SIX

The Work Ethic

"All art," Oscar Wilde declared in the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* "is at once surface and symbol. Those who go beneath the surface do so at their own peril." [82] The superficialities of modern society are more demeaning than the surfaces and masks of art. Rico's neighbors didn't go much beneath the surface with him. The bakers operate simple user-friendly machines which give them a superficial understanding of their work. Rose went to work at a Park Avenue corporation where the emphasis on youth and good looks—the most fleeting, alas, of human qualities—meant her accumulated experience of life had little value.

One reason for this demeaning superficiality is the disorganization of time. Time's arrow is broken; it has no trajectory in a continually reengineered, routine-hating, short-term political economy. People feel the lack of sustained human relations and durable purposes. The people I've so far described have all tried to find the depth of time beneath the surface, if only by registering unease and anxiety about the present.

The work ethic is the arena in which the depth of experience is most challenged today. The work ethic, as we commonly understand it, asserts self-disciplined use of one's time and the value of delayed gratification. This discipline of time shaped Enrico's life as it did those of the autoworkers at Willow Run and the Greek bakers in Boston. They worked hard and they waited; this was their psychological experience

of depth. Such a work ethic depends in part on institutions stable enough for a person to practice delay. Delayed gratification loses its value, though, in a regime whose institutions change rapidly; it becomes absurd to work long and hard for an employer who thinks only about selling up and moving on.

It would be a morose sentimentalism which merely regretted the decline of hard work and of self-discipline—not to mention good grooming and respect of one's elders and all the other joys of the good old time. The serious business of the old work ethic put heavy burdens on the working self. People sought to prove their own worth through their work; in the form of "worldly asceticism," as Max Weber called it, delayed gratification could become a deeply self-destructive practice. But the modern alternative to the long discipline of time is no real remedy to this self-denial.

The modern work ethic focuses on teamwork. It celebrates sensitivity to others; it requires such "soft skills" as being a good listener and being cooperative; most of all, teamwork emphasizes team adaptability to circumstances. Teamwork is the work ethic which suits a flexible political economy. For all the psychological heavy breathing which modern management does about office and factory teamwork, it is an ethos of work which remains on the surface of experience. Teamwork is the group practice of demeaning superficiality.

THE OLD WORK ETHIC revealed concepts of character which still matter, even if these qualities no longer find expression in labor. The old work ethic was founded on self-disciplined use of one's time, with the emphasis laid on a self-imposed, voluntary practice rather than merely passive submission to schedules or routine. In the ancient world this self-imposed discipline was thought to be the only way to cope with the chaos of nature. It was a necessity required every day of farmers. Here is the advice Hesiod gives them in *Works and Days*:

> Do not postpone for tomorrow or the day after tomorrow; barns are not filled by those who postpone and waste time in aimless-

> ness. Work prospers with care; he who postpones wrestles with ruin.[83]

Nature is uncertain, indifferent; the farmer's world is harsh. "Men never rest from toil and sorrow by day," Hesiod declared, "and from perishing by night."[84]

In Hesiod's world, however, self-imposed discipline in using one's time seemed more brute necessity than human virtue. Most of the farmers of Hesiod's day were slaves rather than free yeomen; whether slave or free, the farmer's struggle with nature seemed of less account than the military battles of city men with each other. Thucydides later noted with a certain indifference how both Spartans and Athenians laid waste the countryside of their enemies, as though the farmer's labors had no moral claim to be spared.

In the course of time, the moral stature of the farmer is elevated. The necessity of hard work becomes a virtue. Virgil, nearly five hundred years after Hesiod, still invokes the anarchy of Nature, as in the first *Georgics*:

> Often I have seen the raging winds
> Tear a heavy crop up by the roots,
> And toss it far and wide, just as the farmer
> Brought in his mowers to strip the barley:
> The storm in a black and twisting cloud,
> Swept away both the blade and the writhing grain.[85]

Virgil, like Hesiod, understands the most a farmer can do in the face of this whirlwind is try to husband his use of time. But thanks to the very determination of the farmer to endure, he has become a hero of sorts.

Here lies the sense of the famous passage, in the second book of the *Georgics,* in which Virgil describes soldiers engaged "in dubious battle"; the farmer stands apart from their struggles, and from those of the "Roman State, and empires doomed to die."[86] The farmer knows there are no decisive victories over nature—victory is an illusion. For Virgil, the moral virtue of farming is that it teaches *permanent* resolution regardless of outcome. And in the *Georgics* Virgil gives Hesiod's

adage "He who postpones wrestles with ruin" a new meaning. The "farmer" in all of us wrestles with the capacity to ruin himself. The *Georgics* transposes the anarchy of nature into a vision of inner, psychic anarchy; against these inner storms the individual's only defense is to organize well his or her time.

As the notion of self-discipline first took form, it thus contained a strong dose of stoicism—not of the philosophical sort, but a kind of practical stoicism which dictated the permanent need to combat inner anarchy without expectation of victory. Passing into early Christian beliefs, this practical stoicism shaped early church doctrines about sloth—sloth appearing less a state of sybaritic pleasure than an inner decomposition of the self. For nearly a thousand years, from St. Augustine's depiction of sloth in the *Confessions* to the early Renaissance, this practical stoicism held firm its ethical grip. The scheduling of time, as in the ringing of church bells, could assist men and women in organizing their time, but not instill the desire for self-discipline—that desire could be generated only by a deeper apprehension of pervasive chaos within and without.

Something happened in the early Renaissance to this deep-rooted practical stoicism. It was not directly challenged as an ethical value, but was affected nonetheless by a new appreciation of human beings as historical creatures, creatures who do not simply endure year after year but rather evolve and change. The farmer's permanent stoicism would not suffice for historical man; the terms of discipline would have to adapt to a self in flux. But how?

This was the dilemma which faced the Renaissance Florentine philosopher Pico della Mirandola in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man.* Pico is the first modern voice of *homo faber,* that is, "man as his own maker." Pico asserted that "man is an animal of diverse, multiform, and destructible nature."[87] In this pliant condition, "it is given to [man] to have that which he chooses and to be that which he wills."[88] Rather than maintain the world as we inherited it, we have to shape it afresh; our dignity depends on doing so. Pico declares, "It is ignoble . . . to give birth to nothing from ourselves."[89] Our work in the

world is to create, and the greatest creation is to shape our own life histories. The virtue of imposing a shape on experience remains a fundamental way to define someone possessed of a strong character.

Homo faber ran up, however, against traditional Christian dogma. St. Augustine warned, "Hands off yourself; try to build up yourself and you build a ruin." A Christian obeying St. Augustine should seek to imitate instead the life and example of Jesus. Thus the Renaissance Bishop Tyndale counseled a parishioner to "feeleth him self . . . altered and fashioned like unto Christ." Any purely personal creation will necessarily be inferior.[90] It is a virtue to discipline the use of one's time, but a sin of pride to design one's own experience.

Pico was not deaf to these convictions. He too believed that Christian conduct requires self-discipline and the imitation of exemplary lives. But against this his imagination of historical time is formed by literary models of the spiritual journey; Pico invokes Odysseus the sailor, whose wanderings create their own self-contained history, even though the sailor never doubts his ultimate goal. The Christian in Pico is certain of the final destination, but Pico also wants to put out to sea. He is one of the first Renaissance philosophers to celebrate psychic risks, knowing that the sea within, like the oceans navigated by Renaissance explorers, is uncharted territory.

These two contrary ethical strands, self-discipline and self-fashioning, came together in the most celebrated essay on the work ethic, Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.* He sought to show their combination rather than contradiction in analyzing the dawn of modern capitalism. To be sure, Weber believed that Hesiod's old injunction to the farmer "Do not delay" was partly reversed in capitalism to become "You must delay." What you must delay is your desire for gratification and fulfillment; you have to fashion your life history so that at the end you have achieved something; then, and only then, in that future time, will you be fulfilled. For the present, you must still act like Virgil's farmer, combating sloth

and the forces of inner chaos by a rigid, grim apportioning of your time. This work ethic—to be blunt—Weber thought a fraud. Delay is endless, self-denial in the present is relentless; the promised rewards never come.

This view of working time serves Weber as a way to criticize modern beliefs in character, specifically, beliefs in man as his own maker. The version of Weber's essay most often purveyed in school runs something as follows. The seventeenth century Protestant sought to offer proof of his worthiness in the sight of God by disciplining himself, but unlike the Catholic penitent in a monastery, he would show he was worthy through his work, denying himself in the present, accumulating little tokens of virtue through daily sacrifice. This self-denial then became the "worldly asceticism" of eighteenth-century capitalist practice, with its emphasis on saving rather than spending, its "routinization" of everyday activity, its fear of pleasure. Such a neat little package manages to empty Weber's writing of its tragic grandeur.

Christianity, in his view, is a distinctive faith because it plunges men and women into profoundly painful doubt by requiring them to ask themselves, "Am I a worthy human being?" The Fall and its consequences seem to answer that question decisively: I am not. But no religion could assert an unrelieved vision of human unworthiness; it would be a prescription for suicide. Catholicism before the advent of Protestantism had sought to reassure flawed humanity though counseling surrender to the institutions of the church, its rituals, and the magic powers of its priests. Protestantism sought a more individual remedy for doubt of self.

Oddly, Martin Luther should have been Weber's exemplary figure, but isn't. In Luther's "95 Theses" the rebellious pastor opposed to the comforts of ritual a more naked experience of faith; faith could not come, Luther asserted, through smelling incense or praying to statues and paintings. Attacks on icons have had a long history in the church, as in Islam and Judaism. But Luther was distinctive in maintaining that the man or

woman who renounced idolatry had to face questions of faith unaided and alone, rather than as a member of a community. His is a theology of the individual.

The Protestant individual had to shape his or her history so that it would add up to a meaningful, worthy whole. The individual now becomes ethically responsible for his or her own, particular, lived time; Pico's voyager is to be judged morally by the narrative of how he or she has lived—down to the details of how much sleep one has allowed oneself, how one has trained one's children to talk. We are able to control so little of what happens in our life history, yet Luther insists that we must take responsibility for the whole of it.[91]

In *The Protestant Ethic,* Weber zeroed in upon an aspect of Protestant doctrine which made taking responsibility for one's life history impossible. Luther had declared that "no one is sure of the integrity of his own contrition."[92] The Christian dwells in unrelieved doubt about being able to justify the story of his or her life. In Protestant theology this unrelieved doubt is conveyed through the seemingly arcane theological doctrine of predestination. Calvin declares in the *Institutes* that only God knows whether a soul is to be saved or damned after death; we cannot presume on divine Providence. Crushed by the weight of sinfulness, humans beings thus dwell in a state of permanent insecurity, uncertain whether life will lead to an eternity of burning torment. This is Protestant humanity's unhappy lot: we must earn our moral standing, yet can never presume confidently to say "I am good," nor even "I have done what is good"; all that is possible to say is "I mean well." Calvin's God replies, "Try harder. Whatever is, is not good enough."

Again this risks being a prescription for suicide. But the Protestant was offered in place of ritual's balm a harsher medicine: relentless hard work oriented to the future. Organizing one's life history through hard work might serve as a small light in the dark, a "sign of election" that one might be among those saved from hell. Unlike Catholic good works, though, hard work couldn't earn the Protestant any greater favor with

the Creator; labor merely offers signs of worthy intentions to a divine Judge who has already decided every case in advance.

This is the terror which lurks behind the abstract concept of "worldly asceticism." In Weber's view there passed from Protestant to capitalist the willingness to save rather than to spend as an act of self-discipline and self-denial. This same passage gave birth to a new character type. It is the driven man, bent on proving his moral worth through his work.

Weber invoked an American icon as an early example of the driven man. Benjamin Franklin, the witty and worldly diplomat, inventor, and statesman, appears in Weber's pages as pleasure-fearing and work-obsessed beneath his affable exterior, Franklin reckoning every moment of time as though it were money, constantly denying himself an ale or a pipe in order to save, each penny put aside serving in Franklin's mind as a little token of virtue. As diligently as a man or woman practices the work ethic, though, self-doubt persists. Franklin carries the persistent fear he is not good enough just as he is, yet no accomplishment ever seems enough; there are no consummations in this scheme of things.

The driven man does not conform to the old Catholic images of the vices of wealth, such as gluttony or luxury; the driven man is intensely competitive but cannot enjoy what he gains. The life history of the driven man becomes an endless quest for recognition from others and for self-esteem. Yet even if others would praise him for his worldly asceticism, he would fear accepting that praise, for it would mean accepting himself. Everything in the present is treated as an instrumental means to a final destination; nothing right now matters for its own sake. This is what became in secular society of the theology of the individual.

As economic history, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* is riddled with errors. As economic analysis, it strangely omits any consideration of consumption as a driving force in capitalism. As the critique of a certain character type, however, both its purpose and its execution are coherent. The work ethic of the driven man appears to Max Weber no source

of human happiness, nor indeed of psychological strength. The driven man is too heavily weighed down by the importance he has come to attach to work. Discipline, Michel Foucault tells us, is an act of self-punishment, and it certainly appears so in this rendition of the work ethic.[93]

I've gone into this history in some detail because the disciplined use of one's time is not the simple, straightforward virtue it may at first appear. A grim, relentless struggle in the ancient world, a conundrum for Renaissance believers in *homo faber*, a source of self-punishment in the theology of the individual: Surely the weakening of the work ethic would be a gain for civilization. Surely we want to exorcise the furies besetting the driven man.

IT DEPENDS, HOWEVER, on how the weight upon the working self is lightened. Modern forms of teamwork are in many ways the opposites of the work ethic as Max Weber conceived it. An ethic of the group as opposed to the individual, teamwork emphasizes mutual responsiveness rather than personal validation. The time of teams is flexible and oriented to specific, short-term tasks, rather than the reckoning of decades marked by withholding and waiting. Teamwork, though, takes us into that domain of demeaning superficiality which besets the modern workplace. Indeed, teamwork exits the realm of tragedy to enact human relations as a farce.

Take the matter of vodka. During Rose's year on Park Avenue, her advertising firm faced an evidently perennial problem. Since this liquor has no taste, the marketing task is to convince a buyer that one brand is nevertheless superior to any other. Rose, I am sorry to say, put this conundrum to her financial advantage when running the Trout; she filled empty bottles of Stolichnaya vodka from Russia with a cheap vodka made somewhere in Canada. "No one has yet tasted the difference," she once confessed to me with a certain pride.

During her year uptown, one of the liquor companies proposed shoving a mountain of money at this dilemma and ran a competition of sorts among ad agencies for a solution. New

bottle shapes, impossible Russian names, new and weird flavors, even the shape of the boxes in which vodka is sold—all were on the table for discussion. In this little comedy, Rose had her own solution, one which I suspect she advanced with a certain irony. She pointed out that there existed Russian vodkas flavored with honey; these could be pushed as health drinks.

What made this comedy serious for Rose was that she soon came to be left out of the loop—that is, out of the communications network of mutual suggestion and rumor about what other firms were doing that animated the vodka team and its team players. Modern communications technology has in some ways speeded up the process of collaboration, but in the media industry, at least in New York, face-to-face still is the major means of transmission. She was not part of this face-to-face "buzz" at parties, clubs, and restaurants outside the office; her age and her looks, as we've seen, were against her.

But more than this, she kept intruding information about how people actually drink in bars, which lay outside the purview of those who were in the loop. For instance, she mentioned that vodka is a drink of choice for people who are secret alcoholics, since they believe no one can smell they've been drinking. Her colleagues reacted as if this were her private knowledge, disturbing their own discussions. Specialized information often tends to jam the system of communication. In teamwork of a nonmaterial sort, where people are working together on an image, the act of communication is more important than the facts communicated; to communicate, the playing field of talk needs to be open and accessible. Once that happens, the shaping and sharing of rumor becomes the substance of collaboration. Buzz about competitors provides energy to the communications; hard facts weaken the energies of exchange. Indeed, information exchange tends to be self-exhausting; at the ad agency, the buzz about the Russian-name answer lasted only until it had been fully networked, and then the buzz about hexagonal boxing for the bottles began.

The hardest fact about this group effort was that the agency

failed to get the contract. Rose expected that there would ensue a period of mutual recrimination and blame on the team, since the financial consequences for the agency were severe. Moreover, she told me, she expected people to experience "grief" at the loss, by which she meant that these hard-driven ad execs would really care about losing. But as a group, they had a different reaction, more self-protective. There was no mutual recrimination. Nor did people make an effort to justify themselves. There was no time. In a few days, the hard-liquor group had moved on to another project, and moved on as a team.

A specialist in group behavior might well expect this. Groups tend to hold together through keeping to the surface of things; shared superficiality keeps people together by avoiding difficult, divisive, personal questions. Teamwork might seem to be just another example, therefore, of the bonds of group conformity. But the ethos of communication and information-sharing gives conformity a particular twist: the emphasis on being flexible and open to change made members of the team susceptible to the slightest twitches of rumor or suggestion from others on the party-office-lunch-club network. As I have noted, New York adpersons are not corporate conformists of the tight and buttoned-up sort. In the old work culture, the corporate conformist was an all too predictable and reliable character—you knew every response. In this flexible culture of the image and its information, predictability and reliability are less salient character traits; there is no firm footing here, just as there can be no final answer to the problem vodka poses.

Rose's dictum "Let nothing stick to you" applied in this case to the team leader in a particular way. The leader of the hard-liquor team had throughout the vodka campaign acted as an equal to the others rather than as a boss; in management-speak his role was to "facilitate" a solution among the group and to "mediate" between client and team. He is a manager of process. His job, facilitation and mediation, can be, with enough *savoir faire,* divorced from outcome. The word "leader" thus hardly applies to

him in the traditional sense of an authority. Nor are facilitation and mediation the grim, resolute acts of will such as formed the characters of the ancient yeomen doing battle with nature.

What I have described may seem hardly worthy of the term "work ethic." And indeed it was a shock to Rose to pass into this corporate milieu. When she worked at the Trout, Rose practiced something like the old-fashioned work ethic. The immediate tasks of getting in supplies and turning out burgers and drinks may have given her little deep satisfaction, but she also worked for the future—to accumulate enough money to put her girls through college and to build up a business worth enough that she could eventually retire on what she could sell it for. Self-denial came naturally to her—until the moment, perhaps mistaken, when she decided she could wait no more, could do something with her life, could set out on Pico's voyage.

Weber's worldly asceticism, as we have seen, realized Luther's theology of the individual in a secular world. The individual caught in the toils of worldly asceticism struggles to gain power over himself or herself. More, the driven man seeks to *justify* himself. In the ad agency, Rose found a different work ethic suited to a firm oriented entirely to the present, its images and its surfaces. In this world, the work ethic took a different form, seemingly more collaborative than individual in its terms, and we might say more forgiving.

Yet it is not quite so benign. People still play games of power in teams, but the emphasis on soft skills of communication, facilitation, and mediation changes radically one aspect of power: authority disappears, authority of the sort which self-confidently proclaims, "This is the right way!" or "Obey me, because I know what I'm talking about!" The person with power does not justify command; the powerful only "facilitate," enable others. Such power without authority disorients employees; they may still feel driven to justify themselves, but now there is no one higher up who responds. Calvin's God has fled. This disappearance of authority figures from teamwork occurs in quite specific and tangible ways.

TEAMWORK ACQUIRED a kind of official sanction in modern American management practice in a study commissioned by Secretary of Labor Elizabeth Dole. The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) produced its report in 1991. It set out to be a report on the skills people need in a flexible economy. As one would expect, the report does make much of basic verbal and math skills, as well as the ability to deal with technology. The surprising thing is that Dole and her colleagues, not known for dewy-eyed sentimentality, put so much emphasis on listening well, on teaching others, and on the art of facilitation in teams.[94]

The SCANS image of the team is of a group of people assembled to perform a specific, immediate task, rather than to dwell together as in a village. The authors reason that a worker has to bring to short-term tasks an instant ability to work well with a shifting cast of characters. That means the social skills people bring to work are *portable*: you listen well and help others, as you move from team to team, as the personnel of teams shifts—as though moving from window to window on a computer screen. Detachment is also required of the good team player: you should have the ability to stand back from established relationships and judge how they can be changed; you must picture the task at hand, rather than be plunged into long histories of intrigue, past betrayals, and jealousies.

The realities of teamwork in the flexible workplace are signaled by the misleading sports metaphor which suffuses this report: in flexible forms of work, the players make up the rules as they go along. The SCANS study emphasizes the art of listening, for instance, because the authors consider talking things through more improvisatory and free than working according to written rules in a manual of procedures. And office sports differ from other sports because the players at work don't keep score in the same way. Only the current game matters. The SCANS study emphasizes that past performance is no guide to present rewards; in each office "game" you start over from the beginning. This is one way to convey that seniority counts for less and less in the modern workplace.

The authors of the SCANS and similar studies are realists: they know the economy today emphasizes immediate performance and short-term, bottom-line results. Yet modern managers also know that individual dog-eat-dog competition can wreck the performance of a group. Thus a fiction arises in modern teamwork at work: employees aren't really competing against each other. And even more important, the fiction arises that workers and bosses aren't antagonists; the boss instead manages group process. He or she is a "leader," the most cunning word in the modern management lexicon; a leader is on your side, rather than your ruler. The game of power is being played by the team against teams in other companies.

Here's how the anthropologist Charles Darrah found workers inducted into this fiction in the "human skills" training of two high-tech manufacturing companies. His research abounds in the delicious ironies which reality brings to theory; for instance, Vietnamese workers who composed about 40 percent of the workforce in one company "were especially fearful of the team concept, which they likened to Communist work teams."[95] Training in such sociable virtues as sharing information proved anything but easy and benign. Higher-status workers feared teaching new or lower-status workers their own skills; they could then be replaced.

Employees learned the portable skills of teamwork through coaching in how to act various company roles, so that every worker would know how to behave in the varied windows of work. In one of Darrah's sites, "workers were advised that each team was to act as a separate company, with the members thinking of themselves as its 'vice presidents.'"[96] Most workers found this somewhat bizarre, since the company was known to treat the Vietnamese factory operatives with scant respect, but the new employees who played along were judged to have "succeeded" in their human-skills training. The time allotted for these sessions was short—a few days, sometimes only a few hours. The shortness mirrors the reality the workers would face in flexible work, requiring quick study of new situations and new people. The audience is, of course, the man-

agers whom the new recruit is trying to impress; the art of feigning in teamwork is to behave as though one were addressing only other employees, as though the boss weren't really watching.

When the sociologist Laurie Graham went to work on the assembly line at a Subaru-Isuzu plant, she found that "the team metaphor was used at all levels of the company," the highest team being the Operating Committee. The sports analogy was out in full force; "team leaders," according to one company document, "are highly skilled Associates, like basketball team captains." The team concept justified flexible labor as a way to develop the individual capacities; the company declared "all Associate members will be trained in—and will perform—a number of functions. This increases their value to the team and to [Subaru-Isuzu]" as well as their own feelings of self-worth.[97] Laurie Graham found herself engulfed in a "culture of cooperation through egalitarian symbols."[98]

The sociologist Gideon Kunda calls such teamwork a kind of "deep acting," because it obliges individuals to manipulate their appearances and behavior with others.[99] "How interesting." "What I heard you saying is . . ." "How could we do this better?" These are the actor's masks of cooperation. The successful players in Darrah's training groups rarely behaved the same way offscreen as they did when the bosses were watching. Indeed, the sociologist Robin Leidner has explored the written scripts which are in fact handed out to employees in service enterprises; what these scripts aim to do is establish the "friendliness" of the employee more than address the substance of a client's concerns. In a turnstile world of work, the masks of cooperativeness are among the only possessions workers will carry with them from task to task, firm to firm—these windows of social skill whose "hypertext" is a winning smile. If this human-skills training is only an act, though, it is a matter of sheer survival. Commenting on people who fail to develop quickly the masks of cooperativeness, one supervisor told Darrah that "most will wind up pumping gas."[100] And within the team, the fictions which deny the individual struggle for power or mutual conflict serve to strengthen the position of those on top.

Laurie Graham found people oppressed in a particular way by the very superficiality of the fictions of teamwork. Peer pressure from other workers on her work team took the place of bosses cracking the whip in order to move the cars as fast as possible along the assembly line; the fiction of cooperating employees served the company's relentless drive for ever greater productivity. After an initial period of enthusiasm, a coworker told her, "I thought this place would be different with its team concept and all, but management is just trying to work people to death." The various work groups were collectively responsible for their members' individual efforts, and teams criticized one another. One worker whom Graham interviewed said a team leader "came up to me and gave me a short lecture on how . . . we work best as a team: 'picking up someone else's mistake and letting them know before it hits the end of the line.'" Workers did hold one another accountable; they were forced to do so in meetings where people engaged in what reads like group therapy—a therapy oriented to the bottom line.[101] But the reward for the individual is reintegration into the group.

The fiction that workers and management are on the same team proved equally useful to Subaru-Isuzu in its dealings with the outside world. Subaru-Isuzu uses this fiction of community at work to help justify its fierce resistance to labor unions; moreover, the fiction of community helps justify the existence of a Japanese company extracting profits in America to be sent home. This company represents an extreme case, in that Japanese firms tend to push teamwork to its limits. But it magnifies a more general deployment of teamwork in flexible institutions. "What these measures have in common," the labor economists Eileen Appelbaum and Rosemary Batt believe, "is that they do not change the fundamental nature of the production system or threaten the basic organization or power structure of the firms."[102]

Most important in this regard is the fact that managers cling

to the nostrum of doing the job at hand all together, all on the same team, in order to resist being challenged internally. When Michael Hammer and James Champy urge, in *Reengineering the Corporation*, that managers "stop acting like supervisors and behave more like coaches," they do so for the sake of the boss rather than for the sake of the employee.[103] The boss avoids being held responsible for his or her actions; it's all on the player's shoulders.

To put this more formally, power is present in the superficial scenes of teamwork, but authority is absent. An authority figure is someone who takes responsibility for the power he or she wields. In an old-style work hierarchy, the boss might do that by overtly declaring, "I have the power, I know what's best, obey me." Modern management techniques seek to escape from the "authoritarian" aspect of such declarations, but in the process they manage to escape as well from being held responsible for their acts. "People need to recognize we are all contingent workers in one form or another," says a manager at ATT during a recent spate of downsizing; "We are all victims of time and place."[104] If "change" is the responsible agent, if everybody is a "victim," then authority vanishes, for no one can be held accountable—certainly not this manager letting people go. Instead, peer pressure is meant to do the manager's work.

The repudiation of authority and responsibility in the very superficialities of flexible teamwork structures everyday work life as well as moments of crisis like a strike or a downsizing. Excellent fieldwork on this everyday repudiation of authority by those with power has been done by the sociologist Harley Shaiken, and it is worth quoting at length what one manual worker in a "mixed team" of blue- and white-collar employees told Shaiken about how ducking responsibility occurs:

> Really, what's happening is that you're not running the machine alone—there are three or four people running it—the engineer, the programmer, the guy who made the fixture, the operator. . . . One thing that happens is that it is too hard to communicate with the other people involved in the process. They don't want to hear it. They've got all the training, all the degrees. They just don't want to hear from you about anything that's gone wrong. It's got to be all your fault. They sure won't admit it if *they've* made a mistake. . . . When I find a way to improve some operation, if I can do it without anyone seeing, I don't tell anyone. For one thing, no one ever asks me.[105]

The Swedish sociologist Malin Åkerström concludes from such experiences that neutrality is a form of betrayal. The absence of real human beings declaring "I'll tell you what to do" or at the extreme "I'll make you suffer" is more than a defensive act within the corporation; this absence of authority frees those in control to shift, adapt, reorganize without having to justify themselves or their acts. In other words, it permits freedom of the moment, a focus just on the present. Change is the responsible agent; change is not a person.

Moreover, power without authority permits leaders of a team to dominate employees by denying legitimacy to employees' needs and desires. In the Subaru-Isuzu plant, where the managers used the sports metaphor of calling themselves coaches, Laurie Graham found it was difficult, if not fatal, for a worker to talk straight to a boss-coach about problems in terms other than team cooperation; straight talk involving demands for higher pay or less pressure to boost productivity was seen as a lack of employee cooperativeness. The good team player doesn't whine. Fictions of teamwork, because of their very superficiality of content and focus on the immediate moment, their avoidance of resistance and deflection of confrontation, are thus useful in the exercise of domination. Deeper shared commitments, loyalties, and trust would require more time—and for that very reason would not be as manipulable. The manager who declares that we are all victims of time and place is perhaps the most cunning figure to appear in the pages of this book. He has mastered the art of wielding power without being held accountable; he has transcended that responsibility for himself, putting the ills of work

back on the shoulders of those fellow "victims" who happen to work for him.

This game of power without authority indeed begets a new character type. In place of the driven man, there appears the ironic man. Richard Rorty writes of irony that it is a state of mind in which people are "never quite able to take themselves seriously because always aware that the terms in which they describe themselves are subject to change, always aware of the contingency and fragility of their final vocabularies, and thus of their selves."[106] An ironic view of oneself is the logical consequence of living in flexible time, without standards of authority and accountability. Yet Rorty understands that no society can cohere through irony; about education, he declares, "I cannot imagine a culture which socialized its youth in such a way as to make them continually dubious about their own process of socialization."[107] Nor does irony stimulate people to challenge power; he says this sense of self will not make "you better able to conquer the forces which are marshaled against you."[108] Ironic character, of the sort Rorty describes, becomes self-destructive in the modern world; one moves from believing nothing is fixed to "I am not quite real, my needs have no substance." There is no one, no authority, to recognize their worth.

THE ETHOS OF TEAMWORK, with its inner suspensions and ironies, takes us far away from the moral universe of Virgil's grim, heroic farmer. And the power relations contained in teamwork, power exercised without claims to authority, is far distant from the ethics of self-responsibility which marked the old work ethic, with its deadly-serious, worldly asceticism. The classic work ethic of delayed gratification and proving oneself through hard labor can hardly claim our affections. But teamwork should have no greater claim, in its fictions and its feigning of community.

Neither the old nor the new work ethic provides a satisfactory answer to Pico della Mirandola's question "How should I fashion my life?" Pico's question indeed brings to a head all the issues we have pursued about time and character in the new capitalism.

The culture of the new order profoundly disturbs self-organization. It can divorce flexible experience from static personal ethics, as happened to Rico. It can divorce easy, superficial labor from understanding and engagement, as happened to the Boston bakers. It can make the constant taking of risks an exercise in depression, as happened to Rose. Irreversible change and multiple, fragmented activity may be comfortable for the new regime's masters, like the court at Davos, but it may disorient the regime's servants. And the new cooperative ethos of teamwork sets in place as masters those "facilitators" and "process managers" who dodge truthful engagement with their servants.

In drawing this picture I am well aware it risks, despite all qualifications, appearing as a contrast between before, which was better, and now, which is worse. None of us could desire to return to the security of Enrico's or the Greek bakers' generation. It was claustrophobic in outlook; its terms of self-organization were rigid. In a longer-term view, while the achievement of personal security has served a profound practical as well as psychological need in modern capitalism, that achievement carried a high price. A deadening politics of seniority and time entitlements ruled the unionized workers at Willow Run; to continue that mind-set today would be a recipe for self-destruction in today's markets and flexible networks. The problem we confront is how to organize our life histories now, in a capitalism which disposes us to drift.

The dilemma of how to organize a life narrative is partly clarified by probing how, in today's capitalism, people cope with the future.