

Semi-Retirement for the Under Twenties: The Careers Advice I Never Received by Ethan Crane (for online version with links, see ethancranes.wordpress.com)

I needed this careers advice when I was sixteen. I needed it when leaving university, and again aged thirty, since I did not understand it until then. Such advice is not available at school, which focuses on just one way of living, that of the full-time career job, and so is of limited use. Not only of limited use, but also demoralising: it gives you a distorted view of the working life of adults, and of the possibilities open to you.

A sixteen-year-old needs advice beyond how to obtain a nine-to-five, full-time job with benefits and pension. They need to know that there are other alternatives: that there is a working life that allows you enough spare time to use your genuine capabilities, and discover the pleasure in using these capabilities. In my experience it is people with this kind of life who are happier. So here is some careers advice addressed to the sixteen-year-old me.

The full-time career is not the only future available to you. When asked the age-old question, 'what are you going to be when you grow up?', the answer you presently think correct actually answers the question, 'what work are you going to do to earn money to eat?' The question you ought to answer is, 'if left to your own devices, what do you most dream of doing?' Not to earn money, just to do for its own sake because this is where your genuine capabilities and interests lie.

This is advice on how to live according to the second question. In twenty years time you won't have what your school would call a career. You will have part-time work for which you're paid enough money to live, leaving you enough time to investigate the activities in which you are really interested.

This advice is not available at school because the teachers giving the advice only know about career jobs, since they are working in one themselves. This limited vision, together with the academic bias of school, will combine to make you (that is, me) think your genuine capabilities and interests are not important. And then, years later, when you work in an office, you find you spend seven and more hours a day thinking, 'I was not born to do this.'

This is not advice for everyone. Some people are content to do a full-time career job. But many are not and, tragically, end up in a full-time, well-paid career and do not understand why they are miserable. But if you are that miserable person, it's not too late. You can act on this advice any time.

Part 1: A Full-time Career Rarely Provides Genuine Satisfaction

Look at the job description in an advert for a career job: many claim that the job is 'exciting', 'rewarding', 'fulfilling' or something similar. It won't be. Such claims seemed doubtful when I first read those adverts, and I now have plenty of evidence that this is false.

In his book *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell gives his necessary criteria for a satisfying job: autonomy, in that you decide the tasks you perform and when you perform them; complexity, in that the work is not dull

and routine; and a sense of reward for a job done.

It is the last, the sense of reward, that modern careers pretend to provide but do not. This is a big loss. Many (though not all) well-paid career jobs provide autonomy: an account executive who develops new mobile phone contracts will decide who she does business with and when and where her meetings are held; and career jobs almost always provide complexity: gambling on the futures markets in the City is more complex and intellectually stimulating than the corking of wine bottles on a production line. But the sense of reward for a job done is seldom provided for.

Companies provide one kind of reward in the form of money: the payment of a salary. But this is only a substitute reward – it is not the same as a genuine reward for the job done. To feel the kind of reward that makes a job satisfying you must be able to view the end product of your work as something in which you are proud. Are you going to feel genuinely proud of devising a new mobile phone contract, of balancing the accounts for a multinational corporation, or being a producer's assistant on a reality TV programme?

The reason that the answer to this is 'not really' is because the end products of these jobs did not arise from your own ideas. You did not set out with these goals for your job, they were handed to you by someone else, by your boss. You spend thirty-seven and more hours a week under pressure to complete tasks which you do not care about. (There are of course jobs, such as a doctor, where there is reward in the job done. More about these jobs in Part 3.)

But, you say, is there not still enough satisfaction to be had in completing goals in a career job, even if they are set by an employer? They are still goals. No. You become vaguely aware of this months after starting work, and it becomes clearer as the years go by. Goals set by other people cannot truly satisfy, because deciding these goals yourself is an important part of the sense of reward. Right now do you really count building a website to sell insurance products, or even writing policy advice for a government department amongst your goals in life? Are these activities which use your genuine capabilities and in which you are truly interested? You may have little idea of the nature of your genuine capabilities at the moment. But do you imagine that they coincide with those of any company?

Companies substitute for this lack of genuine reward by trying to make you feel part of a company 'family', and by trying to convince you that the company's goals are your goals. They send you on away-days with these family members that are labelled 'team-building', which sound like their primary purpose is to forge stronger relationships at work. But a company does not care about genuine relationships. Team-building exercises try to create stronger bonds between work colleagues, but only in order that you feel celebrated by your colleagues if you achieve for the company, and that you are letting them down if you don't: a slave driver's whip of emotional guilt. Team-building days feel awkward and false because they come from false motives – they try to form 'friendships' between people who would not naturally be friends.

Your goals are not the company's goals. A company's only goal is to make money.

Ask people you know who have full-time career jobs how much they like them, how much they find them fulfilling. Watch carefully as they answer: judge whether you think they are giving a truthful answer. Many who answer 'yes' or 'it's okay' are lying to themselves. It is a necessary survival trait to convince

yourself, above anyone else, that your job fulfils you. Why else would you be spending thirty-seven-plus hours of your waking week working at it?

What then, you already ask, are the goals that you should instead pursue for a satisfying life? They are difficult to describe, and are not something I understood until in my thirties. Satisfaction comes less from pursuing particular goals than from experiencing the *pleasure of creative ideas*. Ideas connected to your genuine capabilities, not to an employer's demands. And although anything described as 'creative' is usually understood to be found in activities labelled 'art', the word 'creative' covers a much wider range of activities. We'll return to this in a later part.

But maybe you think this doesn't matter, that you never thought of work as a place to use your genuine capabilities anyway. That if you have a job with a good salary you do not mind performing tasks dictated by someone else, because this salary will provide you with the means to pursue the things in which you are really interested.

Part 2 – Full-time Careers Leave No Time For Using Your Genuine Capabilities

If you have a full-time career you do not have the time, or the energy, to devote to finding pleasure from creative ideas. Question people you know who have full-time career jobs, about how they spend their hard-earned money and their spare time. We are not talking about hobbies: this pleasure is not found in occasional games of golf, or going to gigs at the weekend, or mini breaks in Barcelona. These are interludes between long periods of work. The answer is that careerists do not have the time, or the energy. Each week they spend thirty-seven hours plus working, many more getting ready for and travelling to and from work, and after these deductions there is not enough time or energy left for discovering this pleasure.

But you say: perhaps this is only true when you start a career, when you have a more junior position. I won't be on the lower rungs of my career forever. I'll work hard for a while, achieve promotion, leave the more stressful parts of the job to those now working for me and with my new, generous salary have the money to indulge in the things in which I'm genuinely interested.

You may then have the money, but you will not have the time. A well-paid career demands your whole life. Do you think it is easy earning fifty, sixty, one hundred thousand pounds a year? You will be expected to work long hours, many more than is stated in the contract you sign. If you are rewarded with that much money you will not be expected to have ambitions or interests outside of your work: if your superiors suspect that your out-of-work activities are in any way affect your in-work efficiency you will be passed over for promotion and better pay, and promotion and better pay are your objectives in this career job. A friend, who worked in the personnel department of an investment bank, read on an employee's file this advisement against promotion: 'Puts his family before his career.' Do you want to work for organisations with this ordering of priorities?

Nor it seems, even with a larger salary, is it easy to save a portion of each monthly paycheck, in order that you can someday leave to spend this lump sum on your genuine capabilities. Two friends I remember from university: one went to work in the City on a huge salary, said he was going to do the job for a few

years, save some money and then train to be a PE teacher; the other went to work as an energy trader, said he was going to work for a few years, then use the money to set up an adventure camp for teenagers in France. Both still work in the same professions. And these are people who started on good wages.

Working is an expensive business. Most people spend all the money that they earn: if your colleagues at your advertising sales job tend to socialise in expensive restaurants and bars, are you never going to join them because you are saving money? You need to show a willingness to be part of the company team if you are going to carry on earning all that money that you want to save. How much money you spend, and therefore how much you save, depends as much on your peers as on yourself. Are you really going to turn down joining in with all those costly activities in the years that you are saving? More than this, your career job slowly turns you into a different person. You think about your long-term plan less and less often, and when you do it appears less and less realistic as part of the life you now lead.

You do not need to save money from a career salary in order to pursue the ideas that use your true capabilities. You can start pursuing them now.

But, you object: all the career jobs described so far, they are not professions I would choose anyway. I want to be a doctor, or work for a charity, or be a zookeeper, a job where I might make a difference to the lives of others, and, as a consequence, receive a non-monetary sense of reward. Rewarding career jobs do exist, of course. But the demand for them is high, and this brings its own problems.

Part 3 – Rewarding Jobs Are So Highly Prized They Are Unrewarding

Many people desire a career as a doctor, or teacher, or overseas aid worker, and with good reason: these jobs do offer a genuine sense of reward. But the competition for such jobs is fierce, and the entry requirements high.

The entry requirements are not always academic – sometimes they are tests of endurance. To be a doctor you must study for four to six years, and then before you are fully qualified work for another two years as a junior doctor, when you are moved from hospital to hospital, uprooting your home life every few months. In the office of any charity, there will be many unpaid interns, and much more unpaid overtime than in, say, an insurance company. Many rewarding jobs have similar gruelling hurdles over which you must jump to obtain a position: they are testing to see if you will be able to endure the same pace when you start work.

If your work has worth to you, but is controlled by an employer, that employer will, consciously or unconsciously, take advantage of your desire to keep the job, thus reducing its worth. Talk to many doctors and teachers and they say that the heavy commitment they make to their profession is not compensated by the sense of reward. Many teachers I know rarely have any kind of social life in the week because they are too tired. (I don't subscribe to the idea that the long holidays in teaching make it worth the heavy work commitment. If you're only in the job for the holidays, what happened to doing the job for the sense of reward?) There is a correlation: the greater the (publicly-perceived) sense of reward in a job, the more it demands of you. Is this a sacrifice you are willing to make?

School careers advice tells you to 'find a job that you love'. If you follow this advice, rather than ending up in a job you love you end up in a profession that you used to admire at a distance. This is not the same as a job you love, and can often be the opposite. Teachers spend much of their time keeping children in line or adhering to teaching guidelines, rather than experiencing the joy of teaching. Jobbing journalists only occasionally have the chance to pursue stories that they truly think important. Vets don't spend all day petting animals.

When the rewards are not as expected, the worker in the rewarding job tells themselves: this is what I must endure, because I am helping others, and besides, someone has to be a doctor, or nurse, so I'm willing to let that be me. A culture of martyrdom is created. Whilst there are so many willing martyrs competing for rewarding jobs, the jobs continue to exploit. Why would they change?

You may think: if these jobs are so bad, so exploitative, why do people continue in them? Two reasons: debt, and embarrassment. You invested thousands of pounds and years of your life in training to be a doctor/nurse/teacher, and whilst you were training you kept telling yourself the job would be easier once you were qualified and had more experience. By the time you discover the rewards are too few for the sacrifices, there is no turning back. Now your best opportunity to earn money to pay back these debts is to work in the profession in which you have trained. Are you going to throw that all away to start at the bottom in another profession, on much lower wages? And if you say to yourself that you are going to stay in this now-disliked profession only so long as it takes to pay back the debt, are you then, after five or perhaps ten years, going to chuck it all in, and start at the bottom again? It is unlikely.

But a greater force is stopping you quitting. For some time before you started and all the time whilst you were training as a nurse, or a teacher, you were proud to tell others of your profession. A teacher is much more impressive and interesting-sounding than an insurance salesman. How will you feel about telling those same people that you gave it all up, when before you were so proud of what you were doing? Will you suffer many more years of misery in order not to have to tell them? Many people do.

Rewarding work is still an option for you, but not as a full-time career. You can find much more pleasure in such jobs when a salary is not part of the deal.

Part 4 – Creative Pleasure is Not Found in a Creative Career

You ask: if satisfaction in work comes from pleasure in creative ideas, why not work in a creative career job? I can come up with creative ideas for an advertising company, or another creative media job and at the same time be paid generously. Aren't people in these jobs using their creative capabilities?

Not in the same way. Advertising is called a creative industry, and does require original ideas to sell its products. A public relations executive has to write creative copy to publicise their clients' good or service. But their pleasure in this work is in the sense of, 'I have satisfied my bosses/client and will be handsomely paid in return'. Not in the creative idea itself, because the idea does not have genuine value to them.

Everyone has their own genuine personal values for what they like and dislike in books, in music, in food, in toothpaste. But your genuine values are of no use in a creative industry, and working in these

professions in fact results in the suppression of your own personal views. The marketing executive in book publishing learns to declare all books they help publish as ‘fantastic’, regardless of their personal opinion. When they start the job this may feel odd to them, as they declare something good when in fact they think it rubbish. But they must do so, because this is the opinion they need to repeat in their advertising copy and press releases.

Your opinions about books, about music, even about toothpaste are an expression of your values and personality. Being creative for a company means learning how to suppress your own values and personality. After a time the marketing executive who advertises processed food forgets that they themselves like to eat healthily and that their work contributes to others not doing so. To work for a company in this way, your values must become the company’s values. You must forget your own opinions of the company’s products, and later, you must forget that you have forgotten, or else go mad.

Many schoolchildren and graduates aspire to work in the media, in creative jobs. Why is this? Because they themselves enjoy the product of these industries, books, television, or film, and think that to help produce them will provide them with creative pleasure. The majority of jobs in the media do not require creative ideas at all. In my twenties I had a friend who worked as a runner on a feature film, but she derived no pleasure from the creation of the film, for not only did she have little connection to the actual filmmaking in her day-to-day tasks, but also the film had not been her idea. It was not even a film she would have chosen to watch. (At the time she took pleasure from the glamour of telling people she was a runner on a feature film. She later admitted she hated the job, partly because emotional bullying is rife in the film industry, the victims of it uncomplaining because they so want to keep their glamorous job.)

I have worked for book publishers. Here you help sell books written by other people – it is not your books you are selling. The pleasure in creative ideas in book publishing comes at the point of writing the book, not in selling it. In helping to sell it you are merely making this book’s ideas available to the public. Even if it is a book whose ideas you think of vital public interest, something that happens very rarely, the author’s pleasure in their creative ideas will not somehow rub off on you. For this you need your own creative ideas. A full-time career in a creative industry does not provide you with pleasure from creative ideas.

But maybe sometimes, you point out, there *are* creative jobs, where you truly come up with your own ideas, ones that you genuinely think have value. What about the designers of the book covers?

It is true. Book cover designers do originate their own designs, ones they themselves value and in which they take pleasure. It is a short-term pleasure that is repeatedly quashed by the stress of deadlines, the criticism of editors and authors, and the constant interruptions of emails and phone calls. Many designers’ ideas come to them only outside of work, when they are left alone and have time to think, at a time when they are not being paid for their ideas. After a while they forget about trying to find artistic pleasure (the reason they went to art college and applied for their design job), and settle into drawing a salary just like any other careerist.

Don’t squander the pleasure of ideas in a full-time career, however appealing it looks from the outside. The pleasure from creative ideas is found outside of paid work.

So we have talked about all the different careers that will not make you happy. But everyone has to eat. What kind of work should you do?

Part 5 – The Work You Do For Money Must Be Part-time

A review by juniorcain of Jaron Lanier's book *You Are Not a Gadget* (a critique of the internet revolution) asks, angrily, 'Will we all be expected to work at jobs to which we're indifferent so we can come home and do the things we love for free online?' The answer to a more general form of this question is 'yes'. We will work at jobs (though not full-time) to which we are indifferent, and we will come home and do the things we love for free (though not necessarily online).

The type of work you do to earn enough money for rent and food – what we shall call subsistence work – is not so important. The most important aspect of this work is that it is part-time. Your important work is not your subsistence work, but the work you do in your spare time. We shall call the latter type 'work', because when we spend our time taking pleasure from our genuine capabilities we will put in effort, and to not call this work is to give it inferior status to our subsistence work.

The modern work ethic, which says we must take satisfaction and meaning in our lives from our full-time career, is an invention of the last couple of centuries, created by the Industrial Revolution. In the Middle Ages people worked the hours necessary to earn enough money to live: subsistence work. The rest of the time was their own. Would you not prefer to live like this? The idea that we must take meaning from our work has become so entrenched it is not surprising if you are unaware there is an alternative.

Full-time career work has commandeered the definition of the word 'work'. If you refuse to have a career, you will still work, but at ideas of your own choosing. You will not go along with the lie that full-time career work is the only route to finding meaning in your life, because not only is it not the only route, it is rarely a route at all. Only our own ideas are meaningful to us. Other people's work is automatically less meaningful, because it originates from other people's ideas. It only has value in that it provides us with food and rent, and is subsistence work.

So how do you live with a part-time wage, and what type of subsistence work will we look for that will support our real work?

Part 6 – The Nature of Your Part-Time Subsistence Work is Not Important

Is it best to be a part-time salesperson, barman or doctor? The nature of your work is not that important. Your ambition for work is less about the nature of the job, and more that this job is part-time. A summary of the careers advice contained here is: find the sort of part-time work that allows the most freedom for your important work. Your job needs to be part-time, and better still, freelance, in that you work as and when you need to.

Plumber, fitness instructor, nurse, bar work: these are all jobs that are easy to do part-time or freelance. Well-paid executive for an telecoms company is not. Lawyer and advertising copywriter are not. Many part-time jobs are manual jobs, which may not appeal to you at first. If, however, the important work you

do outside of your subsistence work involves sitting at a desk using a computer, active manual work might be a pleasant change. No one is suggesting that being an electrician is going to be your life's fulfilment. This will come outside of your subsistence work.

Happily, the rewarding jobs discussed earlier can be much more rewarding if part-time. The part-time doctor or teacher, if they can resist the pressures to work longer than the hours for which they are paid, can feel the rewards of these jobs more keenly when their spare time is not so minimal. But not all rewarding jobs are possible to do part-time, and should be avoided.

Better still if you can combine a number of part-time jobs (so long as they only add up to the hours of one). You have greater job security if you lose one of three part-time jobs rather than one full-time job. You also have more chance to avoid being exploited when you have more than one job, for you can give it up more easily because you have other work. The best kind of subsistence job is the one where you could not care less if you lost it.

In full-time career jobs people work a huge amount of unpaid overtime. They do this because they fear being seen as not as good as their colleagues, who also work unpaid overtime. In your casual subsistence job, if your employer does not pay you for overtime, you will rightly complain, or threaten to leave. No one threatens to leave a career job, because they have worked so hard to get it in the first place. Their employer will exploit that to the maximum. The principle in feudal times was, 'Pay the poor just enough that they can buy the food they need in order to work, and they will continue working.' In the modern career the principle changes to, 'Increase the employee's workload to just before the point where they are off sick with stress, and they will continue working.'

The great thing about part-time work is, the less you work, and the less attached you are to the work you do, the more available you are to take on different, more interesting subsistence work. Don't take on the fear of your parents, or your school, that you have somehow failed. Part-time subsistence work is not a stop-gap to a full-time career. If you have created the spare time for using your genuine capabilities, and you take pleasure in this, then you are a success.

You ask again: but how do I live on part-time wages? We will get to that in Part 8.

Part 7 – University is Not Essential For a Fulfilling Life

So how does the ambition of part-time work guide you on what to study if you are still at school? Do the subjects you like. If you can, do the ones which have the most inspiring teachers, since these teachers are examples of how best to take pleasure in your capabilities. (Inspiring teachers are thin on the ground, not because there are few people who genuinely love to teach, but because they have been so ground down by their full-time career.) Learning how to take pleasure in your genuine capabilities is what education ought to be for but rarely is.

If you feel it important to go to university, do the subjects whose exams you can pass. If your capabilities do not lie in passing exams, don't worry. Spend your time discovering your creative capabilities. Exams are not essential for part-time work.

You ask: so should I go to college or university? This is a difficult question. Universities can be fantastic places for meeting inspirational people, learning how to live with others, and having the freedom to investigate your genuine capabilities. Art college is an environment set up for the understanding of the pleasure of creative ideas. But nowadays going to college or university also saddles you with enormous debts, debts that are such a burden that upon graduation you may have no option but to find full-time work. There is the great danger that, forced to then find a well-paid career job, you may never escape.

Society gives us the idea that much of our life must be spent studying or training to attain some better, distant future. If you are taking pleasure in the present by investigating your creative capabilities there is no need for this. The path for many graduates is: leave university and spend months or years in part-time subsistence work, and all your spare time applying for that good career job; finally land the good career job; realise the stress and lack of fulfilment of a full-time career job; wonder how you can return to the part-time employment that you had when you first graduated. Just skip the career part, and the problem is solved.

You do not have to go to university. The benefits you gain there, the communal living with your peers, the freedom, the interesting people whom will turn your life in unknown directions, these can all be had elsewhere for a fraction of the price. Travelling and working abroad can give you equivalent social experiences. Education, in its pure sense of gaining knowledge, can be obtained through independent study, through the Open University if you require some structure, or just on your own. You may also decide it better to attend university part-time, and perhaps as a mature student, in order to lessen the crippling debts.

The only thing you cannot get outside of a university is a degree. A degree will help you get you a full-time career job. It is not necessary for part-time subsistence work.

Part 8 – Learn to Live Cheaply If You Desire Spare Time for Real Work

If you want to work part-time, you have to learn to live on part-time wages. This will be the most objectionable piece of advice contained here. Some of you will stop reading and think, if that is the case, then this isn't for me. If you are a teenager, dependent upon your parents, you have most likely been looking forward to the day when you have a pay packet and the freedom of choice to spend it as you choose. Self-determination and security via a surplus of money are the most human of desires. But the person who demands a secure pay packet for their self-determination is blind to what they must give up in order to achieve it: the spare time to pursue work of your own choosing, using your genuine capabilities.

Besides, those in full-time career jobs rarely appear to have much surplus money. It is spent on travel to work, on clothes for work, on food whilst at work, on weekend breaks. Mostly it is spent on treating themselves whilst recovering from the pain of their full-time job. When people say they 'deserve' an expensive foreign holiday, they mean in return for the punishment their career inflicts upon them. Strive for a life in which you don't feel you need a holiday.

The widely-held misconception is that if you don't have a lot of money you are lacking in the means to

enjoy life. This is not some Buddhist advice on the benefits to your soul of having few possessions. It is merely to say that the careerists who are responsible for this misconception do so because they have lost the ability, which they had in childhood, to take pleasure in their own creative ideas. They would not know what to do with themselves if they did not have their full-time job: they would be bored, and they would need money to distract them from this boredom. The semi-retired do not need money for repeated holidays, because they have learnt how to find creative pleasure in their everyday life.

Is this how you want your future life to be, with you so inexperienced at how to spend your spare time that you prefer to fill it with meaningless full-time work? You think I am exaggerating, that of course people with careers would know what to do if they had more spare time. I am not. Observe what happens to careerists when they unexpectedly have time on their hands. Right now you may not yourself have much idea how you would spend your spare time, and this is fine. But it is something you must learn.

What careerists do not know is that you need much less money to be happy when you can spend a significant number of hours a week doing something that brings you creative pleasure. Those with spare time and creative desires are not unemployed, or under-employed, by the government definition of someone who needs more subsistence work to fill their time. Your spare time for important work is already filled, thank you very much, even if you have not yet decided what this work is. These creative ambitions are important, however. Without them we *will* be under-employed.

You might say: I don't want to work this way if it means I have to watch my money all the time. But you won't have *no* money to spend. You will simply be more careful in how you spend it, you will only spend as much as it is necessary to earn in order to leave you with the time for your important work. Clothe yourself from charity shops, where careerists throw out very decent clothes. Couchsurf and camp for holidays. Read library books. Be a late-adopter and use all the technology that careerists trade in for the new model. The semi-retiree's value system slowly changes: cheaper goods become more valuable because they mean you can do less subsistence work and thus have more time for your important work. Also, you find you need less money because you associate with other semi-retirees who have similar cheap ideals.

In any case, you may someday be paid (and paid well) for your pleasurable work – you may even be hired by one of the large organisations with whom you are not going to have a career. But then you will work for them freelance, on your terms, and you can decide how little or much you want this paid work to disrupt the rest of your life. You may feel able to give up your subsistence work. But pay should not be your goal. Being paid for this work is good so long as it does not interrupt the unpaid work that brought you the freelance work in the first place. Being a jobbing musician or journalist is not the same as investigating your capabilities in music or writing. As soon as regular wages are involved, the rewards change. If you are being paid for your pleasureable work, try to remain in the position where you do not care about the pay, just as you do not care if you lose your subsistence job. This is why keeping a part-time subsistence job puts you in a much better position. If you are a writer, write for pleasure and maybe sell the work afterwards, not for an advance which will compromise the work as you create it. If you receive financial reward after the fact, that's a bonus.

Many people earn lots of money from their pleasureable work, but have had to live cheaply at some point

in order to get where they are now. You just need to have the knowledge of how to do so, to not be scared of doing so, because there will almost certainly be times when you need to. Fear of the absence of a full-time pay packet is what keeps most people in mind-numbing careers.

The annoyances of living cheaply are outweighed by not having to work full-time, which is far more annoying. If you cannot do this, or think you cannot do it: then you condemn yourself to a life of full-time work.

Part 9 – The Pleasure of Creative Ideas

You say: I still do not understand what this is, this pleasure from creative ideas, from using my genuine capabilities. What form does this take? How do I go about finding it?

The first step in discovering the pleasure of creative ideas comes when you see the fruits of the creative ideas of others, and think, 'I would love to do that myself'. You see musicians perform, you want to be on stage with them. You watch a great football match, you want to play football. You read of the ideas of Darwin or Einstein, and think, 'I want to investigate theories and experiments that help understand the world'. You read a book that sets down clearly on paper the ideas floating around your own head, and think, 'I want to publish my own ideas'.

If left to your own devices, what are you most drawn to doing? What fascinates you, and where do your genuine capabilities lie? Do not think that because you did not have these capabilities identified and praised at school that you do not have them. Or that if you did have some capabilities praised at school it has to be these in which you feel creative pleasure. (At school I was praised for being good in maths and logical subjects, but now my creative passions lie in writing and music.) School only tests academic capabilities for the purpose of passing exams in order to get a full-time career job. School education ought to be helping you discover how to be creative, but does not, and has little interest in identifying your creative capabilities.

You love reading but do not consider that a writer is something you can be yourself. You can. Trying is being. All the things you enjoy, books, music, comics, they are there for you to use as a model. Everyone starts out wondering if they will ever be able to create anything of value. You might be obsessed with music: there has never been an easier time in which to make and record your own music. It does not matter that at the moment you have no idea how to go about doing so. The first attempts will be bad, the tenth ones will be better. But the first ones are important. The tenth attempt can't happen without the first one.

Creative capabilities are commonly thought to only be found in subjects labelled 'art', such as writing, musical performance or painting, but there is pleasure in creative ideas everywhere: even in the organisation of people, or in the abstract talent of being good with people. If you can organise people, make things happen, this does not have to be for an employer. What organization would you like to see brought into being, something charitable, something sporting, something political? Volunteer for an organization doing something similar and plan how you will do it better yourself. If you love sport, join a team and play.

Start your own team or games, but play, don't just watch. You can't feel the same pleasure as a spectator.

The pleasure of creation is not in being the best at your chosen pursuit or receiving acclaim for it, but in having the creative ideas and following them through. Success in creative pursuits is measured only by the finding of pleasure – recognition and financial reward are secondary. How many times have you heard people say this? But you have to experience it to understand. The great thing is there is no such thing as failure, except failure to feel pleasure, at which point you change the direction of your ideas.

Don't worry if at first you think you are not getting anywhere. It takes time to develop faith in and feel pleasure in your capabilities. You need to relearn the delight you had in creative ideas when you were a child. This creativity is later educated out of most of us and forgotten when older, as we rely more and more on passive forms of entertainment, until we are left with the idea that passive entertainment is all there is. A population of careerists is a population of spectators who are easily bored rather than participants who know how to delight themselves.

Some creative activities will automatically bring you into contact with others who have similar passions. But if your activities are solitary you need to find like-minded people – watching and sharing in their success and failures helps guide you in your activities. If you are interested in traditional arts, hire a space in an artists' studio. Make sure it is a social studio, for much of your creative energies come from interacting with other artists.

These activities, the pursuit of pleasure from a creative idea, this is art. Art is not confined to drawing and painting, or whatever is done in a school art lesson. The categorization of school lessons brainwashes us from an early age to think that art is a subject separate from everyday life that requires special talents. Anything that involves following through your creative ideas to produce something that you value, this is art. You are not excluded if you cannot draw or paint or sculpt well. And, even if you felt no affinity for the traditional arts at school this does not mean you should not investigate them. Try them for yourself, without deadlines, without a forty minute lesson block. You may find there is something about them that you like and want to pursue. Van Gogh said, 'If you hear a voice within you say "you cannot paint," then by all means paint, and that voice will be silenced.' There is art in science. Darwin's theory of evolution was a creative idea: the design of a scientific experiment is a creative act, as is the movement into space on a football field that leads to a goal, holding an audience whilst speaking in public or the nailing together of wooden pallettes for a makeshift den.

When you do art for yourself there is no timetable or homework. The work you do for art won't feel like work, because it is pleasureable, and if it is not pleasureable, if you do not find value in it, it is not art.

This pleasure from creative ideas is not to be taken lightly. It is one that few people have, but many people could have and do not realise. The artist Bill Drummond thinks everyone should have art in their life: we should not be watching others make art, *we* should be making art. We need art for our minds like we need exercise for our bodies. This is the idea behind art therapy in prisons or mental institutions. We all need art therapy, though it need not be called therapy. Everyone is aware of the importance of being healthy, of socialising, but the importance of art, of taking pleasure in creative thoughts, is neglected.

Take semi-retirement from the world of full-time work. Do so before you've even started. You are not slacking off, you are not 'joining the ranks of the unemployed'. You are only unemployed, or underemployed, if you have no creative work with which to fill your spare time. When you are immersed in a project which gives you pleasure, you always have the sense of something to look forward to. You don't get the Sunday evening blues before Monday work, because even if you have to do subsistence work the next day, it won't be that long before you can get back to the things that really thrill you.

Forget about finding fulfilment in life from a career. What are you waiting for? Instead plan how your current studies or work will lead to part-time subsistence work. And meanwhile, begin to discover the pleasure of ideas that use your genuine capabilities. This is the life of the happiest people I know.