Ruskin as 'a mad governess' and his thesis as 'windy hysterics', 'absolute nonsense' and 'intolerable twaddle'), they listened. In 1906, Britain's first twenty-seven Labour MPs entered Parliament and were asked what single book had most powerfully influenced them to pursue social justice through

politics. Seventeen of them cited Ruskin's *Unto This Last*. Thirteen years later, George Bernard Shaw, in a lecture on the centenary of Ruskin's birth, proposed that the invective of Vladimir Lenin and the indictments of Karl Marx were, when compared with Ruskin's works, like the platitudes of a rural dean (though, because he enjoyed teasing label-fixers, Ruskin described himself as 'a violent Tory of the old school – Walter Scott's school, that is to say, and Homer's'). 'I have met in my lifetime some extremely revolutionary characters,' Shaw went on, 'and quite a large number of them, when I have asked, "Who put you on to this revolutionary line? Was it Marx?" have answered plainly, "No, it was Ruskin'.' Ruskinites are perhaps the most thorough-going of all the opponents of the existing state of our society. Ruskin's political message to the cultured people of his day, the class to which he himself belonged, began and ended in this simple judgement: "You are a parcel of thieves'."

Ruskin wasn't alone in the opinion. There were others in the nineteenth century who hammered home, in voices alternately outraged and melancholy, identical criticisms of the way money appeared to have become the chief determinant of respect, something to wield as a sign of demonstrable goodness, and not merely one component, and perhaps not the most important, of a fulfilled life. 'Men are always apt to regard wealth as a precious end in itself and certainly they have never been so apt thus to regard it as they are in England at the present time,' lamented Matthew Arnold in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869). 'Never did people believe anything more firmly, than nine Englishmen out of ten at the present day believe that our greatness and welfare are proved by our being so very rich'. Like Ruskin seven years before him, Arnold urged the subjects of the world's first and most advanced industrial nation to think of wealth as only one of many tools to secure happiness, a quality which he defined in his own way (to further hoots of laughter from critics at the *Daily Telegraph*) as 'an inward spiritual activity, having for its characters increased sweetness, increased light, increased life and increased sympathy'.

Thomas Carlyle agreed, only more angrily. In *Midas* (1843), he asked, 'This successful industry of England, with its plethoric wealth...which of us has it enriched?... We have sumptuous garnitures for our life, but have forgotten to live in the middle of them. Many men eat finer cookery, drink dearer liquors, but in the heart of them, what increase of blessedness is there? Are they better, beautifuller, stronger, braver? Are they even what they call "happier"? Do they look with satisfaction on more things and human faces in this God's Earth; do more things and human faces look with satisfaction on them? Not so... We have profoundly forgotten everywhere that cash-payment is not the sole relation of human beings'.

Carlyle was not blind to the benefits of modern enterprise. He even felt the appeal of aspects of accountancy ('book-keeping by double-entry is admirable, and records several things in an exact manner'). But, like Arnold and Ruskin and any number of social critics before and since, he could not accept a way of life in which what he termed 'Mammon-worship' appeared to have subsumed the drive towards 'blessedness' and 'satisfaction' on 'God's Earth'.

9.

Our societies will never be without money or a status system. However unpleasant the anxieties that flow from this can be, it is difficult to imagine a good life entirely free of them, for a fear that one might fail and disgrace oneself in the eyes of others is only a natural consequence of having ambitions, a preference for one set of outcomes over another and a respect for individuals beside oneself.

Yet, though our need for success may be fixed, we retain a choice of where to fulfil the need, we are free to ensure that our worries about being disgraced and impoverished will arise principally in relation to a public whose methods of judgement we both understand and respect. Philosophy does not seek to do away with hierarchy; it attempts to institute new kinds of hierarchy based on sets of values unrecognized by, and critical of, those of the current majority. While retaining a firm grip on a distinction between success and failure, good and bad, shameful and honourable, it endeavours to remould our sense of what could rightfully be said to belong under these weighty headings.

In so doing, it helps to lend legitimacy to those who, in every generation, will be unable or unwilling to follow dutifully behind the dominant notions of success but who may yet deserve to be categorized other than under the brutal epithets of idealist or dreamer. Philosophy can provide us with a set of persuasive and consoling reminders that there is more than one way of succeeding at life.