The Performance of Idleness in Late Medieval English Society:

Work, Leisure and the Sin of Sloth

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Abstract

The crisis of labour in the post Black Death period has held the attention of historians for decades. Economic scholars concentrate on the rise in wages or how rising prices affected day to day living. Social historians examine how the crisis affected the relationships between social groups or the perception of the poor in the period. Legal historians focus on the introduction of national labour legislation, the first of its kind in England and how this legislation developed over the fourteenth and fifteenth century. However, at the crux of the socio-economic tensions of this period is the concept of idleness, the absence of productivity within the realm. This is what caused much of the contemporary reactions to the crisis but scholars have instead concentrated on the quantifiable effects that this idleness had on society, skipping over the illusive concept as an unquestioned rhetorical device. This is the lacuna that my research has aimed to fill. The thesis looks beyond idleness's position as a sin or rhetorical device to enable us to understand how it was constructed and used as a social, cultural and economic concept. The thesis draws on a variety of source material, such as national and local legislation, session of the peace proceedings, devotional manuals, poetry, drama and many other forms of literature and administrative records. Lexicography is also used throughout to create more nuanced and contemporary definitions of the concepts at hand. This wide approach to source material has allowed me to view the concept of idleness and the perceptions of idle behaviour from a wide variety of perspectives. While this thesis engages with quite mature fields of scholarship, the research reshapes debates and findings to look at what is absent, both in scholarly discussion and contemporary accounts, by elucidating what people were not doing and what this contributes to our understanding of how medieval society viewed work, idleness and leisure.

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And most of all to Peter, for everything...

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

Introduction

> In 1349, that is in the 23rd year of the reign of King Edward III, a great mortality of men advanced across the globe, beginning in the southern and northern zones. Its destruction was so great that scarcely half mankind was left alive. Towns once packed with people were emptied of their inhabitants, and the plague spread so thickly that the living were hardly able to bury the dead. In some religious houses no more than two survived out of twenty. It was calculated by several people that barely a tenth of mankind remained alive. A murrain of animals followed on the heels of this pestilence. Rents dwindled and land was left untilled for want of tenants (who were nowhere to be found). And so much wretchedness followed these ills that afterwards the world could never return to its former state.[1]

Writing in the decades after the Black Death, Thomas Walsingham had an acute awareness that the pestilence that ravaged England between 1348 and 1350 had changed society to a point of no return. With at least half of the population perishing, labour that had once been plentiful became scarce. The reduction of the workforce allowed labourers to demand and receive more favourable working conditions including increased wages and short term, higher paid contracts. This led to substantial anxiety around what the authors of the 1351 Statute of Labourers called 'la malice des servauntz queux furent perceouse' or 'the malice of servants that were

[1] *Historia Anglicana* translated in Rosemary Horrox, *The Black Death* (Manchester: Manchester Uni. Press, 1994), 66 '*Anno gratiae millesimo trecentesimo quadragesimo nono, qui est annus regni Regis Edwardi, a Conquaestu Tertii, vicesimus terius, magna mortalitas hominum grassata est per obem; incipiens ab Australibus et Borealibus plagis, tantaque clade desinens, ut vix media pars hominum remaneret. Tunc villae olim hominibus refertissimae, suis destitutae sunt colonis, et adeo crebra perstis invaluit, ut vix vivi potuerunt motruos sepelire. In quibusdam vero religiosorum domibus, de viginti vix supererant tantum duo. Aestimabatur autem a pluribus, quod vix decima pars hominum fuisset relicta ad vitam. Hanc pestilentiam e vestigio lues animalium est secuta; tunc redditus perierunt, tunc terra, ob defectum colonorum, qui nusquam erant, remansit inculta. Tantaque miseria ex hiis malis est secuta, quod mundus ad pristinum statum redeundi nunquam postea habuit facultatem*.' in *Thomae Walsingham, quondam Monachis. Albani, Historia Anglicana*, ed. Henry Thomas Riley, vol. 1 (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts and Green, 1863), 273.

idle'.[2] But what did this idleness constitute of and why was it seen as such a vindictive transgression?

Scholars have approached studies of idleness through three main registers: the literary use of *otium*, the theological sin of *acedia*, and the vernacular sin of sloth. The standard term for idleness in Latin, the language of the Church and of scholarship in the medieval era, was *otium*. The *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources* defines *otium* variously as leisure, a product of one's leisure, temporary relaxation from toil, state of tranquillity, state of inactivity, idleness and laziness.[3] As a word with such multiple and divergent meanings, *otium* has attracted particular attention from scholars of literature. In 1966 Jean-Marie André published on *otium* in the Roman world in his *L'Otium dans la Vie Morale et Intellectuelle Romaine*.[4] André's study concentrates on pre Christian aristocratic morality and the changing significance of leisure in the life of Romans as portrayed through the works of Scipio, Cicero, and Virgil. Monika Fludernik and Miriam Nandi have edited a volume of essays examining the history of *otium* in English literature from the fourteenth to the twentieth centuries.[5] The historical range of the articles in this collection highlight the importance of viewing the concept within specific contexts. Contributions cover diverse themes such as colonialism, poetics, and travel, highlighting the multiple dimensions in which 'preoccupations, anxieties and fantasies about the use and abuse of time' can be appropriated and articulated.[6] The collection concludes by highlighting the impossibility of neat definitions of the conceptual ideas of idleness and leisure. The long chronological approach leads to a conclusion that attempts to differentiate between idleness and leisure but also to reflect on these concepts within modern society.[7]

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[2] 25 Edward III, 2 in *Statutes of the Realm*, ed. Alexander Luders (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1810), 1: 311.
[3] *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, eds. R. E. Latham, D. R. Howlett, and R. K. Ashdowne (London: Oxford Uni. Press, 1975-2013), s.v. "otium".
[4] Jean-Marie André, *L'Otium dans la Vie Morale et Intellectuelle Romaine* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966).
[5] *Idleness, Indolence and Leisure in English Literature*, eds.Monika Fludernik and Miriam Nandi (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
[6] Monika Fludernik and Miriam Nandi, "Introduction," in *Idleness, Indolence and Leisure in English Literature*, eds. Monika Fludernik and Miriam Nandi (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 6.
[7] Rosa Harmut, "Epilogue: Remember that Time Is Knowledge, Health and Happiness: In the Mysterious Disappearance of Leisure," in *Idleness, Indolence and Leisure in English Literature*, eds. Monika Fludernik and Miriam Nandi (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 293-7.

Within the collection edited by Fludernik and Nandi, Gregory Sadlek has written the only piece which looks at the medieval period.[8] Sadleck concentrates solely on the literary discussions of *otium*. He is clear that *otium* is used by authors to justify their contemplative lives or by members of the clergy who wish to spend their spare time in writing.[9] The majority of the Ricardian authors discussed in the article, such as Geoffrey Chaucer and William Langland, are self-reflective in their discussion of *otium* and finding the balance between their writing as work and writing as leisure. While Sadlek makes reference to how *otium* connects with social position, the concept of *otium* remains in a literary, theoretical bubble separate from historical context. There is no attempt to differentiate literary topos from "real" experience. Sadlek has also written on the topic of love as a product of leisure and/or labour, tracking the tradition from Ovid to the fifteenth century.[10] Sadlek's 'labor' is the broadest sense of the word, 'exertion of the faculties of the body or mind'.[11]

Scholars have also approached the concept of idleness through studies of sin. While idleness has a number of other resonances and meanings in the medieval period, it is generally articulated as a branch of the deadly sin of *acedia* or sloth. While continental scholars had completed studies of the seven deadly sins in relation to their origin and their place in moral theology and iconography, the first major English-language study of the seven deadly sins was performed by Morton Bloomfield in his 1952 monograph, *The Seven Deadly Sins: An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept*.[12] Bloomfield established a detailed history of the concept of the seven deadly sins, but saw his book as an introduction to the field

[8] Gregory M. Sadlek, "Otium, Negotium, and the Fear of Acedia in the Writings of England's Late Medieval Ricardian Poets," in *Idleness, Indolence and Leisure in English Literature*, eds. Monika Fludernik and Miriam Nandi (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 17-39.
[9] Ibid, 17-18.
[10] Gregory M. Sadlek, *Idleness Working: The Discourse of Love's Labor from Ovid through Chaucer and Gower* (Washington DC: Catholic Uni. Press, 2004).
[11] Ibid, 8.
[12] Morton W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins: An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept, with Special Reference to Medieval English Literature* (East Lansing: Michigan State Uni. Press, 1952).
For earlier work on the seven deadly sins see, Otto Zöckler, *Biblische und kirchenhistorische Studien*, vol. 3 (Munich: Beck, 1893), Stefan Schiwetz, *Das morgenländische Mönchtum*, 3 vols (Mainz, Mödling, 1904-1938), Adolf Katzenellenbogen, *Allegories of the Virtues and Vices in Mediaeval Art from Early Christian Times to the Thirteenth Century*, trans. Alan J. P. Crick (London: W. W. Norton, 1939), and Siegfried Wibbing, *Die Tugend- und Lasterkataloge im Neuen Testament: Exegetisch, Religions- und Formgeschichtlich Untersucht* (Berlin: Aschendorff, 1959).

rather than as the definitive scholarly work. Bloomfield's monograph tracks the seven deadly sins from their theological ascetic origins to their use in pastoralia and the increasing secularisation that developed in the heptad during this transition. This is particularly noted in the development of the spiritually dry fifth-century *acedia* to the sleeping and negligent fifteenth-century sloth. However, Bloomfield restricts himself to tracking the development of the sins in literature rather than engaging in analyses of them. As such, Bloomfield has become the jumping off point for many scholars of the vices, including Siegfried Wenzel and Richard Newhauser.

The main work written on the topic of sloth and idleness in the medieval period is Siegfried Wenzel's 1960 monograph, *The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature*.[13] It is the subtitle's *acedia* rather than sloth that is the true focus of this work. Wenzel's volume tracks the development of *acedia* as a temptation to ascetic life in the fourth-century writings of Evagrius Ponticus through to the end of the fourteenth century. Wenzel's interest in the seven deadly sins revolves heavily around the scholastic writers of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. He describes this period as 'one of the most interesting phases in the history of the Sins'.[14] Wenzel nevertheless allocates three chapters of his monograph to later vernacular and visual imagery of the sin, paying particular attention to the growth in pastoral care after the fourth Lateran Council in 1215. Wenzel incorporates and engages with a great quantity of writing on *acedia*. His aim, however, is to engage with the theological culture of the vice rather than the conceptual social culture. The monograph fulfils this aim exceedingly well and presents the reader with a nuanced discussion of *acedia* and its development across the medieval period. However, beyond the popular spiritual imagining of the sin of sloth, Wenzel is less interested in late medieval conceptions of the sin as he describes it as the 'deterioration from the interesting spiritual phenomenon it was in the accounts of the desert fathers to the much less interesting sin of laziness among ordinary folk' in the later medieval period.[15] Wenzel has since highlighted some of the gaps in Bloomfield's work and in

[13] Siegfried Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Chapel Hill: The Uni. Of North Carolina Press, 1960).
[14] Siegfried Wenzel, "The Seven Deadly Sins: Some Problems of Research," in *Speculum* 43, 1 (1968), 3.
[15] Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth*, 164.

his own monograph in his 1968 article in *Speculum*. One of the questions that this article asks is 'what significance did the Seven Deadly Sins really have in mediaeval culture?'[16] Although Wenzel's interest lies with the theoretical and theological, he admits that from earliest beginnings the scheme of vices served a practical purpose.[17] However, his discussion remains with literature, art and theology rather than experiences or perceptions of sins in a more practical lay context.

Sloth and idleness are not merely theological principles but part of late medieval social and economic culture. The tendency for scholars to avoid engaging in the social significance of the sin of sloth or *acedia* is not because of incompatibility of moral and social concepts. Historians have already begun to make significant inroads in this endeavour. Most notably James Davis has published work on the morality of the late medieval market, highlighting the interaction between market forces and Christian ethics.[18] Davis engages in a wide range of evidence including literary and theological works to manorial and village courts to economic legislation. Through this examination he has highlighted that Christian morality, economic thought and law were 'mutually supportive' within the medieval marketplace with an awareness of the shared goal for the 'sustenance of society'.[19] However, this does not mean that there was not any tension between the forces of supply and demand, 'the needs of economic prosperity' and contemporary moral thought.[20] This has remained a debate in thoughts of a moral economy to the present day.

As well as viewing the concept of idleness as a sin, idleness appears in some more mature fields of scholarship such as work, poverty and leisure. While there have been a number of edited volumes on the culture of work in the later Middle Ages, such as those edited by Allen J. Frantzen and Douglas Moffat (1994), James Bothwell, P. J. P. Goldberg and W. M. Ormrod (1998) or Kellie Robertson and Michael Uebel (2004), these have ignored inactivity or idleness as an essential component to the concept of labour in this period, concentrating instead on

[16] Wenzel, "The Seven Deadly Sins," 12.
[17] Ibid, 12-13.
[18] James Davis, *Medieval Market Morality: Life, Law and Ethics in the English Marketplace, 1200-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge Uni. Press, 2012).
[19] Ibid, 450.
[20] Ibid, 458.

activity.[21] This gap in scholarship is somewhat understandable. Idleness is by definition the absence of activity or productivity. This absence makes it extremely difficult to quantify or grapple with historically. However, as a result, there is a key element to the crisis that is not being discussed.

The topic of idleness is not unknown to historians of work, especially in relation to the post Black Death crisis. For example, many historians, including John Hatcher, highlight the use of a rhetoric of idleness by elites in the period immediately after the Black Death.[22] The Black Death caused a significant demographic, economic and social change across Europe, which continued until at least the mid-fifteenth century. This led to emergency legislation across Europe to curb the rising cost of labour and slow the shifting society. Robert Braid has attempted to compile a framework of earlier legislation on which the ground-breaking Ordinance of Labourers may have been based.[23] Much of the material relating to the labour legislation has been discussed at length elsewhere by historians such as Chris Given-Wilson, Samuel Cohn, Mark Ormrod and Anthony Musson.[24] Simon Penn and Christopher Dyer have explored the enforcement of the labour legislation by examining the change in wages in the period after the Black Death.[25] These historians have all made significant inroads in viewing this legislation not just

[21] *The Work of Work: Servitude, Slavery and Labor in Medieval England*, eds. Allen J. Frantzen and Douglas Moffat (Glasgow: Cruithne Press, 1994), *The Problem of Labour in Fourteenth-Century England*, eds. James Bothwell, P. J. P. Goldberg and W. M. Ormrod (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 1998) and *The Middle Ages at Work: Practicing Labor in Late Medieval England*, eds. Kellie Robertson and Michael Uebel (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).
[22] John Hatcher, "Labour, Leisure and Economic Thought Before the Nineteenth Century," in *Past & Present* 160 (1998), 64-115.
[23] Robert Braid, "Behind the Ordinance of Labourers: Economic Regulation and Market Control in London before the Black Death," in *Journal of Legal History* 34 (2013), 3-30.
[24] For selected examples see Christopher J. Given-Wilson, "The Problem of Labour in the Context of the English Government," in *The Problem of Labour in Fourteenth-Century England*, eds. James Bothwell, P. J. P. Goldeberg and W. Mark Ormrod (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2000), 85-100; Samuel Cohn, "After the Black Death: Labour Legislation and Attitudes Towards Labour in Late-Medieval Western Europe," in *The Economic History Review* 60, no. 3 (2007), 457-85; W. M. Ormrod, "The English Government and the Black Death of 1348-49," in *England in the Fourteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1985 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. W. M. Ormrod (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1986), 175-88; Anthony J. Musson, "Reconstructing English Labor Laws: A Medieval Perspective," in *The Middle Ages at Work: Practicing Labor in Late Medieval England*, eds. Kellie Robertson and Michael Uebel (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 113-32; and Anthony Musson, *Medieval Law in Context: The Growth of Legal Consciousness from Magna Carta to the Peasants' Revolt* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).
[25] Simon A. C. Penn and Christopher Dyer, "Wages and Earnings in Late Medieval England: Evidence from the Enforcement of the Labour Laws," in *The Economic History Review* 43, no. 3 (1990): 356-376.

as government regulation but also as a product of the social and economic conditions of the time. All of the scholars mentioned above have contributed significantly to our understanding of the post Black Death labour crisis. However, while most mention in passing the 'malice of servants that were idle', none have truly considered the meaning of idleness in relation to the labour crisis. This thesis will address this lacuna in the historiography of late medieval labour while also highlighting the utility of a broad cultural approach to social and economic subjects. I believe it will introduce a new and important perspective to how historians view the culture of work in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century society.

Economic historians of medieval labour sometimes pay passing reference to the idleness of the workers in their studies of productivity. John Hatcher has completed some work into the view of productivity in the later Middle Ages, however, for the most part, his discussion of labour and leisure in the period is used as a comparative to his main focus: work and leisure in practice and in the economic thought of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[26] Scholars have also attempted to quantify productivity. Building on the pioneering work of E. H. Phelps Brown and Sheila V. Hopkins, R. C. Allen and J. L. Weisdorf have made some attempts at examining the industriousness of workers between 1300 and 1830.[27] Phelps Brown and Hopkins investigated the relationship between wages of builders and prices of consumables by fixing a 'basket of basic consumption goods' needed to survive. Allen and Weisdorf have pushed this data further by computing prices levels across time to understand how much work was required to survive at different points in the pre-industrial age.[28] What encompasses this non-work time is discussed under the guise of leisure.

So far we have introduced two areas of historiography which frame idleness as a negative, a sin or an agent of unproductivity. Alongside idleness, leisure is often placed as an antithesis of work. These concepts of work and leisure are often paired together by historians. Mavis Mate and Keith Thomas have both penned articles with

[26] Hatcher, "Labour, Leisure and Economic Thought," 64-115.
[27] E. H. Phelps Brown and Sheila V. Hopkins, "Seven Centuries of Prices of Consumables, Compared with Builders' Wage-Rates," in *Economica* 23, no. 92 (1956), 296-314 and R. C. Allen and J. L. Weisdorf, "Was there an 'Industrious Revolution' before the Industrial Revolution? An Empirical Exercise for England, c. 1300-1830," in *The Economic History Review* 64, no. 3 (2011), 715-29.
[28] Allen and Weisdorf, "Was there an 'Industrious Revolution," 715-29.

the titles 'Work and Leisure'.[29] However, leisure has been accepted by scholars as a constant and is rarely subjected to any real scrutiny. There have been five main approaches to the study of leisure in the late medieval period which will be discussed in more detail within the thesis itself: periodisation, anthropology, quantifying available leisure time, backward bending labour curves, and examining particular leisure pursuits or the pursuits of a certain section of society. Scholars, such as Peter Burke and John Hatcher, have tended to compare the late medieval period as part of pre-industrial society more broadly with post-industrial constructions of leisure rather than view it within its own social and cultural context.[30] Keith Thomas and George Foster both used anthropology to examine the construction of leisure in developing countries and applied these findings to the medieval and early-modern periods.[31] Foster's argument in particular is based on the theory of "the limited good": that peasant societies view resources and concepts as existing in finite amounts and therefore, for example, an increase in social status necessitates a decrease in the status of another. The argument even when applied to resources such as land is problematic and it requires peasants to view their society, or for example their vill, as entirely self contained, which in terms of medieval England is simply incorrect.

Christopher Dyer has attempted to quantify how much leisure time different sections of peasant society would have had access to before and after the Black Death, tying this with discussions of productivity noted above.[32] Those examining productivity also often mention the model of a backward-bending labour curve. This economic model, put forward in the context of the later Middle Ages by Gunnar Persson, states that as wages rise, workers prefer to work less for the same wages in

[29] Mavis Mate, "Work and Leisure," in *A Social History of England, 1200-1500*, eds. Rosemary Horrox and W. M. Ormrod (Cambridge: Cambridge Uni. Press, 2006), 276-92 and Keith Thomas, "Work and Leisure," in *Past & Present* 29 (1964), 50-66.
[30] Peter Burke, "The Invention of Leisure in Early Modern Europe," in *Past & Present*, 146 (1995), 136-50 and John Hatcher, " Labour, Leisure and Economic Thought," 64-115.
[31] Thomas, "Work and Leisure," 96-103 and George M. Foster, "Peasant Society and the Image of Limited Good," in *American Anthropologist* 67, no. 2 (1965), 293-315.
[32] Christopher Dyer, "Leisure Among the Peasantry in the Later Middle Ages," in *Il Tempo Libero, Economia e Società (Loisirs, Tiempo Libre, Freizeit), Secc. XIII-XVIII: Atti Della 'Ventiseiesima Settimana di Studi' 18-23 Aprile 1994*, ed. Simonetta Cavaciocchi (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1995), 295. See also Barbara Harvey, "Work and Festa Ferianda in Medieval Europe," in *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 23, no. 4 (1972), 289-308

order to spend an increased time at leisure.[33] Finally, much of the work on leisure has considered specific activities or concentrated solely on the leisure activities of the upper levels of society. For example, Maurice Keen has written on the experience of leisure pursuits such as hunting as conspicuous consumption among the nobility.[34] Compton Reeves has also written an overview of different games and activities in the Middle Ages.[35] While all these contributions are useful, there has been no critical examination of the conceptual meaning of leisure or non-work in the late medieval period.

This research seeks to understand how idleness was defined or understood in late medieval English society. While its position in the scheme of vices and virtues means that it carries an almost constant sense of sinfulness, it can be used and appropriated in a variety of discourses and ideologies: sin, labour and leisure to name but three. The late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth century is a point in history when contemporary perceptions of the concept of idleness are particularly evident. As a branch of the sin of sloth, idleness was familiar to the entire population. The seven deadly sins, part of the articles of the faith were required to be taught to all Christian people in England in the vernacular. The labour crisis of the post Black Death era pushed this rhetoric of sin into the temporal, legislative sphere. The Ordinance (1349) and Statute of Labourers (1351) were the first pieces of national labour legislation in English history and were justified by highlighting the supposed 'perceouse', *otium* or idleness of the labouring class. As such the concept of idleness in late medieval society cannot be viewed within just one discourse. Concentrating solely on idleness as a sin or as a social or economic issue would exclude the full understanding of what this concept meant to contemporaries.

I will aim to examine the concept of idleness through a social and cultural approach. This means that, as well as looking at the structural and economic changes that took place within society, I will also examine representations and perceptions of

[33] G. Persson, "Consumption, Labour and Leisure in the Late Middle Ages," in *Manger et Boire au Moyen Age*, ed. Denis Menjot (Nice: Les Belles Lettres, 1984), 211-23.
[34] Maurice Keen, "Nobles' Leisure: Jousting, Hunting and Hawking," in *Il Tempo Libero, Economia e Società (Loisirs, Tiempo Libre, Freizeit), Secc. XIII-XVIII: Atti Della 'Ventiseiesima Settimana di Studi' 18-23 Aprile 1994*, ed. Simonetta Cavaciocchi (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1995), 307-22.
[35] Compton Reeves, *Pleasures and Pastimes in Medieval England* (Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd, 1995).

idleness by those participating actively or passively in the changes that occurred. The term culture in the context of this discussion is based on Peter Burke's definition of 'a system of shared meanings, attitudes and values, and the symbolic forms (performances, artefacts) in which they are expressed or embodied'.[36] While culture is shared it is not necessarily always perceived uniformly. Culture or more specifically a cultural concept is linked with the context in which we find it. For example, a discussion of idleness may have different resonances in a treatise on the seven deadly sins than it does in a piece of legislation against begging. The appropriation of the concept into different discourses highlights its multi-dimensional meanings. My approach to idleness and sloth has been influenced by Richard Newhauser's call for a 'conceptual history' of the seven deadly sins 'not as predetermined, set pieces for rote utilization, but as culturally constructed ideas partially shaped by the environments and functions in which they participate as well as by the individual choices of the thinkers in whose work they are inscribed'.[37] Therefore, I will explore how the concept of idleness varied between different social and cultural contexts, such as ideologies surrounding sin, work and leisure. With this in mind, we must examine the concept across a variety of historical areas.

Although the post Black Death labour legislation particularly notes the supposed idleness of workers, previous discussion has highlighted that the social and cultural concept of idleness has been largely absent in considerations of sin, work and leisure in this period. By opening up this concept we will be able to attain a new perspective on this point in history. The absence of the social and cultural concept of idleness in the historiography of sin, work and leisure may be partly methodological. How does one examine an activity, which by its nature is the absence of action. However, as Jeremy Goldberg argues, 'the medievalist may be hampered by the

[36] Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London: Temple Smith, 1978), 270.
[37] Richard Newhauser, "Introduction: Cultural Construction and the Vices," in *The Seven Deadly Sins: From Communities to Individuals*, ed. Richard Newhauser (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 1. Newhauser has published extensively on the seven deadly sins. For example, Richard Newhauser, *The Treatise on Vices and Virtues in Latin and the Vernacular* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1993), *In the Garden of Evil: The Vices and Culture in the Middle Ages*, ed. Richard Newhauser (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies Press, 2005), Richard Newhauser, *The Early History of Greed: The Sin of Avarice in Early Medieval Thought and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge Uni. Press, 2005), *The Seven Deadly Sins: From Communities to Individuals*, ed. Richard Newhauser (Leiden: Brill, 2007), Richard Newhauser, *Sin: Essays on the Moral Tradition in the Western Middle Ages* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007) and *Sin in Medieval and Early Modern Culture: The Tradition of the Seven Deadly Sins*, eds. Richard Newhauser and Susan J. Ridyard (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2012).

paucity of evidence, but that need not prevent the question from being posed'.[38] Examining the absence of something rather than the thing itself offers us a different perspective. By asking questions, even from the absent, historians may get answers which they were not expecting. In order to penetrate the multiple dimensions of idleness – as a sin, as an economic disrupter and as a social issue – our examination will revolve around sloth, work and leisure in late medieval society. However, it would be anachronistic to begin our examination with modern definitions of these words. Therefore my research will rely heavily on the use of lexicography to penetrate the relevant vocabulary in grasping how contemporaries identified the concepts of idleness, work and leisure. Lexicography creates a more nuanced understanding of concepts to uncover the resonances that a lexicon held for contemporaries. For the data set of this lexicographical examination I shall use the *Middle English Dictionary* (*MED*).

As we have seen there is not one conclusive, encompassing discourse that we can refer to in our understanding of idleness. Therefore, once I have identified the constructed meanings of my concepts through lexicography, it will be necessary to examine a wide variety of source material, both administrative and literary. By accessing both, the historian is capable of examining concepts in a multi-facetted way, which is closer to how contemporaries viewed them. Literary texts may not reflect reality but are useful to the historian as, in James Davis' words, a 'barometer of past mentalities'.[39] Devotional material such as pastoralia, devotional poetry and artwork will allow us to view idleness as a theological or moral concept. This is how the Church constructed the image of sloth for the lay community to process and recognise. Vernacular literature such as poetry, romances, lyrics, conduct literature and drama is also steeped in moral imagery and purpose but will also give a greater insight into how idleness was envisaged outside of the specific discourse of sin. In order to examine a more secular representation of the concept, the thesis will engage with administrative records. These include the Mayor's court of London, records of the Sessions of Labourers and of the Peace, village by-laws, manorial court records, the London Letter Books and the Parliament Rolls. These records will allow us to

[38] P. J. P. Goldberg, "Childhood and Gender in Later Medieval England," in *Viator* 39, no. 1 (2008), 251.
[39] James Davis, "Baking for the Common Good: A Reassessment of the Assize of Bread in Medieval England," in *The Economic History Review* 57, no. 3 (2004), 482.

understand how idleness was understood in social and legal practice. I will examine all these sources through textual analysis in order to ascertain the constructed concepts of idleness, work and leisure. This will allow me to identify how those who created and consumed these sources perceived of idleness. This wide approach to source material will allow me to view the concept of idleness and the perceptions of idle behaviour from a wide variety of perspectives.

By using these sources and building upon the very mature areas of scholarship discussed above, I aim to understand how idleness was defined or understood in late medieval English society. Catherine Batt has discussed the image of sloth within Henry, Duke of Lancaster's *Le Livre de Seyntz Medicines*. She describes sloth as 'this most confusingly roomy of sins', highlighting sloth's multifaceted nature.[40] The first two chapters of the thesis consider the constructed ideas of sloth and work in late medieval culture by examining descriptions of sloth in devotional or pastoral material and a lexicographical examination of the idea of work in late medieval culture respectively. These two chapters will aim to understand how literary evidence framed these two concepts and to grasp the nuances of what they meant to contemporary audiences. Chapter one will attempt to ascertain how sloth was presented by moralists in the fourteenth century. It will ask what this presentation of a vice in pastoral material can tell us about the values placed on activity and inactivity in the period. Chapter two will centre on a lexicographical examination of the idea of work in late medieval culture. It will explore how occupation was presented and differentiated in the fourteenth century.

Once I have ascertained how society perceived sloth and work, the rest of my thesis will aim to understand how these concepts were practically employed and engaged with by different groups. Chapter three will examine these constructions within the framework of government legislation and enforcement. It will concentrate on the post Black Death labour crisis and the regulation of labour and idleness through legislation. It will examine a variety of perspectives on what the legislation refers to as idle behaviour, including the perspectives of landowners and the

[40] Catherine Batt, "Sloth and the Penitential Self in Henry, Duke of Lancaster's *Le Livre de Seyntz Medicines* / The Book of Holy Medicines," in *Leeds Studies in English* 41 (2010), 27.

labourers themselves. The chapter will seek to ascertain how, in light of this post-Black Death labour legislation, idleness and work related to each other within society, it will ask how different members of the community perceived these concepts in a time of labour crisis.

The final chapters of the thesis will cover the concept of non-work. Chapter four considers how idleness affects a person's standing within the community. Vagrants tended to attract mistrust due to their lack of quantifiable activity but the poor were viewed as deserving of compassion and charity. Children and the elderly did not partake in physical labour due to their place in the lifecycle. The chapter will ask how those who do not fit the ideal image of the labourer, established in chapter two, were viewed. The final chapter of my thesis introduces the concept of leisure and acceptable inactivity. While the proceeding chapters concentrated on the issues relating to inactivity and unproductiveness, there are types of inactivity that were allowed and are even encouraged by society, such as sleep, rest and certain non-work pursuits. Life does not consist entirely of occupation and therefore this chapter will seek to ascertain how periods of non-work fit with the concept of idleness in the late medieval period.

Chapter 1

'Slouthe ys my name, off custom callyd Ydelnesse'
Identifying Sloth in Middle English Devotional Discourse

In order to understand the concept of idleness in late medieval society it is first important to grasp the concept of sloth in late medieval devotional discourse. In 1215, Innocent III held the Fourth Lateran Council. The given purpose of the council was 'to eradicate vices and to plant virtues, to correct faults and to reform morals'.[1] This eradication of vices and correction of faults included the suppression of the heretical Cathars, as well as maintaining the liberty of the Church from the encroachment of secular powers. To realise this objective the Lateran Council aimed to reinforce higher educational and moral standards of the clergy.[2] Without properly educated and knowledgeable clerics, laymen and women could not receive consistent and correct service from their pastors. Along with this reinforcement of clerical education there was also an emphasis on the proper administration of the sacraments. All men and women of the age of discretion were to confess their sins once a year so that they could partake in the sacrament of the Eucharist at Easter. Participation in confession cleansed the body and soul allowing the appropriate sinless state to receive the body and blood of Jesus Christ through the Eucharist. In order to participate in confession, men and women needed to be able to discern right from wrong in line with Christian teaching. The council reinforced the importance of this decree by asking that it was made known to all members of Christendom: 'Let this salutary decree be frequently published in churches, so that nobody may find the pretence of an excuse in the blindness of ignorance'.[3]

This decree in particular had extensive effects on the devotional writing that emerged in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Manuals on pastoral care and the

[1] *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*, ed. J. P. Migne (Turnholti, Brepols 1855), 216: 824.
[2] *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman P. Tanner (Washington DC: Georgetown Uni. Press, 1990), 1: 240-2.
[3] Ibid, 1: 245.

sacrament of confession flourished. *Pastoralia* became a defined genre of writing across Europe.[4] These texts outlined and expounded the articles of faith including the creed, the Ten Commandments, the seven virtues and seven vices. Pastoral manuals included lists of questions to be asked at confession to ensure that sin was thoroughly drawn out and appropriate penance prescribed.[5] In 1281, Council of Lambeth led by Archbishop Pecham decreed that these articles should be taught in the vernacular to all Christians in England. This was reinforced when Archbishop Thoresby ordered a vernacular translation of the constitutions of the Council of Lambeth, thereafter known as *The Lay Folk's Catechism*, in the middle of the fourteenth century.[6] Thus, the heptad of vices secured an important place in the pastoral teachings of the English Church. This chapter considers how the sin of sloth was presented to the Christian community by examining wall paintings, treatises on sin, pastoral handbooks and devotional writing.

Before we engage with the late medieval conception of the sloth it is important to understand how the seven deadly sins became standardised. Richard Newhauser correctly argues that the early presentation of the vices was 'a generally unsystematic gathering of sinful qualities which were considered to lead to the death of the soul'.[7] This 'gathering' began to take form with the emergence of the Egyptian hermits in the third century and the asceticism inspired by them. It is from these colonies of hermits that the first collection of capital sins began to emerge. Evagrius Ponticus developed what can be identified as the first ordering of vices in the second half of the fourth century. The list of eight vices that Evagrius created was focused on the temptations to the ascetic life, rather than the seven deadly sins applicable to all, as they were presented by the later Middle Ages.[8] Evagrius believed that the control of all passions would purify the soul and help it reach the upper realms of

[4] Ronald J. Shrewsbury, "Preaching and pastoral care in the Middle Ages," in *A Companion to Pastoral Care in the Late Middle Ages: 1200-1500*, ed. Ronald J. Stansbury (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 35.
[5] John Mirc, *Instructions for Parish Priests*, ed. Edward Peacock, EETS OS 31 (London: Kegan Paul Trench Trübner, 1902).
[6] *The Lay Folks' Catechism, or The English and Latin Versions of Archbishop Thoresby's Instruction for the People: Together with a Wycliffite Adaption of the Same, and the Corresponding Canons of the Council of Lambeth,* eds. Thomas F. Simmons and Henry E. Nolloth (London: Kegan Paul Trench Trübner, 1901), 87.
[7] Richard Newhauser, *Sin: Essays on the Moral Tradition in the Western Middle Ages* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 422.
[8] Owen Chadwick, *John Cassian* (Cambridge: Cambridge Uni. Press, 1968), 89.

contemplation.[9] These passions were listed as greed, lust, avarice, sadness, anger, *accidie*, vainglory, and pride.[10] *Accidie* represented tiredness and within the context of the ascetic life it reflected a 'restless discouragement' that would prevent the reader from having the energy to engage in prayer and devotion.[11]

The fourth/fifth-century theologian, John Cassian retained Evagrius' list except for transposing the positions of anger and sadness:

> First, Gluttony or the pleasures of the palate; secondly, Fornication; thirdly, Covetousness, which means Avarice, or, as it may more properly be called, the love of money; fourthly, Anger; fifthly, Dejection; sixthly, Accidie, which is heaviness or weariness of heart; seventhly, kenodoxia which means foolish or vain glory; eighthly, Pride.[12]

Cassian is writing to introduce the world of asceticism to a cenobitic audience, beyond the Egyptian hermits to whom Evagrius's work was aimed. Gluttony, with its associations with fasting and reserve, was a solid, practical base from which to begin the ascetic journey. He argued that 'it is impossible for a full belly to make trial of the combat of the inner man: nor is he worthy to be tried in harder battles, who can be overcome in a slight skirmish.'[13] For Cassian, it is impossible to deal with the inner battle of contemplation if one is still corrupted by the outward one. *Accidie* was seen to disturb the meditation at particular times of the day, such as the sixth hour, when the meditative begins to tire and become distracted.[14] He prescribed manual activity to overcome the vice in order to engage the mind and prevent distraction.[15] At a time when eloquence and theory were the endeavour of theologians, Cassian presented his writing as a product of experience.[16] At the time of writing, Cassian was not himself in a state of enclosure or a hermitage. Richard

[9] Newhauser, *Sin: Essays on the Moral Tradition,* 423.
[10] In Latin the vices are listed as *gula*, *luxuria*, *avaritia*, *tristita*, *ira*, *accidia*, *cenodoxia* and *superbia*. An extant copy of *Tractatus De Vitiis Quae Opposite Sunt Virtutibus* includes Envy within Evagrius' list. This is the only time Evagrius could be seen to break his octave so it is likely the inclusion of Envy may be due to the work of a later scribe after the emergence of Gregory's list.
[11] Columba Stewart, "Evagrius Ponticus and the 'Eight Generic Logismoi'" in *The Garden of Evil*, ed. Richard Newhauser (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2005), 31.
[12] John Cassian, *The Institutes*, ed. Boniface Ramsey (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), book 5.
[13] Ibid, book 5.
[14] Ibid, book 10.
[15] Stewart, "Evagrius Ponticus," 32.
[16] Richard J. Goodrich, *Contextualizing Cassian: Aristocrats, Asceticism, and Reformation in Fifth-Century Gaul* (Oxford: Oxford Uni. Press, 2007), 6.

Goodrich argues that Cassian's writing and work were deeply influenced by the wishes and needs of 'his fellow Gallic aristocrats' interested in the burgeoning areas of Christian thought and the practicalities of entering an enclosed life.[17] Even in their first century of being, the deadly or capital sins had evolved to reflect the changing temporal as well as spiritual needs of their audience.

Cassian's list of eight sins was displaced by Gregory the Great's heptad in the sixth century. Gregory's list, while written for a monastic audience, became popular with the secular clergy. While Cassian's list concentrated far more stringently on the early ascetic life, Gregory's represented the social and economic practicalities of his time. Vainglory and pride, and melancholy and *accidie* were merged, envy was introduced to the list, pride, the sin of Lucifer, was brought to the forefront and the corporal sins were placed at the end.[18] The list became *Superbia*, *Invidia*, *Ira*, *Avaritia*, *Acedia*, *Gula*, *Luxuria* or SIIAAGL. The list, written after Gregory became Pope (*c*. 590), can be seen to represent his own changing position in society, his involvement in temporal, socially influenced concerns and the impact this made on his spiritual life. This ordering of sins, although a common model, was never standardised and remained flexible throughout the Middle Ages. For example, by the middle of the fourteenth century, *The Lay Folk's Catechism* presents sloth as the sixth sin while Richard Lavynham's *A Litil Tretys on the Seven Deadly Sins* places it as fifth in the mid-fifteenth century.[19]

The active and contemplative lives were major theological themes across the entire medieval period. Gregory the Great believed that it was possible and important for a person to find God in both contemplative and active practices. For Gregory the contemplative, spiritual world, while considerably closer to God, did not eclipse the good works of the outer, temporal world. He strove for a balance of an active life of good works but without the negative distractions that draw one from the ladder of contemplation. These distractions were the vices, and Gregory believed the virtues needed to be expressed outwardly in order to be of true worth to the soul. When he

[17] Ibid, 1.
[18] Chadwick, *John Cassian*, 95.
[19] *The Lay Folks' Catechism*, 94 and Lavynham, *A Litil Tretys*, 15-9.

became Pope, he wrote of the difficulties of finding this balance in his *Moralia* on Job.[20] Using the image of the vices as an army, seen also in Cassian, Gregory places active fighting as necessary in order to defeat this army of vices.[21] The devil, through the vices, is seen to occupy the sinner's body. In the case of sloth, the sinner is left defenceless, as his inactive body is open to the devil's advances.[22]

While the framework and organisation of the sins changed between the fourth and seventh century, with Lateran IV the sins underwent a significant change in audience. The heptad was incorporated into pastoral care for all Christians rather than solely serving the needs of monastic orders. Writings on the vices were translated into vernacular languages making them accessible to those who were not literate in Latin. This allowed them a much greater audience than they had previously received. Morton Bloomfield has argued that this growth in audience correlated with the sins' increased articulation of the socio-economic concerns of the period.[23] From the eleventh century until approximately the early-fourteenth century, the economy of medieval Europe was in expansion.[24] This expansion encompassed a major growth in population, a development of the economy, expanding trade links and an increase in urban development.[25] Bloomfield argues that the representation of sins such as avarice and pride were thought to reflect the growing economy and the social changes this brought with it. While the accuracy of such statements will be considered throughout the thesis as whole, this chapter will go some way to examining how sloth is presented as residing within this new pastoral audience outside monastic orders. It will explore what vernacular pastoralia, devotional writing and visual depictions of the sins tell us anything of how the sin of sloth was performed in secular society.

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[20] G. R. Evans, *The Thought of Gregory the Great* (Cambridge: Cambridge Uni. Press, 1986), 107.
[21] Ibid, 10 and Chadwick, *John Cassian*, 94.
[22] *Jacob's Well: An English Treatise on the Cleansing of Man's Conscience*, ed. Arthur Brandeis, EETS OS 115 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1900), 114.
[23] Morton Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins: An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept, with Special Reference to Medieval English Literature* (East Lansing: Michigan State Uni. Press, 1967), 210.
[24] The word approximately is important here as there is considerable debate as to when this period of expansion ended. Some place it at the end of the thirteenth century, some with the agrarian crisis of the 1310s and 20s, others with the great mortality of the Black Death and some with the economic contraction of the mid fifteenth century. See Edward Miller and John Hatcher, *Medieval England: Rural Society and Economic Change 1086-1348* (London: Longman, 1978), xiv and Steven A. Epstein, *An Economic and Social History of Later Medieval Europe, 1000-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge Uni. Press, 2009), 275.
[25] Miller and Hatcher, *Medieval England*.

While the presentation of the sins may situate them in their contemporary social context, the primary role of treatises on vices was to care for the souls of the community. A thorough understanding of the articles of the faith was viewed as integral to preservation of the soul and ensuring entrance to paradise. *The Lay Folk's Catechism* articulates this point stating 'þat euery man ow to know to fle and forsake. For noman may fle hem; but he know hem'.[26] In order to prevent the spread of sin within society, each person needed knowledge of its various forms and how it may be prevented. The majority of these devotional texts are focused on preparing the clergy and laity for their defence against sin as well as giving them the tools to correctly administer and receive shrift. The idea of protection from sin through knowledge of it is particularly important when we look at sloth. *Handlyng Synne* written by Robert Mannyng of Brunne in 1303, describes the danger of sloth and the importance of knowledge in counteracting its symptom of despondency:

> Whan a man ys slogh & wyle nat do
> Þat holy cherche techyþ hym vnto,
> Aȝens god he ys froward. And yn hys synne he wexyþ hard.
> Þan puttyþ þe fend yn hys þoght
> Þat hys synne ys lytyl or noght.
> And whan tyme were mercy kalle,
> Yn wanhope he makþ hym falle.
> And al ys þys for sloghþehede,
> Whan man betyme wyle haue no drede.[27]

In order to ensure that sins can be easily identified by both confessor and sinner, the Church employed a number of narrative and didactic strategies. They separated each vice into groups of lesser sins, used animal imagery to represent morality and sin, personified the sins as recognisable characters in the community and connected each sin with external symptoms and disease.

[26] *The Lay Folks' Catechism*, 87.
[27] Robert Mannyng of Brunne, *Handlyng Synne*, ed. Idelle Sullens (Binghamton: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1983), 114.

By far the most influential piece of pastoralia in relation to the seven deadly sins is the Old French *Somme le Roi* also known as the *Somme des Vices et des Vertus* (1279). There are over 80 extant manuscript copies of the *Somme le Roi*, highlighting its popularity throughout the later Middle Ages.[28] This Old French treatise was the basis for a number of Middle English writings on the seven deadly sins, such as *Ayenbite of Inwyt* (*c*. 1340), *The Book of Vices and Virtues* (*c*. 1400) and *Jacob's Well* (*c*. 1440). The *Somme le Roi* tradition tends to follow one main narrative and didactic strategy. Each of the seven deadly sins is made up of a number of branches or lesser sins. This is not unique to the *Somme le Roi* tradition as the classification of the sins into separate components goes back to Cassian, where they would have been used to better understand and identify the temptations to religious life.[29] This process of categorisation remained prominent throughout the Middle Ages and gained a new importance with pastoral care and reinforcement of confession after Lateran IV. Lateran IV presents the priest as a healer through the sacrament of confession and prescription of penance: 'Let him carefully inquire the circumstances of both the sinner and the sin, so that he may prudently discern what sort of advice he ought to give and what remedy to apply, using various means to heal the sick person'.[30] Recognising the exact circumstances was of the upmost importance so the correct penance could be prescribed. However, while categorisation was implemented throughout this period, the species of sins varies from text to text. These lists of branches are less defined or systematic than the heptad itself. They range in number, are sometimes grouped together and reflect each author's own idea and impression of what the sins were supposed to reflect. *The Lay Folk's Catechism* contains three main branches of sloth: 'latsumnesse' [delay], 'dulnesse or heuynesse of hert' and 'ydelship'.[31] *Jacob's Well*, A*yenbite of Inwyt* and *The Book of Vices and Virtues* as part of the *Somme le Roi* tradition, carry similar, although not identical, lists of eighteen branches.

Cordelia Beattie in her analysis of the representation of single women in devotional treatises on the sin of lust has argued that the ordering of branches in

[28] W. Nelson Francis, "The Original of the Ayenbite of Inwyt," in *Proceedings of the Modern Languages Association of America* 52, no. 3 (1937), 893.
[29] Siegfried Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Chapel Hill: Uni. Of North Carolina Press, 1960), 79.
[30] *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 1: 245.
[31] *The Lay Folks' Catechism*, 94.

Jacob's Well categorises the branches of lust from least to most sinful.[32] However, I am not persuaded to make a similar comment about sloth. While there is a rationale in the ordering of sloth's branches it does not present a hierarchy of sinfulness as Beattie identifies with lust. *Jacob's Well* contains eighteen different branches of sloth, divided into three categories: sins that hinder a man from beginning well, sins that hinder a man from amending his bad life and those that bring a man to an evil end.[33] As such the development of sloth reflects the developmental nature seen in the seven deadly sins as a whole. By engaging with one sin, the sinner may find himself engulfed in a spiralling progression of sinfulness. It is not that the later sins reflect a higher level of sinfulness but rather that they are likely to have been preceded by other sinful actions. Richard Lavynham's *Litil Tretys on the Seven Deadly Sins* (mid-fifteenth century) separates sloth into eight sins.[34] These are similar to the sins found in the *Somme le Roi* tradition but they have been reworked in order to form a far more concise and economical list than those of *Ayenbite of Inwyt* and *Jacob's Well*. This simplified list may suggest that Lavynham's *Litil Tretys* is directed towards a less scholarly audience, where a more generalised image of sloth will suffice for identifying the sin. For the purposes of exploring the narrative strategies of sloth, I have formed a list of ten branches, which encompass the various daughter sins of the sin of sloth: sluggishness, idleness, delaying, negligence, growing slack, tenderness, cowardice, hypocrisy, wanhope and unrepentance (see fig. 1). These reflect the variety of meanings rather than the names of branches of sloth. However, the classification of sloth into branches is not the only narrative and didactic strategy at work within these sources.

[32] Cordelia Beattie, *Medieval Single Women: The Politics of Social Classification in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford Uni. Press, 2007), 41.
[33] Branches which hinder a good life: sluggishness, tenderness of flesh, idleness, heaviness of heart, hardness of heart and cowardice. Branches which hinder a man from amending his bad life: delaying, recklessness/negligence, forgetfulness, feint heart, enfeeblement of will and growing slack. Branches which bring a man to an evil end: un-buxomness, impatience, grudging, heaviness, languor and wanhope.
[34] Sluggynesse, tendyrheed, idilnesse, rechileshed, dylayng, arwnesse, wanhope and heuynesse.

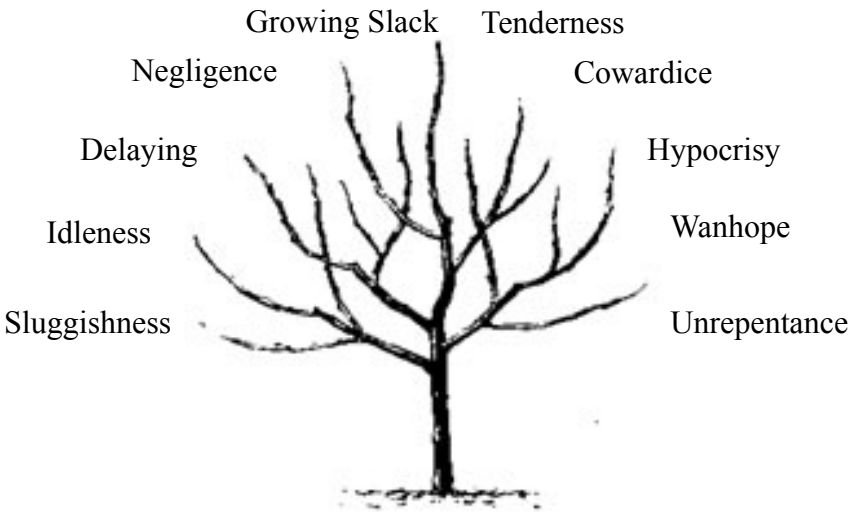

Figure 1: Branches of Sloth

Handlyng Synne is another influential treatise on the vices. Instead of simply classifying and categorising the sins as per the *Somme le Roi* tradition, approximately half of *Handlyng Synne* is made up of exempla, far more than other treatise on the vices. This collection of ready-made exempla rendered *Handlyng Synne* a useful source for sermon writers.[35] Many of the treaties on the vices and virtues would have permeated to the lay community through exempla in sermons, shrift and visual imagery within the church, which will be considered below. The higher levels in society may also have had access to personal confessors and priests who would guide their devotion and theological understanding.[36] To successfully disseminate this information to the masses, recognisable visual and literary images were extremely important. Animal imagery was used as a pedagogic device from pre-Christian times onwards. It was appropriated by Christianity and elucidated in texts such as Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies* (*c*. early-seventh century).[37] These allegories were based on the belief that nature and with it the animal kingdom were

[35] Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth*, 75 and Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne*, xiii.
[36] Richard Newhauser, "Understanding Sin: Recent Scholarship and the Capital Vices," in *Sin in Medieval and Early Modern Culture: The Tradition of the Seven Deadly Sins*, eds. Richard G. Newhauser and Susan J. Ridyard (York, York Medieval Press, 2012), 5.
[37] *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, eds. Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach, and Oliver Berghof (Cambridge: Cambridge Uni. Press, 2006).

created by God to provide humanity with examples of proper conduct and to provide moral instruction. While they appeared in sermons and devotional writing throughout the Middle Ages, by the high medieval period these animal allegories developed into Bestiaries, books that collected these allegories in one, usually illustrated, volume. As such the animal imagery was also utilised to warn of the dangers of sinful behaviour. Personifications of sloth also served to illuminate the sin in a way that was directly relatable to the community and to society as a whole. By seeing the sin as a member of their community, men and women would be better equipped to recognise slothful behaviour in themselves. While positioned in a temporal landscape, images of morality in both literature and art aimed to aid the audience in reflecting on their own spiritual condition.[38]

The question of whether sloth is a spiritually or temporally enacted sin has been approached by the literary scholar Helmut Hatzfeld. He has referred to *acedia* as 'spiritual sloth', positioning sloth as temporal but also the primary vice.[39] He suggests that *acedia* reflects an older, monastic and spiritual vice, placing sloth as more recent and reflecting more secular, lay concerns. However, the concept is far more nuanced than this. *Acedia* only appears within Middle English devotional treatises as a heading for sections on sloth, not in the discussion of the sin itself. For example, *Jacob's Well* begins chapter 16 with the title '*De Accidia*' but refers to the sin as 'slowthe' for the rest of the chapter.[40] This may be due to *acedia* remaining as the Latin term for the vice while sloth is the Middle English translation. It could be argued that the concept of sloth is different than that of *acedia*. For example, *Ayenbite of Inwyt* lists the fourth vice as 'sleauþe þet me clepeþ ine clergie: accidye'. Latin texts were by their nature focused on a religious or clerical audience and therefore on the more traditional view of contemplative and spiritually focused *acedia*. The vernacular treatises on the other hand were meant to reach those whose concerns were more temporal: secular clergy and literate pious laity. The narrative strategies employed by the pastoralia discussed below go some way to help us

[38] A. Caiger-Smith, *English Medieval Mural Paintings* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 44.
[39] Helmut A. Hatzfeld, "Linguistic Investigation of Old French High Spirituality," in *Proceedings of the Modern Languages Association of America* 61, no. 2 (1946), 346.
[40] *Jacob's Well*, 103.

discern whether sloth does in fact reflect a change in the theological concept as well as a move to the vernacular.

Jacob's Well defines 'slawthe' as 'lothe for lyiflode bodyly ouþer for lyfliflode gostly'.[41] The sin can be both temporal and spiritual. 'Unlusty' is a common term used to describe the insipid and spiritless character of the slothful. Lavynham's *A Litil Tretys* defines sloth as 'a vice which is rotyd in hym þt is vnlusty of him sylf to serue god or þe world desyryng noon oþer blisse but only esse'.[42] A sermon on the seven deadly sins in MS Royal 18B describes sloth as a sinner's concentration on worldly rather than spiritual affairs: 'a man ȝeueþ hym in is occupacion velnyȝ all to þe world and lytill or els noþinge to-Godward'.[43] This is a common theme across fourteenth- and fifteenth-century devotional literature. The sin manifests itself in the non-adherence to devotional practices such as learning prayers: 'Ful slogh he ys þat wyle nat lere / yche frame blessed preyere'.[44] These devotional activities which the slothful are seen to neglect usually include attendance of mass and other services within the church, learning prayers, confessing sin and engaging in the faith. Attention is paid in particular to non-attendance on Sundays and other holy days. The presentation of sloth is multitudinous and multifaceted. By looking at the constituent branches of sloth together with the other didactic strategies used by the Church a more harmonious image may be discerned. Each branch or image carries its own value and resonances, building a nuanced image of sloth in the mind of medieval Christians.

Sluggishness

Sluggishness is described as a sin that prevents a man from beginning well. It reflects the act of being sluggish or slow in the love of God, the fulfilment of the articles of the faith, in getting out of bed, and in their own labour, work or craft. Sluggishness is commonly portrayed in the visual and literary images of sloth by the sleeping figure who does not rise for mass.[45] This is reinforced in the animal imagery of sloth, with the slothful being compared to bears and to pigs, two animals

[41] *Jacob's Well*, 103.
[42] Lavynham, *A Litil Tretys*, 15.
[43] *Middle English Sermons*, ed. Woodburn O. Ross, EETS OS 209 (London: Oxford Uni. Press, 1940), 53.
[44] Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne*, 107.
[45] *Jacob's Well*, 103.

contemporarily known for their sluggish behaviour. In the *Secreta Secretorum* 'Man ys hardy as a lyon … and sleuthfull as Bere'.[46] Bears were known for remaining in their caves for the winter, forty days for males and up to four months for females.[47] In the lyric 'Mercy Passes All Things' (*c*. 1400) the slothful are described as sleeping 'as swolle swyn in lake'.[48] The pig himself is drowsy due to overindulging in food which is indicated by his swollen body. The 'lake' which is mentioned is unlikely to be a body of water but a pig sty or pit where the pig lies and sleeps.[49] The pig wallowing in its dirt reflects the slothful person sluggish in bed and the bodily filth that an overused bed may hold. It is likely that this filth also refers to the poisonous and foul essence of sin itself, overwhelming the virtue of the body. These images reinforce the traditional view of sluggish behaviour as connected with inactivity and sleep. *Jacob's Well* describes the behaviour of the sluggard: 'whan þou castyth þe all to lyen longe in þi bed, & whanne þou louyst to sytten stylle & to don nouȝt ellys, to lenyn on þin elbowe, to lyen on-long on þi o syde; whan þou omittyst & leuyst þi prayerys vnsayd.'[50] It then goes on to include different ways in which one may be sluggish in religious devotion such as not taking the time to learn the articles of the faith.

This image of the sluggard lying long in bed is usually connected with the sinner's preference for sleep rather than attending church. *A Litil Tretys on the Seven Deadly Sins* builds on the description of sluggishness given in *Jacob's Well*, including 'late comynge to þe seruyse of god, hauyng no sauyr in bedis byddyng, ne no deuocion in matynys heryng & masse'.[51] This disregard for devotional activities is what makes sluggishness such a contemptible vice. In William Langland's late fourteenth-century devotional poem *Piers Plowman*, the graphic description of the personified Sloth is representative of his lifestyle: 'Sleuthe al byslobered, with two

[46] *Three Prose Versions of the Secreta Secretorum*, ed. Robert Steele, EETS ES 74 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1898), 104.
[47] "Bear", *The Medieval Bestiary*, accessed Feb 12, 2015, http://bestiary.ca/beasts/beast171.htm.
[48] "Mercy Passes All Things" in *Religious Lyrics of the Fourteenth Century*, ed. Carleton Brown (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 130.
[49] *Middle English Dictionary*. 24 vols. (Ann Arbor: Uni. of Michigan Press, 1952-2001) Digital Edition at <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/> , s.v. "lake (n.1)".
[50] *Jacob's Well*, 103.
[51] Lavynham, *A Litil Tretys*, 16.

slimed yes [eyes]'.[52] The 'byslobered' description of Sloth also reflects his having just awoken. This image of Sloth as a slumberer is reinforced, for if Sloth attempts to give confession standing up he falls back asleep and therefore needs to sit or kneel to do so.[53] John Mirc's *Instructions for Parish Priests* (early-fifteenth century) sheds some light on Sloth's standing position. 'No none in chyrche stonde schal, / Ne lene to pyler ny to wal, / But fayre on kneus þey schule hem sette, / Knelynge doun vp on the flette'.[54] When a person is standing they are not fully engaging and showing reverence to God. When Sloth is standing he is not engaged in devotion and falls asleep. *Instructions for Parish Priests* goes on to comment that men and women should kneel when making confession. However, the action of sleeping itself conflicts with the attention and engagement which should be aimed at God. *Instructions for Parish Priests* asks: 'Haste þow be slowe for to here / Goddes serues when tyme were? / Hast þou come to chyrche late / And spoken of synne by þe gate?'[55]

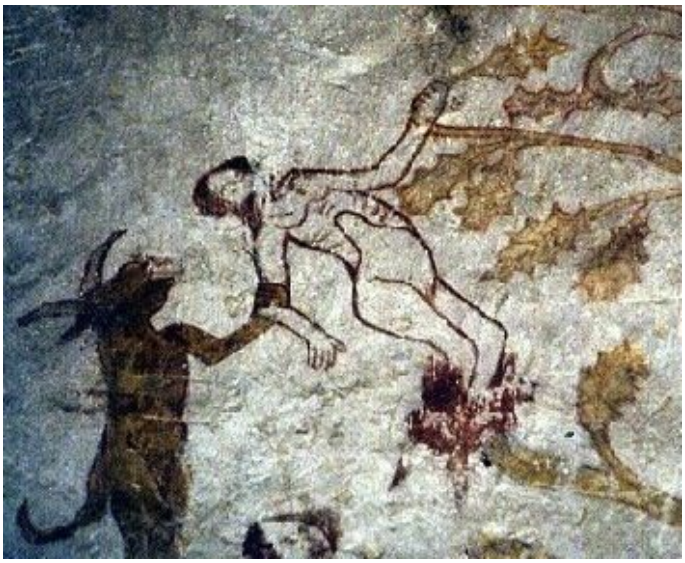

Figure 2: The Seven Deadly Sins, Cranborne, Dorset (c. 1400)[56]

This depiction of sloth is repeated in visual imagery, where sloth tends to be shown as a reclining figure. In an early-fifteenth-century wall painting (fig. 2) in Cranborne, Dorset, the figure of sloth reclines from the branches of the Tree of

[52] William Langland, *Piers Plowman: A Parallel-Text Edition of the A, B, C and Z Versions*, ed. A. V. C. Schmidt (London: Longman, 1995), 1: C, 231.
[53] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 1: C, 231.
[54] Mirc, *Instructions for Parish Priests*, 9.
[55] Ibid, 36.
[56] "Cranborne, Dorset: The Seven Deadly Sins, c. 1400," *Medieval Wall Painting in the English Parish Church*, 2014, accessed Dec. 3, 2014, http://www.paintedchurch.org/cranb7ds.htm

Vices.[57] The figure is aided in their repose by a horned demon, who grasps their arm and possibly pulls them back further. Another tree motif (fig. 3 & 4), at Crostwight in Norfolk (*c*. 1400) shows sloth leaning his head on his hand.[58] This figure is labelled as *soccordia*, meaning sluggishness or negligence, another branch of sloth. The fifteenth-century mural in Hessett, Suffolk also represents sloth as lying back with lethargy.[59] *The Pricke of Conscience* suggests that 'for syn es swa hevy and swa harde, / þat it draws þe saul ay dunwarde; / until payn and penance had wasted þat syn / þe saul may never tulle heaven'.[60] While all sins are heavy, this is particularly true with the sin of sloth. This heaviness is what leads a man to stay in bed instead of rising in the morning for mass. Sluggishness shares considerable imagery with what *Ayenbite of Inwyt* and *The Book of Vices and Virtues* call heaviness: a physical preference for inactivity and sleep.[61] *Ayenbite of Inwyt* uses 'heaviness' to describe a physical heaviness of the body which makes man 'loueþ but to ligge and resti'.[62] 'Ternycell' is the name of the devil associated with slothfulness.[63] He advises the sinner to remain in bed instead of getting up for mass. However, not all inactivity is a deadly sin. *Jacob's Well* gives two instances where inactivity is not deemed to be sloth. The first is not a sin at all but a sort of depression: 'ȝif þou in þi slowthe hast heuynesse, & no lust in goodnes in þin herte, but a manere of angwysch, ȝif it be noȝt aȝens charyte to god ne to man, but lettyth þi deuocyoun in þin herte, ȝif it come of kynde, it is no synne'.[64] Secondly to spend time in excessive deliberation rather than an active life is seen as a venial rather than a deadly sin.[65]

[57] Ibid.
[58] "Crostwight, Norfolk: The Seven Deadly Sins, C. 14/15," *Medieval Wall Painting in the English Parish Church*, 2014, accessed Dec. 3, 2014, http://www.paintedchurch.org/crost7ds.htm.
[59] "Medieval Painting Of The Seven Deadly Sins, Hessett, Suffolk," *Medieval Wall Painting in the English Parish Church*, 2014, accessed Dec. 3, 2014, http://www.paintedchurch.org/hessds.htm.
[60] *The Pricke of Conscience: A Northern Poem by Richard Rolle de Hampole*, ed. Richard Morris (Berlin: A. Asher & Co., 1863), 78.
[61] They both also include sluggishness. *The Book of Vices and Virtues: A Fourteenth Century English Translation of the Somme le Roi of Lorens d'Orléans*, ed. W. Nelson Francis EETS OS 217 (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), 27.
[62] Dan Michel, *Ayenbite of Inwyt*, ed. Richard Morris, EETS OS 23 (London: Trübner, 1866), 31
[63] Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne*, 108.
[64] 'If you are heavy in sloth, and there is no lust in goodness in thine heart, but a manner of anguish, if it be not against charity to God nor to man and you let devotion into your heart, if it comes of kindness, it is no sin,' *Jacob's Well*, 114.
[65] *Jacob's Well*, 114.

Figure 3 and 4: The Seven Deadly Sins, Hessett, Suffolk (Fifteenth Century)[66]

One mid-fifteenth-century sermon highlights the problem of men falling asleep while they pray. The sermon is addressed at all levels of society: 'both lered and lewde of all degree, als well byshoppes and prelates, relygious and prestes, as lordes and knyȝthes and commoners in iche degree'.[67] *Handlyng Synne* gives a description of the slothful disregarding the ringing bell to prayer and not arising for matins: 'Whan he heryþ a belle rynge / To holy cherche men callynge, / þan may her nat hys bed lete, / But þan behouyþ hym lygge & swete / And take þe mery mornyng slepe; / Of matynes ryche men take no kepe'.[68] While the mention of the 'ryche men' is not reinforced again in the section of *Handlyng Synne*, it could be suggested that rich men were particularly guilty of remaining in bed longer than was seen proper. The upper levels of society could also afford to employ household priests or have a private chapel. This meant that the schedule of their devotion was not as fixed as

[66] "Medieval Painting Of The Seven Deadly Sins, Hessett, Suffolk," *Medieval Wall Painting in the English Parish Church*, 2017, accessed May 9, 2017, http://www.paintedchurch.org/hessds.htm.
[67] *Middle English Sermons*, 46.
[68] Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne*, 108.

those who attended a parish church. When the sinner finally arrives at mass he does not say his prayers: 'Ful fewe bedys are yn hys mouth: / He vsyþ noun - þey are vncouth'.[69] The use of the term 'uncouth' suggests that the sluggard believes he will be viewed as unknowledgeable or strange due if he prays in public.[70] That the sinner believes that prayers are 'vncouth' is another suggestion that the slothful comes from the upper levels of society, since he sees such devotional activities as beneath him. Although later in the passage, *Handlyng Synne* reinforces that sloth is seen in both high and low levels in society: 'Be he hugh or be he logh, / He ys yn goddes seruyse slogh', perhaps it was easier for those of the higher orders to be slow in God's service.[71]

Another group which are highlighted as particularly prone to sluggish behaviour are the young. In *The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man*, it is the female character of Sloth who lures men into sleeping past the appropriate time. This female personification of the sin, although hideous to behold as we shall discuss below, is presented as seducing young people and bringing them to bed: 'That lye a bedde with ffolkyes yonge, / And make hem tourne to and ffro; / I close her Eyen bothe two, / I make hem slepe, dreme and slombre, / Yonge folkys out of noumbre'.[72] While she makes them sleep for a long time, this sleep is not restful as they dream and 'tourne to and ffro'. The sleep she imposes does not serve the purpose of rejuvenating the body after work. The young may have been a group who were seen as more prone to this type of sloth, as well as other lustful and idle activities. Lavynham also highlights predisposition of the young to sluggishness. While the text commonly refers to 'man' as the subject of the sentence, in reference to sluggishness, Lavynham uses 'cild or man'.[73] The inclusion of child breaks with the normal style of writing and can therefore be seen as reinforcing the point of the young being sluggish and their 'longe reste … fedith mochil wikidnesse'.[74] They use this extra

[69] Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne*, 109.
[70] See *MED*, s.v. "uncouth (adj.)".
[71] Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne*, 114.
[72] John Lydgate, *The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man*, eds F.J. Furnivall and Katherine B. Locock, EETS ES 77, 83, 92 (New York: Kraus, 1975), 373.
[73] Lavynham, *A Litil Tretys*, 16.
[74] Ibid, 16.

rest to stay up later and to take part in unsavoury night time activities such as gambling and riotous behaviour.

There is one image which contradicts sloth's slow and sluggish characteristics. *Jacob's Well* compares the slothful person to a hungry dog. The hungry dog is obsessed with the food it craves and cannot be distracted. The sinner shows this hunger in sins of tenderness, idleness and negligence:

> þi mowth hungreth gredyly delycasyes. þi tunge hungryth gredyly ydell woordys. þin handys hungryn gredyly foule towchynges & foule werkynges. þin herte hungreth gredyly werdly worschippes. þin erys hungryn gredyly newe tydynges, slaundrys, & lesynges, & iapys, & rybaldrye. þin eyȝin gredyly hungryn to se vanytees.[75]

In a sin which is so often represented as slow and inactive, this vibrant image is full of movement and passion; not characteristics which one otherwise associates with sloth. Perhaps this contradiction can be explained when we look at the particular activities within the image: delicacies, idle words, lust, festivities and vanities. These are all worldly pursuits. While the sinner may be inactive and sluggish in their spiritual life, they can simultaneously be actively engaged in secular society, particularly what the Church views as secular society's most immoral aspects.

Idleness

John Mirk's *Festial* (*c. 1*385) was a popular and influential collection of sermons.[76] It describes sloth as a mixture of sluggishness and idleness: 'lyging in mor-tyd [morning] long in bedde, for outrage wakyng ouer nyght in rotyng [rioting], in euel, in pleying of vanyteus, in iapis makyng of rybady and harlotry'.[77] The sin of idleness is the most commonly referred to sin within the branches of sloth. It belongs to the group of sins that prevent a man from beginning well. Idleness is deemed dangerous as if man does not busy himself with good occupation then the devil will be able to tempt him into sin. The idle man is viewed as an empty vessel rendered defenceless

[75] *Jacob's Well,* 113.
[76] 22 manuscripts of *Festial* survive as well as countless manuscripts that contain partial copies of *Festial's* sermons. Beth Allison Barr, *The Pastoral Care of Women in Late Medieval England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2008), 31.
[77] *John Mirk's Festial: Edited from the British Library MS Cotton Claudius A.II*, ed. Susan Powell, EETS OS 334, 2 vols, (Oxford: Oxford Uni. Press, 2009), 1: 61.

against sin by his lack of occupation. In order to avoid idleness *Jacob's Well* recommends that one should 'alwey do sum good werk, þat þe feend may fynde þe occupyed'.[78]

The sin of idleness is presented as a lack of profitable occupation rather than total inactivity. *Jacob's Well* includes thinking idle thoughts, speaking idle words and playing games as types of idle activities. While exposition of *Jacob's Well* on the branches of sloth is written in greater detail than in many of the other texts this research has engaged with, it may have been influenced by contemporary legislation regarding leisure pursuits.[79] The sin of idleness is given quite specific examples, as it refers to the playing of games and other leisure activities. *Jacob's Well* gives numerous examples of what activities should be described as idle:

> huntyng, hawkyng, foulyng, fyschinge; to gon to wakys & to wrestlynges, to daunsynges & to steraclys [spectacles], to tauerys [taverns], to reuell, to ryott, to schetinges, to feyres, to markettys on þe holy-dayes, & to chaffarynge [buying and selling], & levyst þi parysch-cherche & þi seruyse; & in doinge þi pylgrimage on holy-dayis; & in pleying at þe two hande swed, at swerd & bokelere, & at two pyked staf, at þe hurlebatte.[80]

Some of these activities would have only been available to the aristocracy while some are applicable to all levels of society. Lavynham sees the idle as loving no other occupation but vanity and work that has no profit. This includes the playing of games such as 'pleyng at þe tables, at þe chesse, at þe dees & alle oþer game þt no profyte is inne'.[81] He adds a clause to this description, however, highlighting the time which is spent on these activites: 'þe whiche ho so vsith it out of mesure & in vntyme, leuyng þerfor a beter occupacion he fallyth in þis vice'.[82] Lavynham does not condemn these activities as the author of *Jacob's Well* does but finds them allowable so long as they are not taking away from other, more profitable occupations. An exemplum in *Handlyng Synne* tells of a minstrel who disturbs the

[78] *Jacob's Well*, 106.
[79] This will be discussed in length in chapter five.
[80] *Jacob's Well,* 105.
[81] Lavynham, *A Litil Tretys*, 16-7.
[82] Ibid, 17.

bishop's blessing before the meal with his music and singing. The minstrel is killed by a falling stone as he leaves the bishop's palace.[83] Music and merriment are seen as distractions from proper spiritual activities. The next exemplum in Handlyng Synne shows how one can enjoy music without sin. This is done by admiring that God has made the wood so that the harp will make such a beautiful sound. Rather than banning all leisure pursuits, the devotional texts tend to present ways to engage in leisure which the clerical author views as a proper and acceptable[84].

Handlyng Synne also identifies tournaments as a hotbed of vice. The passage contains examples to show that all seven of the deadly sins are found in the activities surrounding a tournament: 'Of tournamentes y preue þer ynne / Seuene poyntes of dedly synne'.[85] Mannyng argues that the tournament is an idle activity because men love the tournament more than they love going to mass in God's service. It is not that the men choose to go to the tournament instead of mass but rather that they find it more enjoyable. It is a betrayal of God's love and mercy: 'And certes þey falle yn sloghnesse, / Þey loue hyt more þan god or messe. / And þer of ys hyt no doute, / Þey dyspende more gode þyrboute / Þat ys ȝeue al to foly, / Þan to any dede of mercy'. Attending tournaments is a folly with no positive effects on the participants and onlookers. Rather it instils pride, avarice, lust, gluttony, envy and wrath. In fact Mannyng goes on to note that tournaments are called such because 'þey tourmente al wyþ synne'.[86]

Along with productivity, waste and emptiness are major concerns related to the sin of idleness. *Handlyng Synne* denounces idle behaviour saying that the idle man 'wykkedly … dyspendyþ / Al þe lyff þat god hym sendyþ'.[87] The idle man does not utilise the faculties that God has given him. In *Handlyng Synne*, idleness is presented as a sin of young men who have not yet committed themselves to a line of work:

> Of sloghnes þys ys þe assyse
> Whan þou wylt nat betyme chastyse.
> Ȝyt ys þyr an ydylnes,

[83] Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne*, 119.
[84] This will be discussed further in chapter 5.
[85] Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne*, 115.
[86] Ibid, 116.
[87] Ibid, 109.

A gret vnwysdom for soþe hyt es,
Whan a ȝung man draghþ lyte on lengþe
And wylnat traueyle yn hys ȝenþe,
Ne lerne hym craft for to wynne
Yn hys age to leue weyl ynne.[88]

Handlyng Synne includes 'Daunces, karolles, somur games' in its list of sinful, idle activities. These are also seen as leisure pursuits of both young men and women.

Figure 5: The Heavenly City and the Earthly City (*c.* 1475)[89]

In an illumination (fig. 5) in a French manuscript of Augustine's *City of God* (*c*. 1475), the mortal world is depicted with juxtaposed vices and virtues. Idleness or 'paresse' is shown as six men and women all sitting and lying down. One figure lies in the bed while two other men lie on the ground resting their head on their hands. One woman is holding what seems to be a distaff under her arm although she is not spinning at the time. She has the materials with which to work but is not actively participating in it. The three active figures, who represent the opposing virtue of diligence, are on their feet each holding implements of their work. Their knees are

[88] Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne*, 127.
[89] The Heavenly City and the Earthly City, The Hague, MMW, 10 A 11, fol. 6r.

bent and they are placed in an active pose. The figure on the left holds an axe and the ground is covered in pieces of wood while the two other men are carrying a pail of what may be mortar. The three men are using their bodies, skills and tools in order to fulfil their occupation, a stark contrast to those below. The concentration on temporal idleness and the neglect of work is significant. As this dates from the end of the period this thesis addresses it may be that the sloth and idleness were merging into the laziness, which they are seen to represent by the early-modern period.[90]

While these warnings about the perils of idle activities seem to be intended to keep society in check, idleness is also presented as spiritual inactivity. Although the previous examples of idleness have concentrated on secular activities, such as dancing and hunting, in *Jacob's Well* idleness is still reinforced as 'slawthe of goddys seruyse' and includes spiritual and moral actions:

> to harpyn, lutyn, to scornyn, & to ȝeuyn þe to euyll cumpany, in myspendyng þi good & þi freednys good, & in ȝeuyng euyl exaumple, & in wykkyd desyres in euyll wyllys, & in steryng oþere to euyll, in wycked counseylyng, in defoulyng þe halyday, in synne & in euyll werkys.[91]

Handlyng Synne includes spending more time on making a livelihood rather than devotional activity as a form of idleness: 'Hyt ys an ydelnes yn here lyff, / Al þat oþer man or wyff / Traueyleþ for þe lyues fode / And lytel for þe soules gode'.[92] While performing one's role in society is fulfilling the role God has given, one must keep God and not the temporal gains of work at the forefront of the mind. In *Piers Plowman*, Sloth is well educated and informed on secular matters but has not devoted any time to learning the proper prayers and manners of Christian devotional life. He is skilled in secular activities such as hunting and administration, however, he is disengaged from devotional activities: 'Ac Y can fynden in a feld and in a forlong an hare, / An holden a knyhtes court and acounte with þe reue; / Ac Y can nat construe Catoun ne clergialiche reden'.[93] While Sloth is able to get by in the world with tasks he has learnt through experience such as finding a hare or the running of a

[90] Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth*, 186.
[91] *Jacob's Well,* 105-6.
[92] Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne*, 127.
[93] 'I can find in a field and a furlong a hare, and hold a knight's court and account with a reeve, but I cannot construe Cato (an elementary textbook) nor read like a cleric.' Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 1: C, 233.

manor, he has not received a formal education with which to learn to read devotional writings. *Piers Plowman* survives in a number of revised versions dating between approximately 1370 and 1390. The B-text of the poem also includes the holding of 'louedayes' as another secular activity that Sloth is able to engage in.[94] Secular idleness is not the consideration here. Langland's portrayal of sloth does not include secular labour but rather secular labour distracts from the spiritual labour, which is necessary for salvation.

The most common form of spiritual idleness which we encounter, however, is speaking out of turn in church. *Handlyng Synne* describes this as a form of disengagement from and disinterest with devotional activities: 'Hem þynkþ hyt lasteþ ouer long. / Þan shal he iangle or telle a tale, / Or wete where þey shul haue þe best ale'.[95] Here the sinner is more interested in where the best ale can be found rather than the care of their soul. The idle gossiper is a common image within depictions of sloth and idleness.[96] In fig. 6, a late-fourteenth-century wall painting in Little Melton, Norfolk, two well-dressed women are huddled together. They sit on what Anne Marshall considers church benches and hold prayer beads.[97] However, rather than engaging in prayer the two women lean together in close conversation. The image of a demon is just visible beside them listening to their conversation, highlighting to the viewer that their behaviour is sinful. Another fourteenth-century wall painting from Slapton, Northants (fig. 7) warns against idle gossip.[98] Here, two women are in conversation, their heads are held together by a demon standing over them. Images of idle speakers are generally depicted as women although within the devotional literature there is no distinction made between the sexes and idle speech within the church. This imagery may be influenced by St. Paul's advice to Timothy to 'let the women learn in silence, wit all subjection / but I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to use authority over the man: but to be in silence' which in particular

[94] Love days were used to arbitrate disputes. The personified Sloth is able to facilitate negotiations to rectify conflict within the community. Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 1: B, 232.
[95] Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne*, 115.
[96] For a detailed discussion of idle gossip see Susan Phillips, *Transforming Talk: The Problem with Gossip in Late Medieval England* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Uni. Press, 2007).
[97] "Warning Against Idle Gossip C. 14," *Medieval Wall Painting in the English Parish Church*, 2014, accessed Dec 03, 2014, http://www.paintedchurch.org/lmelgoss.htm.
[98] "Slapton, Northants: The Warning Against Idle Gossip C. 14," *Medieval Wall Painting in the English Parish Church*, 2014, accessed Dec 03, 2014, http://www.paintedchurch.org/slapgoss.htm.

discredits female voices.[99] Sloth, represented as speaking out of turn in church, is also seen in one of the exempla of *Jacob's Well*. In the exemplum, a sculpture of Christ on a cross comes to life and covers his ears to block out the jangling of the parishioners during the mass.[100] This exemplum is followed by a story of a hermit whose steps in the desert are counted by an angel who explains that the idle words said in holy church are collected by the devil. This creates a sense of devotional capital where one must produce a higher number of good works in order to enter heaven. The bad deeds, such as idle words in church, will be subtracted from this amount and will have to be redeemed in purgatory or be punished in hell. The parishioner heard and saw these images within the context of the church space, highlighting the immediate and present danger to the soul.

Figure 6: Warning Against Idle Gossip, Little Melton, Norfolk (Fourteenth Century)[101]

[99] 1 Timothy 2:11-2 .
[100] *Jacob's Well,* 110.
[101] "Warning Against Idle Gossip C. 14."

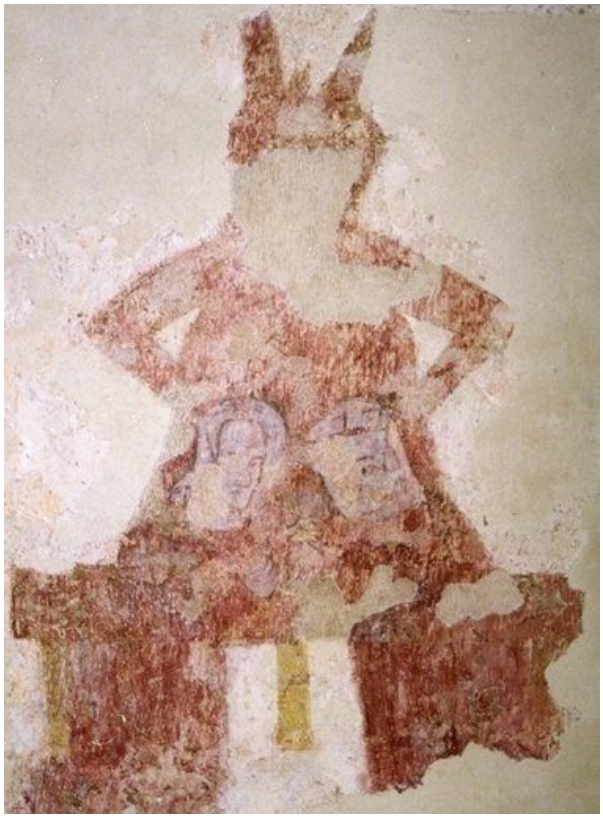

Figure 7: The Warning Against Idle Gossip, Slapton, Northants (Fourteenth Century)[102]

While all those who attended church would have been aware of the danger idleness posed to the soul, were there any groups in society that were more prone to idle behaviour? Lavynham notes that idleness affects the entire community, not just the literate who have the ability to read his treatise: 'In þis vice trepacen al þo lewid & leryd þt whan þey scholde serue god byn idil, or ellis occupiȝed a bowte þing þt is lasse worth boþe to þe body & to þe sowle'.[103] There are interesting social implications at work here. Lavynham creates pairings between the 'lewid' and the 'body' and between the 'leryd' and the 'sowle'. The 'lewid' or unlearned would have reflected a large proportion of the population who were unlearned in Latin and practised their devotion not just through attending mass and saying prayers but also through their labour and fulfilling their roles in society as part of the post-lapsarian model. The 'leryd' are far more in touch with the higher levels of devotion and therefore the soul. In The *Lay Folk's Catechism* idleness is seen as contrary to the

[102] "Slapton, Northants: The Warning Against Idle Gossip C. 14."
[103] Lavynham, *A Litil Tretys*, 17.

nature of human beings: 'that ar we er kyngely borne for to swink'.[104] By acting contrary to this nature than one is 'euermore in ese ogaynes our kyng'. The king in question here is God, although idleness is also seen to be an assault against the secular order and therefore is against the temporal king also.

In line with this belligerent and work shy idleness, the slothful are commonly presented as sharing the characteristics of the ass.[105] While also presented as a bear and a pig, which tend to portray the sluggish sinner, sloth's most frequent animal depiction is the ass. Just like man in the post-lapsarian context, the ass is bred to work physically. According to Isidore of Seville (*c*. 600), the ass's main role is aiding in agricultural work of humans: 'they are called beasts of burden because they assist humans, for these are animals of great strength'.[106] As a beast of burden the ass is subject to human control.[107] *Jacob's Well* describes the slothful as being like an ass, concentrating on the slowness and stubbornness of both the animal and sinner but also on the necessity of labour: 'A slow man is lyche an asse, for an asse louyth weel ese, & is lothe to trauayle, but he be constreyned þerto. & þis beeste is wondir slow in going'. [108] The slothful man also is slow to move towards goodness and productivity. Due to its 'symple' and 'slowe' nature it was easily 'ouercome and subiet to mannes seruice'.[109] The ass is easily domesticated just as the idle man is easily tamed and manipulated by the devil. However, what differentiates the ass from man is free will. The ass has been created by God in order to teach mankind the dangers of slothful behaviour. His behaviour and characteristics are determined by this. Man on the other hand, has the ability to choose whether he will follow the path of virtue and work diligently or whether he will allow himself to be overcome by the devil.

The image of the ass which is given in John Trevisa's translation (*c*. 1397) of *De Proprietatibus Rerum* by Bartholomeus Anglicus (*c*. 1240) presents the ass as having a particularly difficult life.

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[104] *The Lay Folks' Catechism*, 94.
[105] Lavynham, *A Litil Tretys*, 15.
[106] *Etymologies*, 247.
[107] Ibid, 249.
[108] *Jacob's Well*, 103.
[109] *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus De proprietatibus Rerum: A Critical Text*, ed. M. C. Seymour (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 1120.

> And þe asse haþ oþere wrecchede condiciouns yknowe nyh to alle men. For he is yput to trauayle ouer might and is ybete wiþ staues and ystiked and yprikked wiþ prikkes. And his mouþ is ywronge wiþ a barnacle. And is ylad hider and þider and wiþdrawe fro lese and pasture þat is in his weye ofte by refreynynge of the barnacle. And dieþ atte laste after vayne trauayle. And haþ no reward after his deth for þe seruice and trauayle þat he haþ in his lyue, nought so moche þat his owne skynne is yleft wiþ him, but it is bynome and þe careyne is yþrowe sepulture and burieles but in so moche as þe careyne, bycause of etynge and deuourynge, is somtyme yburyed in wombes of houndes and wolues.[110]

This description of the ass is particularly significant. Man's punishment of manual labour after the Fall is similar to the life of the ass. However, man, by fulfilling this role as a form of shrift will one day reach salvation. The same is not true for the ass. While Christ saved man by dying and suffering his own 'ybete wiþ staues and ystiked and yprikked wiþ prikkes', the ass as a stubborn and slothful animal does not received this mercy and suffers as Christ has suffered. While a man who works and prays and lives a good life will be rewarded in heaven for his labours, the ass's labour is described as 'vayne trauayle', 'vayne' being a synonym for idle.[111] The bleak description of the ass's fate is reminiscent of the many devotional Mirrors, which became popular in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. These guided the reader to contemplate their life, death and finally the inevitable corruption and decomposition of the temporal body. For example, the *Mirror of Sinners* describes the physical process of death:

> For whenne a man bigynneþ to wexe cold & his siknesse groweþ þe conscience drediþ. þe herte quakeþ. þe heed stoupeþ. þe wittes wasteþ his strengþe failleþ. þe visage wexiþ paal. þe tunge englaymeþ þe teeþ stynkyn. þe speche wexiþ dym. þe breeþ goþ a wey. þe body crokeþ. þe flessh wideriþ. & al þe beaute & fairnesse is turned in to fulþe & corupcion. Whenne þe

[110] *On the Properties of Things*, 1124.
[111] This will be discussed in chapter 2.

> body is buryed: it falleþ in to powder & so turneþ al in to wormes.[112]

Just as the ass' body is devoured by 'houndes and wolues' the human body is devoured by 'wormes'. Both these extracts seem to be guiding the reader to reflect on their spiritual health as opposed to their temporal pleasures and enjoyments, which will inevitably be reduced to 'fulþe & corupcion'.

Delaying

Tarrying or delaying was understood as a sin which prevents a man from amending his bad ways. It delays this amendment and redemption, although God has given the means to do so in the form of confession and penance. This sinner knows what good works he or she will do but delays carrying them out. *The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man* (*c*. 1426) refers to delaying as 'hope off longe lyff' and the character of Sloth adds that this sin 'in thys the world ys now fful ryff'.[113] Lavynham identifies the peril associated with delaying as man 'þenkyng þt it is no gret perel to hem ȝif þey mowe haue hosel & schrifte & repentaunce in her ende. But in þat þey put hem self in gret perel'.[114] *Ayenbite of Inwyt* refers to this sin as 'ontreuþe'.[115] Untruth includes the belief, which stems from the devil, that one is strong and young and there is plenty of time in the future to redeem oneself. In *Handlyng Synne* the first exemplum refers to a king and his knight. The knight is dutiful but works only for money and glory. As he lies sick in his bed he is shown a small book of his virtues and a huge book of his sins. The man does not repent promptly believing that he will soon recover from his illness. This delaying of shrift causes him to be taken away by devils when he perishes.

In *Piers Plowman*, the personified Sloth portrays the manifold ways that the vice manifests itself within the sinner. Sloth falls asleep while saying his prayers and the character of Repentance wakes him, urging him to 'rape [hurry] þe to shryfte'.[116] Here, Repentance highlights one of the main spiritual and temporal problems of the sin of sloth, a lack of haste. While the passage continues to explain the spiritual

[112] *Mirror of Sinners,* personal edition from Oxford, Bodleian Library MS, Laud Misc. 23 and Cambridge, Magdalene College, Pepys MS 2125.
[113] Lydgate, *The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man*, 376.
[114] Lavynham, *A Litil Tretys*, 18.
[115] Michel, *Ayenbite of Inwyt*, 32.
[116] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 1: C, 231.

danger of Sloth's delaying, tarrying was also connected with worldly actions. Sloth is aware that his choice to delay his shrift over other secular activities causes him spiritual danger. If the character of Sloth did not wake from his dozing, his soul would not be saved for he has not actively engaged in spiritual activities: 'Yf Y sholde deye be þis day,' quod he, 'Y drede me sore; / Y can nat parfitly my Paternoster as þe prest hit syngeth; / Y can rymes of Robyn Hode and of Randolf Erle of Chestre, / Ac of Oure Lord ne of Oure Lady þe leste þat euere was maked'.[117] Sloth has learnt popular verse but not his prayers. While highlighting Sloth's laziness and disregard for his spiritual wellbeing, this point also highlights another important aspect of sloth. Sloth had the ability to learn these prayers as he was capable of learning about 'Robyn Hode' and 'Randolf Erle of Chestre'. This shows that Sloth was indeed committing the sin of sloth. If Sloth had been unable to learn anything off by heart, try as he might, this would have been forgiven as, while he was unsuccessful, he had the desire to do so. The sinner concentrates on his temporal pursuits and not on his spiritual knowledge, putting them off until another day. Delaying is only used to refer to delaying shrift and making secular rather than devotional activities a priority, however, the sin of negligence refers to the neglect of both temporal and spiritual activities.

Recklessness and Negligence

While to procrastinate in learning prayers is indeed a form of delay, the behaviour of Sloth above also falls under the sin of negligence. To delay the care of one's soul is reckless. The negligent sinner is selfish and puts his own wishes and comforts before his responsibilities and duties. Lavynham in the *A Litil Tretys on the Seven Deadly Sins* highlights the selfishness of the negligent and reckless: 'he makyþ no fors but haþ an eyȝe alwey to him silf & to no body ellys'.[118] This negligence is both spiritual and temporal in nature, including activities such as neglecting prayer, not attending mass, neglecting one's work, children, household and generally taking more heed to one's own worldly needs than to the responsibilities set by God. *Jacob's Well* argues that one may neglect both spiritual duties and the duties within society. For example, negligence 'makyth þe ofte tyme dystracte, & to make manye

[117] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 1: C, 231.
[118] Lavynham, *A Litil Tretys*, 17.

defawȝtes in þin offyce, in þi seruyse, & in þi prayerys, & in þi gouernaunce of þi wyif, chylderyn, & seruauntys, & of houshold; & recheles in cure of soule'.[119] This continues with a description of prayers and religious activities that may be neglected. *Jacob's Well* is closely aligned with the "mixed life" which promotes serving God through both spiritual devotion and active involvement in the secular world. Like idleness, negligence is seen as contrary to the virtue of diligence. Lavynham describes recklessness as 'whan a man doþ not his diligence to godward ne to hys euencristyn'.[120] 'Euencristyn' refers to the all Christians but especially neighbours within the community. This includes not attending church but also not caring 'how his pouer euen cristyn fare be sudyn hym'.[121] This lack of regard is interpreted as a lack of regard for God as he created the world but it also highlights negligence toward the Christian community and failing to protect those in the community who are in need of aid. Negligence is a communal as well as personal sin.

When we look how the portrayal of negligence interacts with society some noteworthy temporal exemplars of the sins are presented to us. *Jacob's Well* refers to the negligence of mothers whose children die. It states that the sin of negligence takes place 'whanne þe moderys or þe chuldren in chylde-byrthe perysschyn for defawte of kepyng & of kunnyng; and whanne a womman wyth chylde is recheles, &, thrugh here recheles gouernauns, þe chyld perysscheth'.[122] In a period with a high infant mortality rate, the positioning of infant death as an effect of a mother's sinful negligence is rather startling. There are few gendered examples of sloth within this literature and this connection between motherhood and sloth may highlight the gender values at play for the writers of this period. In the post-lapsarian world, a woman's role in society is to produce children. This is the role given to her by God, as painful childbirth is the punishment given to Eve after the Fall.[123] While this pain is a punishment for womankind, it is also a form of penance, aiding their redemption. In the first epistle to Timothy, St. Paul highlights this redemptive nature of childbearing: 'Yet she shall be saved through childbearing'.[124] By being negligent in this penance, the temporal activity of not caring for a child becomes laden with sin.

[119] *Jacob's Well*, 108.
[120] Lavynham, *A Litil Tretys*, 17.
[121] Ibid, 17.
[122] *Jacob's Well*, 109.
[123] This will be discussed further in chapter 2.
[124] 1 Tim 2:15.

The parameters of what are considered reckless activities for the mother are not set, leaving this open to interpretation and misappropriation. This ambiguity reinforces the cultural understanding of women as the primary carers of children by placing blame for the child's death directly on the mother.

Children are a common focus of warnings against negligence. The first question that *Instructions for Parish Priests* directs the confessor to ask is whether they have neglected to teach their godchildren the *Pater Noster* or Creed: 'Hast þou be slowe & take non hede, / to teche þy godchyldre pater noster & crede'.[125] *Handlyng Synne* also reinforces this portrayal of negligence. The passage reminds the reader of the importance of chastising their children and the danger to the soul of the child if they are not prevented from falling into sin. While this is a spiritual negligence in that they have not been taught the correct morals and behaviour suitable for a good Christian, it is also a very temporal, familial context. The child is so doomed by being allowed a free rein that *Handlyng Synne* goes as far as to argue that it would have been 'better were þe chyld vnbore / Þan fayle chastysyng & seþen lore'.[126] This is followed by two exempla about fathers who did not chastise their sons' sinful behaviour. Both sons, although they also have some good works, are sent to hell for their own sins as well as their father's negligence.[127] The importance of teaching and guidance in these discussions likely reflects the increased importance placed on the pedagogic nature of pastoralia at the time.

Negligence and recklessness are quite closely connected with the sin of forgetfulness. The forgetful sinner fails to recall his or her sins and therefore it is impossible to be properly shriven.[128] This is extremely dangerous as God's mercy can be given only for those sins that have been confessed. In order to avoid forgetting one must contemplate and reflect on one's deeds.[129] The personification of Sloth in *Piers Plowman* illustrates this sin's presence in both the temporal and spiritual realms. He forgets his vows, penance and feast days and lies late in bed

[125] Mirc, *Instructions for Parish Priests*, 36.
[126] Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne*, 122.
[127] Ibid, 122-7.
[128] Michel, *Ayenbite of Inwyt*, 32.
[129] Ibid, 32-3.

instead of getting up for mass. He does not make time to go to shrift and begrudges having to say his prayers. His thoughts are not on Christ's Passion but instead he talks idly in alehouses and in the church. However, Sloth is negligent of his temporal duties as well as his spiritual ones. He describes how he borrows money and then forgets about it and gets out of repaying the loan: '[i]f Y bygge and borwe ouht, but yf hit be ytayled, / I forȝete hit as ȝerne and ȝyf eny man hit aske / Sixe sithe oþer seuene, Y forsake hit with othes; / And thus haue Y tened trewe men ten hundrit tyme'.[130] The negligence of the slothful through their forgetfulness can affect the lives of the people around the sinner. The men whose loans were not repaid have been damaged financially from Sloth's sinful behaviour. Sloth's negligence also infiltrates his household: 'my seruauntes somtyme, here salerie is bihynde: / Reuthe is to here rekenynge when we shal rede acountes, So with wikkede will my werkemen Y paye!'[131] The slothful man has passed the sin onto the people in household.

Growing slack

Growing slack is similar to negligence, however, it is focused most often on servants and the young. *Instructions for Parish Priests* advises the priest to ask: 'Ȝef þow be a seruaunt, / Hast þow holde þy couenaunt? / Hast þow be scharpe and bysy / To serue þy mayster trewely? / Hast þow treely by vche way / Deseruet þy mete & þy pay?'[132] *Jacob's Well* describes this sin as especially common in servants who, although at first interested and enthusiastic in their work, soon become bored and fail to conduct their occupation diligently.[133] *Ayenbite of Inwyt* does not make the direct connection with servants but links growing slack with stereotypical characteristics of the young: unknowing and foolishness.[134] As many servants were young, the connection between youth, servants and slackness may be implicit. It is these characteristics that prevent a person from engaging in the proper temporal and spiritual work God has laid down for them. *The Book of Vices and Virtues* includes weariness, which it

[130] 'I beg and borrow ought, but if it is recalled, I forget it eagerly and if any man ask of it, six times out of seven, I reject it with oaths; and thus have I injured true men ten hundred times.' Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 1: C, 233.
[131] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 1: C, 233.
[132] Mirc, *Instructions for Parish Priests*, 37.
[133] *Jacob's Well*, 109.
[134] Michel, *Ayenbite of Inwyt*, 33.

describes as being similar to growing slack in that one gives up on their duties.[135] The examples of growing slack reinforce this sin as a temporal concern. However, it can also be applied to the persistent attention which is required for meditative devotion within enclosed religious community.

Tenderness

In modern usage tenderness represents gentleness and kindness, however, late medieval devotional discourse concentrates on its resonances of fragility and weakness rather than these more compassionate understandings. Tenderness is classified by the *Somme le Roi* tradition as a sin that prevents a man from starting well. Tenderness is the weakness and fragility of a person brought on by a love for earthly comfort and luxuries. It involves indulging oneself in soft clothing and bedding and spending time bathing and cherishing one's own soft skin.[136] Thus the sinner is unable to suffer penance which risks damaging this soft skin, such as 'goyng barfot' and 'knelyng on þe bare grownd'.[137] *Instructions for Parish Priests* asks whether the penitent has been 'slowe & lothe to faste' reflecting their aversion to the physical discomfort associated with penitential activities.[138] Tenderness has strong associations with the upper levels of society. *Jacob's Well* describes it as the love of 'softe clothys next þi body, bothe on þi bak & in þi bed, & often to be wasshyn and bathyd & kemmyd, in cherschyng of þi flesch; so tendyrly, þat it may suffren non hardnesse'.[139] While these are actions that only the wealthier in society would have access to, *Jacob's Well* then goes further to make a direct connection between tenderness and the aristocracy: 'þis branche of slowthe is myche norysscheđ in lordys courtys'.[140] This particular image is based on Luke 7:25 which highlights the luxury of rulers – 'Behold they that are in costly apparel and live delicately, are in the houses of kings' – and it would also have held contemporary resonances.[141] Richard II in particular was criticised for engaging in his luxurious lifestyle while also exacting taxes to pay for the war with France. Lavynham also states that the

[135] *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, 29.
[136] Lavynham, *A Litil Tretys*, 16.
[137] Ibid, 16.
[138] Mirc, *Instructions for Parish Priests*, 36.
[139] *Jacob's Well*, 104.
[140] Ibid, 104.
[141] Luke 7:25.

king's court nourishes this sin.[142] In arguing the perils of this form of sloth, Lavynham refers to Jerome's warning that 'it is hard he seyþ & as þyng þt is impossible þt he þt deyeth in delytis scholde passen fro deitys to delitys a ȝen'.[143] *The Book of Vices and Virtues* distinguishes two different sins that are referred to as 'tendernesse' and 'tenterhed'.[144] 'Tendernesse' is when a man does not love God 'brennyngly' but does so 'slakly'. 'Tenterhed' is much more similar to the examples of tenderness above in that it refers to the sinner's belief that they are too soft and delicate to partake in the rituals of devotion. *The Book of Vices and Virtues* comments that 'tenterhed' is equally applicable to 'a man or womman'.[145] The specific inclusion of women is noteworthy. Perhaps the resonances of delicacy and softness were seen as being linked with femininity.

Tenderness is most prominently illustrated in *The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man*. The Pilgrim encounters the character of Sloth when he chooses to take the easier path on his pilgrimage which is lined with hay rather than the path of thorns. As soon as he does this he is bound by ropes by an old woman representing sloth. The Pilgrim describes the woman, concentrating on her 'ffoul and owgly' appearance: 'I sawh a wekke, Old and hydous, / Off look and cher ryht monstrous, / Pyled and seynt any kaat, / And moosy-heryd as a rat'.[146] This grotesque hag is a common image in medieval culture, where women are often polarised to virginal or corrupted.[147] The Pilgrim, repulsed by this image, tells her that she is 'stynkynge and old'. Sloth takes offence and attempts to disprove this description by telling the Pilgrim of all the marvellous places she has been.[148] She lists these places as chambers of emperors, kings, dukes, bishops, abbots, priors and prelates and other great estates and these were never called ugly or stinking.[149] But by connecting the ugliness of sloth with these places a connection is made between them. Although these courts of nobility are beautiful and opulent, they are tainted with the ugliness

[142] Ulrike Grassnick, "'O Prince, Desyre to be honourable': The Deposition of Richard II and Mirror for Princes," in *Fourteenth Century England IV*, ed. J. S. Hamilton (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2006), 165.
[143] Lavynham, *A Litil Tretys*, 16.
[144] *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, 26.
[145] Ibid, 26.
[146] Lydgate, *The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man*, 371-2.
[147] Christa Grössinger, *Picturing Woman in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art* (Manchester: Manchester Uni. Press, 1997).
[148] Lydgate, *The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man*, 372.
[149] Ibid, 373.

of tenderness as those that reside there do not remove themselves from their comfort in order to carryout penance.

Cowardice

Cowardice prevents a man from beginning well. The coward is unwilling to take risks for his faith or for good deeds and therefore is unable to participate in proper devotional activities. For example, although he understands the benefits of going on pilgrimage, he fears the dangers and discomforts that pilgrimage will bring with it.[150] While the simile of the slothful man as an ass is most prominent in the sin of idleness, the coward is also compared to the ass. While the coward is afraid of the dangers of pilgrimage, the ass is described as being afraid of passing over water. 'Þe asse dredeþ ful sore to passe þe water'.[151] *Handlyng Synne* argues that 'Hyt semeþ yn goddys seruise þan þou hast drede, / And drede wyle make a man slogh / To do þe seruyse þat he ogh'.[152] *A Litil Tretys on the Seven Deadly Sins* and *Ayenbite of Inwyt* both name it 'Arwnesse'.[153] In *Ayenbite of Inwyt* the reason for cowardliness is a fear that the sinner is too tender or not up to completing penance.[154] Lavynham also includes not giving alms to the poor for fear that the sinner will one day be poor 'wherfore he fallyþ a wey from þe ferst purpos'.[155] We can see the similarities here to tenderness and also the avarice where the sinner does not want to lose their wealth and material possessions. *The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man* includes a sin called 'ffoly dred'. This involves being scared of penance and embarrassed to admit sins.[156] This fear is deemed foolish because the confessor 'muste be mwet and secre, / Ther tonge be dowmb in ther spekyng'.[157] It also includes 'Shame' as another type of sloth where the sinner will not 'tellyn out hys ffautys, nor expresse, / Only for dred and ffor shamfastnesse'.[158] These are internal concerns, presenting sinners' view of the world around them. While cowardice results in inaction and inactivity, the devotional writing above represents cowardice as a personal rather than a communal sin.

[150] Lavynham, *A Litil Tretys*, 17.
[151] *On the Properties of Things*, 1122.
[152] Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne*, 129.
[153] Lavynham, *A Litil Tretys*, 17.
[154] Michel, *Ayenbite of Inwyt*, 31.
[155] Lavynham, *A Litil Tretys*, 17.
[156] Lydgate, *The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man*, 376.
[157] Ibid, 376.
[158] Ibid, 377.

Faint Heart and Enfeeblement of Will

Faint heartedness is similar to cowardice. The faint-hearted sinner does not fully embrace the difficulties of penance and gives up before the penance has been completed. *Instructions for Parish Priests* asks the penitent: 'Hast þou be slowe & feint in herte / To do penaunce for hyt dyde snerte?'[159] The sinner lacks willpower to complete difficult activities such as fasting and also following through in helping his neighbour: 'Hast thy neghbore I-trust to þe / To helpe hym in any degre, / And þow for slowthe & feyntyse / Hast hym be-gyley in any wyse?'[160] *Handlyng Synne* also refers to faint heartedness in relation to confession: 'Repente þe nat for no feyntyse, / Ne be nat heuy to hys seruyse'.[161] This branch of sloth is similar to faint heartedness but lack of will power means that the sinner is unable to pull himself away from the easiness of evil towards a life of good.[162] This has the most similarities with what *Ayenbite of Inwyt* terms weariness.[163] Weariness is when a man becomes weary of his actions every day and so falls into a bad life. The sinner is seen as weak for not persevering with his good works.

Hypocrisy

Hypocrisy is described in *The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man* as when a man 'wolde ben holden mor hooly than he ys'.[164] In *A Litil Tretys on the Seven Deadly Sins*, heaviness is used to refer to this type of hypocrisy. Although the sinner carries out the proper actions of a good Christian, he says the words and completes the actions without truly meaning them: 'þey he sey many bedis ȝet he hath þerwt no deuocion'.[165] His thoughts are not on God and he does not truly believe. *Instructions for Parish Priests* also asks: 'Hast þow wyþowte deuocyone / I-herde any predycacyone?'[166] The sinner places himself within society as a devout man, but he is not engaged spiritually. *Ayenbite of Inwyt* includes a sin named 'sloth' which is similar to hypocrisy.[167] This form of sloth causes the sinner to doubt his fellow

[159] Mirc, *Instructions for Parish Priests*, 36.
[160] Ibid, 37.
[161] Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne*, 129.
[162] *Jacob's Well*, 109.
[163] Michel, *Ayenbite of Inwyt*, 33.
[164] Lydgate, *The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man*, 377.
[165] Lavynham, *A Litil Tretys*, 19.
[166] Mirc, *Instructions for Parish Priests*, 36.
[167] Michel, *Ayenbite of Inwyt*, 32.

Christians are working diligently as they believe that people exaggerate their own good works to make themselves appear better to the world. *Ayenbit of Inwyt* argues that the world is 'besmet' with such people. Grudging is also a similar but rather more aggressive form of hypocrisy. When committing the sin of grudging, the sinner does not support the good work of others. They begrudge the virtuous deeds and therefore find fault in them.[168] In Mirk's *Instructions for Parish Priests*, grudging is seen as preventing others from partaking in devotion and leading them astray: 'Hast þou letted any mon / þat to chyrche wolde haue gon?'[169] Grudging is distinctive from envy or jealousy as the sinner is insulted by the pious activities rather than envious of them. In the depictions of hypocrisy there is a concentration on the sinner's perception of what others would think of him if they knew about his sins, similar to what was seen with the sin of cowardice. This creates a sense that these sins are internal rather than external as they can be hidden from others. Engaging with a culture of devotional activity and outward displays of devotion means nothing if the person does not spiritually engage with God, thus putting spiritual activity above that of both material devotional culture and secular activities. This reinforces the image of sloth as a very personal sin, affecting the sinner themselves as opposed to the community around them.

Wanhope

Handlyng Synne describes wanhope as 'þe werst poynt of alle: / To helle pyt hyt doþ þe falle'.[170] The sinner doubts the mercy of God and therefore does not look for shrift or forgiveness of his sins, as he believes he is unforgivable. He concentrates on his own defects: 'þenkyng þt his frayelte & his febilnesse is so gret þt he may wt stonde no temptacionys … he demyth him silf worthy to be dampnyd'.[171] In doing this, the sinner turns his back on God and gives himself to the devil. *The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man* refers to wanhope as 'Desperacioun'.[172] The personified character of Sloth describes 'Desperacioun' as the 'hangeman off helle' creating a link between Judas' wanhope and the absoluteness of this sin's outcome. *Jacob's Well* and

[168] Ibid, 34.
[169] Mirc, *Instructions for Parish Priests*, 36.
[170] Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne*, 130.
[171] Lavynham, *A Litil Tretys*, 17.
[172] Lydgate, *The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man*, 377.

A Litil Tretys both argue that it was Judas' wanhope and suicide that was his damnation and not his treason against Jesus, reinforcing the graveness of this sin.[173] In *Piers Plowman*, Repentance urges Sloth to face his sins and repent, warns him of wanhope and tells him to 'bete thysulue vppon þe breste'.[174] Here, a connection is made between wanhope and the cowardice. The sinner must face himself and his sin with courage and strength in order to overcome both these branches of sloth and receive shrift. Languor is similar to Wanhope. *Ayenbite of Inwyt* describes 'languor' as sorrow out of measure that can lead a man to desire death.[175]

Unrepentence

Some of the branches of sloth prevent sinners from properly repenting their sins, which lead them to choose a bad life rather than a good one. This unwillingness to repent manifests in three branches of sloth. The first is impatience. The impatient sinner does not want to contemplate his own sins but to be rid of them quickly and without effort of contemplation of his own wrongdoing.[176] Impatience to leave mass is seen in *Instructions for Parish Priests* when the confessor asks: 'Hast þou hyet hyt to þe ende / þat þou myȝtest hamward wende?'[177] This is similar to what *Ayenbite of Inwyt* names wickedness.[178] The wicked man is unwilling to make the effort to alter his ways. He is compared to a 'ssrewe' who would rather rot in prison than climb the steps to freedom.[179] Within the context of these sources the shrew does not seem to carry the gendered resonances of a disagreeable woman. *The Book of Vices and Virtues* refers to this sin as 'schrewednesse' or lying in sin.[180] Unbuxomness is when the sinner makes excuses not to do penance and therefore does not adhere to what the confessor, as a mediator to God, has asked him to do.[181] In *The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man*, the character Sloth complains of her body's aches and blames the weather for her inability to move: 'On ech whedyr, I putte blame'.[182]

[173] *Jacob's Well*, 113 and Lavynham, *A Litil Tretys*, 18.
[174] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 1: C, 235.
[175] Michel, *Ayenbite of Inwyt*, 34.
[176] Ibid, 33.
[177] Mirc, *Instructions for Parish Priests*, 36.
[178] Michel, *Ayenbite of Inwyt*, 31.
[179] Ibid, 32.
[180] *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, 27.
[181] Michel, *Ayenbite of Inwyt*, 33.
[182] Lydgate, *The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man*, 374.

So far, this chapter has considered the sin of sloth through its classification into specific branches and the imagery that is used to teach the laity to recognise the vice. Another strategy to illustrate the seven deadly sins was to characterise them as illness and disease. While leprosy has long been associated with ethical decay, each of the seven deadly sins is related to a specific illness through which the corruptive nature of the vice physically manifests itself.[183] Like an illness, sin can be transmitted from person to person or be contracted in the environment. This contamination by sin occurred in a variety of ways. For some sins, such as envy, the infection occurs through the medium of the senses: seeing the goodness of others with a negative eye and listening to and participating in backbiting.[184] Sloth on the other hand is not passed from person to person but develops when one does not properly occupy the body and in turn, the soul. *Jacob's Well* describes the slothful as 'a cyte vnwallyd, redy & esy for alle synnes & for alle feendys to entryn in-to þi soule'.[185] The slothful do not defend themselves because their minds and bodies are otherwise occupied, be it in idle activities, wanhope or sluggishness. Lateran IV highlighted the connection between spiritual and physical health:

> So we by this present decree order and strictly command physicians of the body, when they are called to the sick, to warn and persuade them first of all to call in physicians of the soul so that after their spiritual health has been seen to they may respond better to medicine for their bodies; for when the cause ceases so does the effect.[186]

Canon 22 continues to highlight the importance of the soul over the body. The links between physical and spiritual well-being are seen in popular, vernacular treatises on health, such as the *Regimen Sanitatis*, which became common from the mid-fourteenth century onwards.[187] These emerged alongside a growth in the image of

[183] Saul Nathaniel Brody, *The Disease of the Soul: Leprosy in Medieval Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 132.
[184] See Emma Martin, "Portraits of Envy: The Green Clothed Monster in Late Medieval Material and Literary Culture," in *Occupying Space in Medieval and Early Modern Britain and Ireland*, ed. Gregory Hulsman and Caoimhe Whelan, (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2016), 43- 62.
[185] *Jacob's Well*, 114.
[186] *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 1: 245.
[187] Carole Rawcliffe, "The concept of Health in Late Medieval Society" in *Economic and Biological Interactions in Pre-Industrial Europe from the 13th to the 18th centuries*, ed. Simonetta Cavaciocchi (Firenze: Firenze Uni. Press, 2010), 320.

the political body to represent the organic functioning of a unified healthy society, associating the human body with ideas of social order.

There are two aspects to this rhetoric of illness in relation to sloth. Firstly, there is a concentration on purely physical health based on the balance of humours in the body. Secondly, we see specific illnesses and deformities that are seen as the physical symptoms of sloth's attack and infection of the soul. In medieval medical theory, an imbalance of the four humours, cholera, melancholy phlegm and sanguine, caused illness and a change of temperament. A balance of moisture and temperature allows the body and soul to work properly.[188] The *Somme le Roi* tradition associates the cold and dry humour phlegm with sloth: 'Þe flewmatike of glotonye and slowþe. Þe malencolen of enuye and anger of herte.'[189] In *On the Properties of Things* the phlegmatic man is described as 'lustles, heuy, and slowȝ; dul of wit and þouȝt, forȝeteful; neissche of fleissche and quauy, bloo of colour, whitliche of face, ferdeful of herte; ful of spirringe, snyuel, and rokeinge; ful of slouthe and of slepinge; of a litil appetite and of litil þurst'.[190] While it is clear that these characteristics align with those presented in the various branches of sloth, melancholy is more frequently associated with sloth. Wenzel argues that the use of the two humours highlights two separate parts of *acedia*, the sluggish related to phlegm and the sorrow related to melancholy.[191]

Cold and wet, melancholy was also called black bile and was thought to be produced from the sediment found at the bottom of the stomach during the digestion of food and then stored in the spleen.[192] An overabundance of melancholy made a man listless. *On the Property of Things* gives some of the symptoms of a melancholic complexion as: 'ferdful in herte withoute cause', desiring death and varying types of 'mania' or madness.[193] An early-fifteenth-century sermon by Robert Rypon explains how an excess of melancholy can bring about slothful behaviour: 'The natural cause for this is that coldness by its nature compresses and freezes, and thus causes heaviness. This heaviness afflicts the body and disposes it to

[188] *On the Properties of Things*, 143.
[189] *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, 156.
[190] *On the Properties of Things*, 157.
[191] Wenzel, *The Sin of Sloth*, 193.
[192] Rawcliffe, "The concept of Health," 318.
[193] *On the Properties of Things*, 161.

somnolence, which is the foremost species of *accidia*.'[194] This heaviness of the body and inactivity is a commonly associated with the branch of sluggishness noted above. There was a belief that different sections of society had different constitutional balances. Manual workers required a larger amount of energy and, being of a less refined nature, were able to digest rougher, more basic meals while such dishes caused an imbalance in the humours of the ruling class: 'Groos metys / make no perturbence, / In labouryng men / which may them deffye; / In othir / engendrir malencolye'. Instead the non-labouring in society were prescribed 'metys smale / and sotyl in substaunce' such as chicken.[195]

It does not seem that the upper orders always followed this recommendation. Gout, a painful swelling of the joints is one of the earliest identified diseases.[196] Hippocrates links the disease with an opulent lifestyle, the overabundance of humours sinking into the joints and causing them to swell.[197] Gout is used throughout the tradition of the seven deadly sins to highlight the dangerous debilitating effect sloth has on both body and soul. *The Pricke of Conscience* associates sloth with gout and the inflammation of limbs: 'Som sal haf in alle þair lymmes about, / For sleuth, ale þe pottage and þe gout'.[198] Gout is the exterior symptom of the soul's occupation by sloth. The pottage which is mentioned here would have been a poultice. Lanfranc's *Complete Art of Surgery* recommends using a pottage to treat the inflammation and infection of limbs and wounds.[199] Limbs and particularly legs are also used to illustrate the debilitating nature of sloth. This is because the symptoms of the illness related to sin usually correspond to how the sin is performed. As the slothful are known for their inactivity, the sin manifests itself in the deformity of the limbs causing immobility. In the *Pilgrimage of the Soul* the sins parade past the pilgrim. Sloth is described as having broken feet: 'These other with

[194] London, British Library MS Harley 4894 cited in translation in Siegfried Wenzel, "Preaching the Seven Deadly Sins" in *In the Garden of Evil: The Vices and Culture in the Middle Ages*, ed. Richard Newhauser (Toronto: The Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2005), 167.
[195] *Lydgate and Burgh's Secrees of Old Philospffres*, ed. R. Steele, EETS ES 66 (New York: Kraus, 1975), 58.
[196] George Nuki and Peter A. Simkin, "A concise history of gout and hyperuricemia and their treatment" in *Arthritis Research & Therapy*, 8 (2006).
[197] Shom Bhattacharjee, "A Brief History of Gout," in *International Journal of Rheumatic Diseases*, 12 (2009), 61.
[198] *The Pricke of Conscience*, 82.
[199] *MED*, s.v. "potage (n.)"

the broken fete and legges they ben slouthful men and neclygent aboute theyr owne gouernaunce.'[200] The slothful men, who have not taken advantage of their limbs in life, lose the use of their limbs in purgatory. In the wall painting of *The Purgatorial Ladder* (*c*. 1200) at Chaldon in Surrey, the slothful are portrayed by three walking figures whose feet are attacked by flames demons. The souls, who were inactive in life must suffer the torments of painful activity in purgatory.[201] Inactivity and the production of melancholy is portrayed as both a cause and product of slothful behaviour. The richer elements in society are more exposed to these dangers due to greater access to opulent diets and sedentary lifestyles. However, certain points in the lifecycle increase the risk of sloth, such as old age and youth.

Old age usually corresponds with a slower pace of life and reduction in activity. It is also a time when physical ailments become more common. The image of Sloth in *The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man* is rooted in the pains and physical condition of the elderly. Sloth explains why her name is such:

> My name ys ycallyd 'slouthe';
> ffor I am slowh and encombrows,
> Haltynge also, and Gotows,
> Off my lymes crampysshynge,
> Maymed ek in my goynge,
> Coorbyd, lyk fflokys that ben Old,
> And afouwndryd ay with cold;
> On ech whedyr, I putte blame,
> And, ther-fore, Slouthe ys my name.[202]

Sloth is crippled with the physical representations and symptoms of old age. Her movements are slow and painful as her legs cramp with gout in the cold. She is 'coorbyd' which suggests a stooped back or crippled body.[203] While the elderly themselves may not be slothful, the slothful may present the characteristics of the elderly or the symptoms of old age by appropriating their place as the non-working in society. The ass, who shares many characteristics with the slothful, is presented as

[200] *Pygremage of the Sowle* (Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrum, 1975), fol. xxv.
[201] "The Purgatorial Ladder, or Ladder of Souls, with the Seven Deadly Sins: Chaldon, Surrey c. 1200," *Medieval Wall Painting in the English Parish Church*, accessed Nov. 30, 2014, http://www.paintedchurch.org/chaldon.htm.
[202] Lydgate, *The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man*, 374.
[203] *MED*, s.v. "cŏurben (v.)"

forgetful and slothful in later life. While the younger ass is fair of shape and temperament, the older ass has a melancholic disposition: it 'is a malencolik beste þat is colde and druye and is þerfore kyndeliche heuy, slowh, and lustiles, dulle and witles and forȝetful'.[204] The old ass as well as the personified elderly Sloth in *The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man* present the symptoms of sloth: sluggishness, unrepentance, forgetfulness and idleness.

While the elderly may be more likely to suffer from the aches of legs and inactivity, the young are thought to be more naturally prone to a melancholic complexion. An early-fifteenth-century sermon by Robert Rypon states: 'For while children are disposed to accidia and gluttony by their complexions, those others are disposed to these vices by their evil habits and unclean desires.'[205] People who drink and are greedy tend to be lazy also: 'such people are sleepy and consequently lazy and accidious, not by nature, as children are, but from too great an excess, like pigs'.[206] The sermon differentiates between the natural abundance of melancholy in children and the abundance which we have seen can be caused by overindulgence in unsuitable foods paired with inactivity. The sermon goes on to explain that children's melancholy does not make them slothful although it has the possibility to lead to sloth if the children are not properly encouraged to lead active lives by their parents.[207] *The Book of Vices and Virtues* has a slightly different take on how a person is attacked by sloth: Þe deuel seeþ wel sliliche þe staat of a man and his manere and his complexion and to what vise he is most enclyne to, or bi kynde, or bi wone, and on þat side he saileþ hym most'.[208] The devil looks at the social position, character and complexion in order to understand how best to tempt that person into sin. It was important therefore for Christians to be aware of their own personal dangers.

We have seen the many daughter sins or branches that constitute the deadly sin of sloth. Medieval moralists hoped to equip their readers with the knowledge of

[204] *On the Properties of Things*, 1120.
[205] Wenzel, "Preaching the Seven Deadly Sins," 167.
[206] Ibid, 167.
[207] Ibid, 167-8.
[208] *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, 156.

these sins so that they would not fall into vice unknowingly. As sin was associated with illness, the moralists also provided their audience with cures to counteract sin and bring the sinner back to spiritual health: 'Like as ȝe see þat be crafte of medecyne hote aȝeyns colde and colde aȝens hote it helpeþ and heleþ, like-wize God almyghtye aȝeyns dyvers synnes ordeyns dyvers remedies þat was contrarius vn-to hem'.[209] *Le Livre de Seyntz Medicines* or *The Book of Holy Medicines* was written by Henry of Grosmont, Duke of Lancaster in the middle of the fourteenth century.[210] The text is written as a confession to God. The narrator highlights how sin has infiltrated and corrupted his own body while also offering advice to the reader on how to heal their spiritual wounds. The narrator tells us that while it may be difficult to hear sermons on the sinfulness of mankind this is a 'theriac' for the evil of sin.[211] By remaining vigilant of sin and active in profitable work, it is possible to avoid and cast off the sin of sloth. The sermon for Easter Sunday in the *Festial* recommends that all Christians should move 'owte of sclowthe into holynesse or bysines', embracing diligence wholeheartedly.[212] *Handlyng Synne* is clear that getting into heaven requires diligent adherence to devotional practice: 'Þou getyst nat heuene so lyghtly'.[213] This activity may require hard work and may not be comfortable but the overcoming of these adversaries further strengthens the Christian: 'tyl þou fynde & flee a syker ground, & þat is gostly strengthe to werkyn well, to wythstondyn synne, & to duryn stylle in good lyif, & to suffre strongly alle aduersytes'.[214] One must overcome struggles. This idea will be considered further in the next chapter. However, as long as the sinner wishes to redeem himself and carries through on his penance, the doors to heaven will be open to him. The section on sloth in *Handlyng Synne* ends with the reassurance that God will forgive the sin if you want him to: 'To leue hys synne he shal haue space / And turne aȝen to lyff and grace'.[215]

* * *

[209] *Middle English Sermons*, 83.
[210] Henry of Grosmont, First Duke of Lancaster, *Le Livre de Seyntz Medicines: The Book of Holy Medicines*, trans. Catherine Batt (Tempe: Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2014).
[211] Ibid, 126.
[212] *John Mirk's Festial*, 115.
[213] Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne*, 114.
[214] *Jacob's Well*, 113.
[215] Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne*, 131.

This chapter has sought to understand how the sin of sloth was presented by moralists in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. By examining the composition of sloth through the various narrative strategies employed by the Church a number of themes begin to emerge. According to a mid-fifteenth-century sermon all three estates – viz. those who work, those who pray and those who fight – were guilty of sloth: 'I am a-ferde lest all þre degrees of holychurche arn gilty in þis synne of slowth, as well prelates, prestes, and religious as lordes and oþur comon pepull'.[216] Perhaps, while the sin of sloth is applicable to all there are some who, due to their situation in the world, are more likely to be tempted by sloth and its branches. Where there is a focus on social groups, it tends to lie securely on the upper levels of society. This may be due to the primary audience of the texts being those who could afford access to such manuscripts, however, other sins do not share this repeated reference to the upper levels of society which makes this unlikely. Gout, an illness of the wealthy is seen as the physical manifestation of the soul's infection with sloth. Melancholy, which is said to derive from the overindulgence of the upper classes, is seen to cause slothful behaviour. Its cold and wet constitution weighs down the slothful, causing sluggishness and idleness.

The branch of tenderness gives us our most explicit connection with the upper levels of society as we are repeatedly told that this sin resides at the courts of emperors, kings and bishops. The upper levels of society are highlighted as more susceptible to sloth due to their opulent and sedentary lifestyles. The lower orders are not mentioned as susceptible to particular types of sloth. The character of Sloth in *Piers Plowman*, however, highlights that his slothful behaviour has led him to become a beggar as he did not take advantage of the educational opportunities in his youth: 'and ȝede aboute in my ȝouthe and ȝaf me to no thedom, / And sethe a beggare haue ybe my foule sleuthe'.[217] He wasted his chances in life and is now a beggar. While this comment is unlikely a criticism of all those who receive alms, it does highlight the view that beggars may have reached their position through their own negligent and idle actions.[218]

[216] *Middle English Sermons*, 53.
[217] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 1: C, 235.
[218] The connection between begging and idleness will be discussed in more detail in chapter four.

The devotional discourse also suggests that sloth was most active at the beginning and end of the life cycle. Growing slack, sluggishness, and presentations of illness highlight the susceptibility of the young to sloth. The young have a naturally higher level of melancholy, which makes them predisposed to slothful behaviour. However, this allows for free will as this melancholic disposition can be counteracted through diligent spiritual and secular activity. The devotional writing focuses on the stereotypical youthful attributes such as not choosing an occupation, lying long in bed and partaking in frivolous leisure. The young, who are still in training, have not yet established their position within the working world and therefore are prone to frivolity and unstructured activity. The Church saw this as a serious enough problem to require persistent comment within pastoralia. Another point in the lifecycle that is illustrated as sharing the characteristics of sloth is old age. The elderly mainly appear in personifications and anthropomorphisms of sloth. They have completed their role or occupation within society and may no longer be able to work physically. Their immobility prevents them engaging in the physical and possibly the devotional activity that is recommended to defend against sloth. The old ass is portrayed as melancholic and slothful. The painful, swollen limbs which are external symptoms of sloth's attack on the body and soul are also common ailments of old age. Just as the slothful lose the use of their legs through inactivity, the slothful may also present the characteristics of the elderly or the symptoms of old age by appropriating their place as the non-working in society. Of course, we should not take these attributes of the young, old or wealthy to be realistic or to represent that the majority of members of these groups are riddled with the sin of sloth. Instead it gives us an idea of where late medieval society, including the institutionalised church traditionally placed concerns over inactivity and idleness.[219]

Women are either associated with specific branches of sloth or embody the personification of the sin. Negligence highlights the role of women to bear children. As bearing children is a form of penance for the sin committed by Eve, the failure of a woman to produce a child becomes a form of unrepentance as well as negligence. The description of tenderness specifically addresses women as well as men. This is

[219] The lifecycle and idleness will be discussed further in chapter 4.

likely due to the connection between the sensuality of luxury and femininity. The idle gossip, speaking out of turn in church is visually depicted as female but is represented as male within devotional writing. In *The Book of Holy Medicines,* sloth is the only sin to be personified and is presented as Lady Sloth, who is repeatedly referred to as an 'enchantress'.[220] Apart from these cases, women are rarely mentioned within the visual or textual portrayals of sloth specifically. The seven deadly sins are repeatedly personified as female. In *The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man*, all the sins, including sloth, are portrayed as old women. The image of the corrupt hag is a common motif in late medieval writing such as La Vielle in the Roman de la Rose and Chaucer's Wife of Bath, where women tend to be classified as either virtuous or fallen.[221] Therefore this representation of Sloth is likely an extension of this motif rather than a gendering of the sin. While 'man' is used to refer to mankind generically, there is a general concentration on how sloth is committed in what is presented as male social and economic contexts. This is in part a residue from the monastic origins of the seven deadly sins tradition, but men may also have been viewed as more susceptible to slothful behaviour then women.

Whether the sin of sloth is focused on temporal or spiritual considerations is not clear-cut. It certainly does not correspond with Helmut Hatzfeld's argument that sloth represents a temporal form of *acedia*. All of the branches of sloth are portrayed as dangerous to the soul, with delaying, unrepentance and wanhope presented solely as such. Hypocrisy damages the soul but it does so through spiritual disengagement while performing devotional activities. Sloth undoubtedly originated as a spiritual detachment during devotion and, to some extent, this was still true in the fifteenth century. The main focus of all these devotional works is the health of the soul. The financial and social implications of unemployment are not the focus of this genre of devotional writing. However, some of the literature, such as *Piers Plowman*, gives us temporal examples of debts and disorganised households, which arise through slothful behaviour. Idleness and neglect seem to have reached the temporal realm as social as well as devotional concerns. Idleness is referred to as the temporal form of

[220] Henry of Grosmont, *Le Livre de Seyntz Medicines*, 93 and 124.
[221] "The Romaunt of the Rose," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 732 and "The Wife of Bath's Prologue," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 105-116.

sloth. In *The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man*, Sloth introduces herself to the Pilgrim saying: 'Slouthe ys my name, / Off custom callyd 'Ydelnesse''. Idleness is portrayed as the physical manifestation of the spiritually-disengaged sloth; it is her occupation and role within society. However, the majority of the sins represent spiritual danger from neglecting the role held by a person as a Christian and a member of society.

Forgetfulness and negligence in particular highlight the duplicity of sloth which makes it applicable to both the devotional and secular realms. Cowardice is represented as an internal sin, focused on the thoughts of the sinner and how he or she believes they are viewed by the outside world but also a concern to retain the sinner's material wealth. Siegfried Wenzel's conclusion that sloth remained tied to God's service but that the boundaries of what God's service constituted were expanded and came to encompass more temporal duties also is very convincing.[222] While these representations of the sin of sloth are portrayed using temporal, worldly images they are deeply rooted in a post-lapsarian context, where work and the fulfilment of roles is integral to the proper order of society. Where this structured work has not yet been established or has been removed, such as youth and old age, there is particular social concern. The following chapters will explore to what extent this can be reflected in contemporary society.

No one branch of sloth is highlighted by contemporaries as the most important, however, by examining the emphasis on particular branches within the visual and textual depictions of sloth, some trends begin to emerge. Wanhope is consistently presented as a very serious, grave sin. Unless the sinner reassess their outlook towards God's mercy, it is almost impossible to be redeemed. Idleness is given a large amount of reinforcement with detailed examples of what activities this sin contains. Negligence, tenderness and delaying are all included and expounded in the majority of the sources considered. Sluggishness is reinforced strongly throughout textual images of sloth but is also the most common visual image of sloth. Sloth the sluggard would have been seen across the country in church wall paintings such as those found in Cranborne and Hessett. For the lay population, this may have symbolised far more than just slowness and sleep. The devotional

[222] Wenzel, 96.

discourse of sloth and idleness is clearly presented as a danger to the soul. It is likely that this image prompted memories of the many exemplars the laity heard on sloth and the dangers of its branches. While classifying them separately is useful to understand their composition and meaning, together they represent how the majority of the population viewed sloth. John Mirk in his *Festial* warns that the idle will not be able to enter heaven: 'for he þat wol not trauayl hire wyth men, as seyth Seynt Bernard, he schal travayl euer with fendes of helle'.[223] Whether the population acted on this warning will be addressed in the following chapters.

[223] *John Mirk's Festial*, 4

Chapter 2

'It is al traueile in idil'
The Lexicon of Late Medieval Work and Idleness

Language is an essential source for the historian. It is the means by which people understand and represent their world.[1] However, language is not a static source. It is nuanced, subtle and ever evolving. To understand how late medieval society viewed the concepts of idleness and work, it is important that we first grasp what these words meant and the resonances that they held in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. By doing this we may access the values placed on these concepts. Work and idleness are terms that could be seen as ubiquitous to human existence. They are so entrenched in modern rhetoric that it is difficult to view them within a different, historical context. Historian, Joan Scott offers a framework for examining language. Scott uses a poststructuralist approach to problematise subjects thought of as natural or absolute, such as gender or in the context of the present research, work and idleness.[2] She suggests four modes of examination: language, discourse, difference and deconstruction.

According to Scott, language is how relationships of power are conceived, articulated and performed. However, understanding language even in its most basic grammatical form is not a simple endeavour. As Scott argues:

> those who would codify the meanings of words fight a losing battle, for words, like the ideas and things they are meant to signify, have a history. Neither Oxford dons nor Académie Française has been entirely able to stem the tide, to capture and

[1] Joan W. Scott, "Deconstructing Equality-Versus-Difference: Or, the Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism," in *The Postmodern Turn: New Perspectives on Social Theory*, ed. Steven Seidman (Cambridge: Cambridge Uni. Press, 1994), 283.
[2] Scott, "Deconstructing Equality-Versus-Difference," 282-98.

> fix meanings free of the play of human invention and imagination.[3]

Language while static within a dictionary or even in the textual sources that survive is but a snapshot of the period and from that it is only possible to see the first layer of meaning, the basic shell of understanding that a word may have symbolised for contemporary users. In order to overcome this issue, James Schultz, in his 1995 monograph, *The Knowledge of Childhood in the German Middle Ages*, completed an extensive examination of Middle High German literature in order to collect references to childhood.[4] He then examined the use of different words referring to children in order to categorise the resonances they held within this literature. By using an analysis of the terms used to describe children, James Schultz concludes that childhood in late medieval Germany is defined by gender and sexual experience. Schultz is careful to use the word 'knowledge' in the title of his book, in order to clarify that he is not referring to the reality of medieval childhood but to the 'culturally constructed meanings of childhood' as they are represented in the sources he considered.[5] It is these culturally constructed meanings, which are so useful in understanding the social and moral values of the past. Jeremy Goldberg has undertaken a similar approach to the Middle English lexicon of childhood.[6] For Goldberg, Shultz's findings are removed from their context. He argues that 'the important point here is not so much that the same word can be used to mean different things, but that we are readily able to identify these differences from the context in which the word is found'.[7]

This ties with the second point in Scott's modes of examination, discourse. Scott defines discourse as 'a historically, socially, and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories, and beliefs'.[8] Discourse expands past the

[3] Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, rev. ed. (New York: Columbia Uni. Press, 1999), 28.
[4] James A. Schultz, *The Knowledge of Childhood in the German Middle Ages, 1100-1350* (Philadelphia: Uni. of Pennsylvania Press, 1995).
[5] Ann Marie Rasmussen, "The Knowledge of Childhood in the German Middle Ages, 1100-1350: Review," in *Speculum* 74, no. 2 (1999), 500-1.
[6] P. J. P. Goldberg, "Childhood and Gender in Later Medieval England," in *Viator* 39, no. 1 (2008), 249-62.
[7] Goldberg, "Childhood and Gender," 251.
[8] Scott, "Deconstructing Equality-Versus-Difference," 284.

boundaries of textual material or its genre, encapsulating the social, spiritual and/or economic system in which the source resides. According to Michel Foucault 'in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality'.[9] By constructing a discourse defining the value of labour those in power can inherently control the perception of labour and activity by those in receipt of the discourse. Joan Scott has looked at the value placed on different types of work in nineteenth-century France, particularly the shop-based craftspeople and home-based 'appièceurs'.[10] Scott shows that by looking at these roles within the rhetorical context in which they reside, we can garner much more information about work identities in the period. Cordelia Beattie has also used this methodology to examine the social classification of single women in late medieval England. By examining the words used to denote single women within the Poll Tax collections of 1379 and documents relating to craft and religious guilds, Beattie has sought to explore the value systems used to define non-married women.[11] Both Scott and Beattie have shown that the discourse to which a source belongs has a particular agenda and therefore influences how the language contained in that source was understood and interpreted.

The poststructural idea of difference can be applied to a study of work and idleness. Poststructuralist analysis of language highlights the idea of difference, namely that meaning is constructed through contrast.[12] Within the context of this research, a poststructural view would be that inactivity is an essential component in the definition of activity and vice versa. For Joan Scott, 'any analysis of meaning involves teasing out these negations and oppositions, figuring out how (and whether) they are operating in specific contexts'.[13] Is it possible to understand inactivity without reference to activity? The relationship between these antitheses is central to this thesis. By looking at both of these concepts, we shall have a better

[9] Michel Foucault, "The Order of Discourse," in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. Robert Yang (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 52.
[10] Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, 97-8.
[11] Cordelia Beattie, *Medieval Single Women: The Politics of Social Classification in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford Uni. Press, 2007).
[12] Scott, "Deconstructing Equality-Versus-Difference," 285.
[13] Ibid, 285.

understanding of how they functioned separately and as a pair. The final element of Scott's poststructural approach is to deconstruct these uses of difference within the text by reversing and displacing these binary oppositions.[14] This is a methodology proposed by Jacques Derrida. However, while this would likely provide a stimulating discussion, it is not integral within the goals of the present research. At its most simple level, a lexicographical examination of activity in the later Middle Ages is not just concerned with what writers said, but how they said it and what influenced their choice to phrase it as such. This chapter will apply these ideas of language, discourse and difference to recover the culturally constructed ideas of activity and inactivity in Middle English. By understanding how specific words were used and comparing the resonances they held, this chapter aims to understand both how occupation and idleness in late medieval society functioned and what they tell us about the value systems of that society.

I began my own examination of the language of late medieval occupation and idleness by examining examples in the *Middle English Dictionary*.[15] The *Middle English Dictionary* (*MED*) was compiled by scholars at the University of Michigan between 1954 and 2001. From undergraduate students studying the *Canterbury Tales* for the first time to researchers faced with the perplexing use of a word, the *MED* constitutes an extremely useful resource. However, it was also built to allow scholars to complete their own further examination of the meaning and uses of words. The *MED* provides academics with a wealth of illustrative examples. For instance, there are almost fifteen hundred examples considered for all grammatical forms of the root word *werk*. The editor of the *MED*, Hans Kurath states the intended purpose of these examples in his plan for the dictionary: 'It is hoped that the number of quotations offered in support of the various meanings is large enough to furnish a starting point for a recasting of the scheme of meanings, or for a theory of semantic development, if anyone should wish to undertake such manipulations or

[14] Scott, "Deconstructing Equality-Versus-Difference," 285.
[15] *Middle English Dictionary*. 24 vols. (Ann Arbor: Uni. of Michigan Press, 1952-2001) Digital Edition at <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/>.

investigations'.[16] Rather than just providing definitive definitions of words the *MED* aimed to support scholars in further study of language in the Middle Ages.

Every effort was made to reduce tainting the *MED* with any personal bias of the compilers. This included avoiding over detailed distinctions between meanings as these risked reflecting individual interpretations.[17] In regards to the attribution of meanings on the words in the dictionary, Kurath describes the *MED*'s methodology thus:

> The meaning or meanings of a word or phrase are ascertained by inference from its range of applications. The thing denoted (the referend), the culturally determined conception or interpretation of the thing denoted, and the attitude of the individual or of a faction of society toward such conceptions are part and parcel of what we understand by the term 'meaning'.[18]

While the *MED* has gone to great lengths in its attempt to create unbiased readings of these words, it was completed over a period of 57 years. It is skewed towards literary sources and underrepresents more conventionally historical or documentary sources. Therefore to ensure consistency in my readings of the lexicon of activity and idleness, I have undertaken to reassess the examples in the *MED* rather than use the meanings given within the *Dictionary*. The meaning of a word is the sense or signification of a word. However, we are also looking at the resonances held within this lexicon; the connotation or responses that a word may evoke for a contemporary audience. Resonances shape each other and they balance differently in each word. By examining these resonances we can see the multiple layers of meaning that these words carried throughout this period.

As my research interrogates the concept of idleness this was the obvious word to choose as a starting point. I have also examined other words relating to inactivity, such as sleep, ese, rest and leisure, however, these will be discussed separately in chapter five. In order to explore the lexicon of late medieval work-related activities, I began by searching within the *MED* for words related to

[16] Hans Kurath, *Middle English Dictionary: Plan and Bibliography* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1954), 3.
[17] Kurath, *Middle English Dictionary: Plan and Bibliography*, 3.
[18] Ibid, 3.

occupation and activity such as *labour*, *travail*, *swink*, *toil* and of course, *werk* itself.[19] From a preliminary study of a range of texts, these words were identified as the most common used to describe activity or occupation. On average each of these root words carries a dozen different meanings, most of which are shared across grammatical forms. Schultz in his study of the Middle High German lexicon of childhood deals with the nouns used to refer to childhood with only slight reference to other grammatical forms to reinforce his argument. As work related terms are far more diverse in forms we must be much clearer on the way we refer to each root word or grammatical form. The words relating to activity appear in noun, verbal, adjectival and less commonly in adverbial forms. For example, *werk* is a root word. The different grammatical forms of *werk* are as follows:

Noun (n.): werk

Verb (v.): werken

Adjective (adj.): werkful

Adverb (adv.): werkingli

While all of these forms are themselves different words, they are derived from the same root and share the same meanings and resonances.[20] For example, the nounal form of the root word *travail* can mean a journey. This has a similar meaning to the verbal form travailen which can mean to travel or the act of taking a journey. I also include werker, labourer, swinker, and travailour to illustrate how the meanings and resonances are applied directly to those men and women who undertook work-related activities in the late medieval period. I have attempted to quantify this data to make comparisons between the meanings of each root word. As the texts used in the creation of the *MED* are predominantly literary and devotional, with some published administrative records also included, quantification can only be viewed within this evidence base, as constructed concepts rather than as representing medieval society

[19] *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v. "lăbŏur (n.)", "labŏurāğe (n.)", "lăbŏuren (v.)", "lăbŏurer(e (n.)", "lăbŏuring(e (ger.)", "labōrāciǫn (n.)", "labōrant(e (n. & adj.)", "labŏriŏus (adj.)", "labŏrŏus (adj.)", "labŏrŏuslī (adv.)", "travail (n.)", "travailen (v.)", "travailing(e (ger.)", "travailinge-man (n.)", "travailŏur (n.)", "travailŏus (adj.)", "ravailŏuslī (adv.)", "travesinge (ger.)", "swink (n.)", "swinken (v.)", "swinker(e (n.)", "swinkful (adj.)", "swinkfulnesse (n.)", "swinkhĕd (n.)", "swinking(e (ger.)", "swinkles (adj.)", "toil(e (n.)", "toile (n.)", "toile (n.)", "tǫ̆ileien (v.)", "toilen (v.)", "toiling(e (ger.)", "toilŏus (adj.)", "tollen (v.)", "tolling(e (ger.)", "werk (n.)", "werk (n.)", "werken (v.)", "werken (v.)", "werkende (n.)", "werker(e (n.)", "werkful (adj.)", "werking(e (ger.)", "werking(e (ger.)", "werkinglī (adv.)", "werk-man (n.)", "werk-manlī (adv.)", "werk-manship(e (n.)", and "werkrī (n.)".

[20] Root words will be italicised throughout to clearly differentiate them.

as a whole. In order to compile their examples, the *MED* carried out what Kurath calls 'systematic selective sampling of ME usage'.[21] While the plan of the *MED* does not define the process in any more detail, this would imply that every nth example that clearly illustrated meaning, in line with the parameters set by the plan of the *MED*, was chosen. This would suggest that the number of examples in the *MED* should be relational to the frequency with which words appear in the *MED*'s dataset. All percentages given in this chapter are taken from the meaning of a root word as a whole, as the difference in resonances between grammatical forms was found to be negligible.

To begin, we will look at the root word *idle*. The most common use of *idle* in Middle English was to denote uselessness or needlessness in a person, object or activity. Writers tend to use idleness to highlight that actions or activities must have a purpose or consequence. The *Wycliffite Bible* connects inactivity with this sense of uselessness. It reads 'feith with outen werkes is ydel'.[22] 'Chess and tablis' are described as 'idel gammes' in the *Cursor Mundi*, highlighting their lack of purpose or productiveness for society.[23] A *c*. 1400 Middle English translation of Lanfranc's medical treatise *Science of Cirurgie* problematises the treatment of children suffering from a hernia: 'But if it be in children … it is al traueile in idil & þe patient haþ greet penaunce þerwiþ wiþouten ony profit.'[24] 'Idil' is compared to 'wiþouten ony profit'. Even if an activity is performed, if it does not serve its purpose and provide a function, it is considered 'idil'. The narrator in "How the Wise Man Taught his Son" advises that no matter 'what maner man þou be, / Ȝeeue þee not to ydilnesse, / But take good hede of þi degree, / And þeron do þi bisynesse'.[25] While idleness is a universal concept, from these examples it is clear that a person's societal role or occupation is integral to the understanding of what constituted both activity and inactivity in the later Middle Ages. In order to avoid idleness one must first

[21] Kurath, *Middle English Dictionary: Plan and Bibliography*, 3.
[22] James 2:20 in *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments, with the Apocryphal Books*, eds. Josiah Forshall and Frederic Madden (Oxford: Oxford Uni. Press, 1850), 599.
[23] *Cursor Mundi (The Cursur o the World). A Northumbrian Poem of the XIVth Century in Four Versions*, ed. Richard Morris, EETS 62, 66, 68 (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1876-7-8), 1555.
[24] *Lanfrank's "Science of Cirurgie"*, ed. Robert V. Fleischhacker, *EETS* OS 102 (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1894), 270.
[25] "How the Wise Man Taught his Son" in *The Babees Book*, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall, EETS OS 32 (London: Trübner & Co., 1868), 49.

understand what their role in society is and match their leisure or rest to that role. In order to understand medieval idleness, we must understand work.

The second most common meaning given to idleness is inactivity or laziness. This has a general negative sense and tends to be used in devotional literature that aims to reform the activities of others and bring back those who have strayed from an active religious life. In the B-version of William Langland's *Piers Plowman* the personification of 'Actyf' introduces himself by saying 'alle ydel ich hatye' creating a juxtaposition of active and inactive lives.[26] 'Ymagynatyf' also introduces himself in relation to idleness. 'I am 'Ymagynatif,' quod he; 'ydel was I neuere, / Thouȝ I sitte by myself, in sikenesse ne in helþe.'[27] Here we see the differentiation between the contemplative life, open to the first and second estate, and the active life, which is seen as the concern of the third. Lydgate links idleness with bodily labour and therefore the labouring in society when he says: 'Al ydil folk that wolde also disdeyne in vertuous labour ther bodies to applie'.[28] Idleness or inactivity can be most easily applied to the lower orders of society whose role revolves so heavily on activity.

For medieval man to 'sitt idel and halt is hand' is portrayed as a very negative attribute.[29] There is often a mocking tone in the description of the idle. Chaucer's "Tale of Melibee" describes: 'He that is ydel and slow kan neuere fynde couenable tyme for to do his profit'.[30] The waste of time that is a by-product of idleness is also highlighted within literature. In a letter from John Russe to John Paston, Russe uses the phrase, 'A day lost in idyll can never be recoveryd'.[31] The same point is made in Chaucer's "Franklin's Tale" with 'In ydel, as men seyn, ye no thyng make'.[32] While

[26] William Langland, *Piers Plowman: A Parallel-Text Edition of the A, B, C and Z Versions*, ed. A. V. C. Schmidt (London: Longman, 1995), 1: B, 528.
[27] Ibid, 1: B, 492.
[28] John Lydgate, "The Banner of St. Edmund," in *Altenglische Legenden Neue Folge*, ed. C. Horstmann (Heilbrown: Gebr. Henninger, 1881), 393.
[29] *Vices and Virtues: A Soul's Confession of its Sins, with Reason's Descriptions of the Virtues: A Middle English Dialogue of about 1200 A.D.*, ed. F. Holthausen EETS OS 89 (London: Oxford Uni. Press, 1888), 113.
[30] "The Tale of Melibee," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 233.
[31] *The Paston Letters 1422-1509*, ed. James Gairdner (London: Catto & Windus, 1904), 4: 183
[32] "The Franklin's Tale," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 180.

waste and idleness are seen as an affront to God they are also secular concerns crucial to the maintenance of social order. With such inactivity comes time that can be filled by more immoral pursuits such as lustful activities and gluttony. Robert of Gloucester's *Chronicle*, translated to Middle English in 1325, comments 'vor wanne men beþ al ydel … / hor ydelnesse hom ssal bringe to sunne of lecherye'.[33] Unbridled colts are connected with young men who spend their time in idle activities by John Lydgate: 'Loth toward scole, lost my tyme indeede, / Like a yong colt that ran withowte brydil, / Made my freendys ther good to spende in ydil'.[34] Young male horses are generally untamed and without a bridle they cannot be controlled. *Ayenbite of Inwyt* is more candid on the spiritual dangers posed to the idle man: 'Huanne þe dyeuel uynt þane man ydel, he hine deþ to worke.'[35] The devil is able to take full advantage of the idle because he is not actively engaging in the work of God and of society. This is similar to the *Imitation of Christ* where man's soul is compared to the barren earth before God has given it light: 'I am idel yerthe and voyde, tille þou illumyne me'.[36]

Idleness can represent emptiness to be filled with either good or evil. Idle is also used to mean vanity, profanity, falsity, without care, and light-heartedness. All these uses highlight the link between idleness' lack of purpose or importance. It is not always used as negatively as we have seen above. In the 1389 gild return of the Carpenters' Gild of London, we see conditions being put in place to ensure that 'if any brother go idel for defaute of werke' his fellow brothers will share in any extra work that they themselves have.[37] Here the term 'idel' is not used to denote laziness or uselessness but contains a more neutral meaning of without work or unemployed. The key here is 'for defaute of werke', the man's inactivity is not of his own choosing.

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[33] *The Metrical Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester*, ed. William Aldis Wright (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1887), 282.
[34] *Early English Poetry, Ballads, and Popular Literature of the Middle Ages*, ed. James Orchard Halliwell-Phillipps, vol. 2 (London: T. Richards, 1840), 255.
[35] *Dan Michel's Ayenbite of Inwyt or Remorse of Conscience in the Kentish Dialect, 1340 A.D.*, ed. Richard Morris, EETS OS 23 (London: Trübner & Co., 1866), 31.
[36] *The Imitation of Christ: The First English Translation of the 'Imitatio Christi'*, ed. B. J. H. Biggs, EETS OS 309 (Oxford: Oxford Uni. Press, 1997), 97.
[37] The 1389 Gild Returns will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4. *A Book of London English 1384-1425*, ed. R. W. Chambers and Marjorie Daunt (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931), 43.

The vocabulary of activity or occupation is the antithesis of idleness, however, like idleness, it cannot be explained through a simple idea of activity and passivity. Before we consider the meanings and resonances of this vocabulary it is important to introduce the frequency of use, date range, and genres in which it is found. *Werk* is by far the most commonly used word in this group with over 1500 quotations presented in the *MED*. This is followed by *travail*, *labour* and *swink* respectively. *Toil* is also considered as a word relating to activity and occupation, however, it has less than one hundred examples recorded in the *MED*. In regards to their patterns of use over time, *werk*, *travail* and *swink* are all found from the twelfth century onwards, the beginning of the *MED*'s coverage. However, by the beginning of the fourteenth century, *swink's* resonance becomes focused on manual labour and suffering with the minor uses of traveling and conflict no longer found by this time. *Toil* and *labour* are predominantly fourteenth- and fifteenth-century usages. While *labour*, *travail*, *toil* and *work* are all found in a diverse range of textual genres, *swink* is found almost entirely in devotional sources. This phenomenon will be explored below.

This chapter will concentrate on what I have ascertained by quantitative and qualitative examination of the *MED* to be seven of the main usages seen in *werk*, *travail*, *labour*, *swink* and *toil*. These seven meanings, viz. act or action; exertion of energy; suffering or pain; creation; causality; travel; and conflict, appear in all or most of the words listed. By understanding how these words were used and the values they held, we shall have a clearer understanding as to how this culture understood appropriate roles and work related activities. Once we have examined the shared and differing meanings and resonances of this vocabulary, the remainder of the chapter will seek to understand the values articulated in the medieval concept of work.

Act or Action

By far the most common meaning of the vocabulary is an act or action. It carries resonances of positive activity and physical or mental engagement. *Werk* is used either as a noun to denote actions and activities or as a verb to act or behave. In devotional writing, *werk* tends to be employed to review or place value on the

actions of people such as in the *c*. 1460 treatise *The Tree and the Seven Fruits of the Holy Ghost*: 'make all þi workis and dedis perfight in myldenes'.[38] 'Guode workes' are praised while 'falce werkes' are discouraged.[39] *Werk* is used similarly as a verb, telling of good acts or imploring man to act in a Christian way: 'Aftir his comaundment men mut nedis werch'.[40] Medieval man is implored to adhere to the Christian role he has been given. Secular writing also employs this usage of *werk* to exhort people to act in a certain way, such as in a 1417 record of the proceedings of the King's Council: 'lette theym to wyrke agayn your entente'.[41]

Werk also relates to a person's or object's function or purpose. In the late fifteenth-century verse dialogue *Sidrak and Bokkus*, the *werk* discussed belongs to the personified clouds: 'As þicke ben clowdes ay In somer as in winter day ... And als redy to her werke, Þat is, to reyne and make fair Þe clowdy wedre and þe air'.[42] The clouds have a function and duty that hold benefits for society, by ridding themselves of water and bringing on fair weather afterwards. To 'werken' someone or something is used to refer to putting that person or object to its given use and function. For example, in the romance *Ipomedon* (*c*. 1460), 'Jason … broght the reid knight a spere … & he toke it … & thoght forto sett it on wark'.[43] The *South English Legendary*'s entry on St. Cuthbert includes a comment on play, idleness and the functional nature of 'work': 'Cuberd it ne valþ no ȝt to þe wiþ ȝonge children pleie, / For none suche idel games ne bicomþ þe to werche'.[44] The young Cuthbert is told by an angel to stop playing idle games and to 'werche' for God by learning. This is to be Cuthbert's function in life and thus the *werk* in question is taken to mean prescribed role. Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* also makes this differentiation between *werk* and idleness: 'Ful longe lay the sege and lytel wroughten, So that they

[38] *A Deuout Treatyse Called The Tree and XII Frutes of the Holy Goost*, ed. J. J. Vaissier (Groningen: J. B. Wolters, 1960), 116.
[39] *Ayenbite of Inwyt*, 160 and *Patience*, ed. J. J. Anderson (Manchester: Manchester Uni. Press, 1969), 44.
[40] *The Life of St. Norbert by John Capgrave (1393-1464)*, ed. Cyril Lawrence Smetana (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1977), 141.
[41] *Proceedings and Ordinances of the Privy Council of England*, ed. N. H. Nicolas, vol. 2 (London: Commissioners on the Public Records of the Kingdom, 1834-37), 237.
[42] *Sidrak and Bokkus: A Parallel-Text Edition from Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 559 and British Library, MS Lansdowne 793*, ed. T. L. Burton, EETS OS 312 (Oxford: Oxford Uni. Press, 1999), 2: 611.
[43] *Ipomedon*, ed. Eugen Kölbing (Breslau: W. Koebner, 1889), 343.
[44] *The South English Legendary Edited from Corpus Christi College Cambridge MS. 145 and British Museum MS. Harley 2277*, eds. Charlotte D'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill, vol. 1, EETS OS 235 (London: Oxford Uni. Press, 1956), 119.

were half idel'.[45] The level of idleness is related to the level of work 'wroughten' or role performed.

Labour, *swink* and *travail* are all utilised in similar ways to *werk*, denoting a general sense of doing or occupying a role. The *Pilgrimage of the Life of Man* (*c*. 1450) uses *labour* to employ this sense of occupying a role: 'If j hadde oother thing to laboure, j wolde ocupye me ther on'.[46] In Job 5:7 from the *Wycliffite Bible* (*c*. 1425), this sentiment is expressed to highlight man's role to labour: 'A man is borun to labour, and a brid to fliȝt'.[47] A man is inherently made to work just as a bird is to fly. The act of 'labour' is naturalised and not participating in it is against nature. Here, *labour* is removed of all social resonances and is applicable to the community as a whole, men and women of all social degrees and occupations. In Geoffrey Chaucer's *Romaunt of the Rose*, children and the elderly are placed outside the world of *labour*: 'if he may done no labour, / For elde or sykenesse … / Or for his tendre age also, / Thanne may he yit a-begging go'.[48] If we are to consider that children, the sick and the elderly are all unable to 'labour', then *labour* must be related, in this context, with physical or mental ability.

Physical and mental ability are needed in order to fulfil a person's role within society. Sickness and old age are times when a person's role changes as their previous role may no longer be fulfilled. *Labour* is regularly associated with 'bisynesse'.[49] In John Fortesque's 1475 treatise on the governance of England, *labour* is used to denote proper work and focus: 'This serche wich we nowe haue made … hath be a digression ffrom the mater in wich we labour'.[50] *Labour* represents work that must be completed or activities that must be undertaken. Its resonances are entirely active, thus placing it as the opposite to the passive idleness. *Swink* likewise represents activities completed, for example it is represented as 'Hise

[45] "Legend of Good Women," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 618.
[46] *The Pilgrimage of the Lyf of the Manhode,* ed. W. A. Wright, Rorburghe Club 91 (London: J. B. Nichols, 1869), 100.
[47] Job 5: 7 of 1425 version of the Wycliffite Bible cited in *MED*, s.v. "labour (n.)."
[48] "The Romaunt of the Rose*,"* in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 757.
[49] "Troilus and Criseyde," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 487.
[50] John Fortescue, *The Governance of England: Otherwise Called The Difference Between an Absolute and a Limited Monarchy*, ed. Charles Plummer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885), 142.

swink ne hauede he nowt forlorn' in *Havelok the Dane* (*c*. 1300).[51] *Swink* denotes the way in which a person makes their living: 'Hast þou I-stole mete or drynke, For þou woldest not þerfore swynke?'[52] This meaning is shared by *travail*, *toil* and *werk:* 'ȝwane he i-saiȝ ani idel man þat louede glotonie and ne trauailede nouȝt for is mete' and 'Alle kyne crafty men … toille for here foode'.[53]

Exertion of Energy

At the core of the consideration of the vocabulary of activity is the exertion of energy. This release of energy during activity is integral for the fulfilment of tasks but can also leave the person drained and tired. The verb form of *travail* is used to denote the exertion of energy, which in this case aids medieval man to lose weight: 'Forto allegge fatnesse he travailled his body wiþ besynesse of hontynge'.[54] This meaning has an emphasis on the differences between the active and passive person. This comparison is clearly shown in John Trevisa's translation (*c*. 1398) of Bartholomew the Englishman's *De Proprietatibus Rerum*: 'Restinge men schal ete and drinke lasse þan trauaylinge men, for hete is strong in trauailinge men'.[55] In the devotional treatise, *Rule of the Order of Penitents* (*c*. 1500) there is a stipulation made that 'Thei that labore … may ete laufully thries in the day whan they laubor'.[56] The labourer, whose work is more physical in nature, requires more sustenance than those whose occupation is less physically demanding.

Werk similarly denotes an activity that requires energy. A late-fifteenth-century Middle-English version of Lanfranc's medical treatise recommends a rest

[51] *The Lay of Havelok the Dane: Re-edited from MS. Laud Misc. 108 in the Bodleian Library Oxford*, ed. Walter W. Skeat and K. Sisam (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1915), 29.
[52] John Mirc, *Instructions for Parish Priests*, ed. Edward Peacock, EETS OS 31 (London: Trübner & Co., 1868), 38.
[53] "St. Francis," in *The Early South-English Legendary or Lives of Saints*, ed. Carl Horstmann, EETS OS 87 (London: Trübner, 1887): 257, *The English Works of John Gower*, ed. G. C. Macaulay, vol. 2, EETS ES 81 (London: Kegan Paul Trench & Treubner, 1900), 82 and *Piers Plowman: The A Version, Will's Visions of Piers Plowman and Do-Well*, ed. G. Kane (London: Athlone Press, 1960), 414.
[54] *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden Monachi Cestrensis: Together with the English Translations of John Trevisa and of an Unknown Writer of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Joseph Rawson Lumby (London: Longman & Co., 1882), 8: 25.
[55] *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus De Proprietatibus Rerum: A Critical Text*, ed. M. C. Seymour (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 1: 324.
[56] *A Fifteenth-Century Courtesy Book and Two Franciscan Rules*, ed. R. W. Chambers and Walter W. Seton, EETS OS 148 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1914), 50.

from activity when one is ill: 'Make þe seke rest from all warkes'.[57] This physical and tiring *labour* is also applied to animals. In the *The Fair Maid of Astolat* by Thomas Malory (*c*. 1470), a horse is excitable as he has not been worked physically to rid him of excess energy: 'The horse was passyng lusty and frycke, because he was nat laboured of a moneth before'.[58] While exertion can highlight an honourable action it also carries the sense that by keeping society active in their roles, they will remain docile and agreeable. Regular *labour* is important to ensure a passive and orderly society. This exertion of energy appears in the mid-fourteenth-century interlude *Occupation and Idleness*. The personified Idleness disagrees with the argument of the personifications of Doctrine and Occupation, that everyman must fulfill his role in society. He argues that they want him to be weary like a dog: 'Thou woldist make me weré / As is eny hounde, / And that Y hate'.[59]

Swink is most frequently used to refer to the effort and energy put into actions. It is commonly linked with physical labour and is paired with sweating, an image to denote this energy-intensive task. In the mid-fifteenth-century text *The Siege of Calais*, women are described as throwing stones from the 'scaffolde' to do their part in the protection of the town, giving all their energy and effort to the task: 'They spared no swete ne swynk'.[60] This exertion is honourable and praiseworthy. The doubling of *swink* and sweat likely carried resonances of Adam's punishment in Genesis 3:19: 'and thow shalt ete erbis of the erthe; in the swoot [sweat] of thi chere'.[61] *Swink* is repeatedly placed as Adam's punishment for disobeying God in the Garden of Eden. This association with Adam and Eve is not as pronounced elsewhere in the lexicon. A 1400 version of the historical and devotional poem *Cursor Mundi* mirrors Genesis 3:19 in its depiction of the banishment of Adam and Eve: 'Of erth þou sal, wit suete an suinc, win þat þou sal ete and drinc'.[62] This

[57] *A Middle English Version of Lanfranc's Chirurgia Parva: The Surgical Part*, ed. A. Asplund (PhD diss., Stockholm University, 1970): 20a/20 cited in *MED*, s.v. "werk (n.1)."
[58] *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, ed. Eugene Vinaver, vol. 3 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947), 1085.
[59] Brian S. Lee, "Occupation and Idleness" in *Medieval Literature for Children*, ed. Daniel T. Kline (London: Routledge, 2003), 31.
[60] "The Siege of Calais (1436)" in *Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, ed. Rossell Hope Robbins (New York, Columbia Uni. Press, 1959), 81.
[61] Genesis 3: 19, *The Holy Bible*, 84.
[62] *The Southern Version of Cursor Mundi*, ed. Sarah M. Horrall (Ottawa: Uni. of Ottawa Press, 1978), 63.

rhetoric of punishment would have undoubtedly permeated the conscious or subconscious resonances of *swink*. The fact that *swink* is almost never used in administrative documents suggests that it belonged solely to a devotional discourse. The word is coloured with a sense of difficulty and struggle in the sweating which it requires. *Swink* is manual and exhausting. The A-version of *Piers Plowman* placed *swink* within the specific context of the agricultural labourer: 'In settyng & sowyng swonke ful harde'.[63] This physical labour is a way in which the world pays for the sins of the first man and woman.

The most common way for a person to exert themselves in the examples found in the *MED* is through manual labour. This is *Swink's* predominant meaning accounting for one third of the examples of *swink* in the *MED*. While *swink's* minor resonances disappear by the early-fourteenth century, *swink* as manual labour remains a strong component of the word until the end of the fifteenth century. As we have seen above, *swink* is regularly doubled with sweat denoting the exertion involved in physical labour: 'Þere thar þe noþer swynke ne swete'.[64] *Swink* and *labour* are commonly placed together: 'I swynk and laboure all day' and physical activity is also the most common usage of *labour*.[65] About a fifth of the examples of *labour* in the *MED* carry this meaning. *Labour* is particularly used in reference to agricultural work or the 'labourage of his londis'.[66] In John Lydgate's *Thoroughfare of Woe* (*c*. 1475), a plough is described as 'laborious' highlighting its use in physical labour but also in the struggle that must be experienced to move the heavy piece of agricultural equipment.[67]

In a Middle English translation (*c*. 1450) of *De Re Militari* by Flavius Vegetius Renatus, the commons are described as 'boystous and rude peple' who 'haue hir membris and hir lymmes of hir body hardid wiþ trauaile to al manere

[63] *Piers Plowman* 1: A, 5.
[64] *Twenty-Six Political and Other Poems*, ed. J. Kail, EETS OS 124 (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1904), 38.
[65] Labour, travail, and werk refer to physical occupation in approximately 21, 9, and 3 per cent of their examples in the *MED* respectively. *The Early English Version of the Gesta Romanorum*, ed. Sidney J. H. Herrtage (London: Trübner & Co., 1878), 369.
[66] *The Boke of Noblesse: Addressed to King Edward the Fourth on his Invasion of France in 1475*, ed. John Gough Nichols (London: Roxburghe Club, 1860), 268.
[67] *A Selection from the Minor Poems of Dan John Lydgate*, ed. James Orchard Halliwell (London: C. Richards, 1840), 123.

laboure'.[68] However, the *Romaunt of the Rose* describes this physical *labour* as the action of the perfect man: 'A parfit man … / ne shal … / With propre hondis and body also, / Gete his fode in laboryng.'[69] *Labour* is a physical pursuit and one that is the proper and honourable work for at least some members of society. This resonance of *labour* is also defined along social grounds in *Mum and the Sothsegger*: 'That rewlers of rewmes … / … were … yffoundid … / … to laboure on þe lawe / as lewde men on plowes'.[70] This label tends to reflect the traditional view of the three estates where those who work are portrayed as ill-educated and base, although in reality ploughmen would have been highly skilled. While *werk* is predominantly used to refer to the crafts, it is also used to discuss manual labour but in only three per cent of the examples given for *werk* in the *MED*. *Werk* is much more likely to refer to creation and production than to physical labour. The infamous letter from John Ball to the peasants of Essex, during the 1381 Peasant's Revolt, mentions a man named Piers Plowman: 'biddeþ Pers plouȝman go to his werk'.[71] Piers, whose occupation is manual agricultural labour, is described as having 'werk' as opposed to *travail* or *labour*. The use of *werk* may have intended to highlight the important, productive and crucial role of an agricultural worker's activities for society.

The exertion of energy is not just a physical resonance as *swink* also refers to mental exertion. This exertion of the mind is not physically active but passive. This means those who partake in this type of activity need to legitimise their activity by highlighting the mental exertion required. Sadlek has highlighted an awareness of *otium* in the works of Ricardian poets such as Langland, Chaucer and Gower. While Sadlek argues that this discussion represents a real concern to the authors about the possibility that they lead an idle life, it seems more likely that this served as a topos, legitimising the work of lay authors within society. In Chaucer's *House of Fame*, the narrator speaks of the hard work of his wit or mind: 'Hit … / maketh al my wyt to swynke, / On this castel to bethynke'.[72] *Travail* is also used to denote the mental

[68] *The Earliest English Translation of Vegetius' De Re Militari*, ed. Geoffrey Lester (Heidelberg: C. Winter Universitätsverlag, 1988), 50.
[69] "The Romaunt of the Rose" in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 755.
[70] *Mum and the Sothsegger: Edited from the Manuscripts Camb. Univ. Ll. IV. 14 and Brit. Mus. Add, 41666*, eds. Mabel Day and Robert Steele, EETS OS 199 (London: Oxford Uni. Press, 1936), 20.
[71] "John Ball's Letters, II (1381)" in *Historical Poems*, 55.
[72] "House of Fame," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 362.

exertion especially in regards to writing and devotional meditation: 'Wise writeres of arte and of science … hadde swettnesse and lykynge al hir lyf tyme to studie and to trauaille aboute konnyng and knowleche of kyndeliche þinges'.[73] The verb form of *labour* is also used for the labours of the mind especially in relation to contemplation. St. Augustine is described as 'labourand in þe law of God day and nyth' in John Capgrave's *Life of Saint Augustine* (*c*. 1450) suggesting that he constantly contemplates it.[74]

This exertion of energy can also be an activity of strength as opposed to exhaustion denoting to strive or put great effort into something: 'So comeþ drines and þurst and sechinge and loude breþinge, for þe herte trauaileþ to drawe in breþ and ayer'.[75] In a memorandum of evidence given against the Earl of Ormond's position as Lieutenant in Ireland, a description of a true Lieutenant is given: 'Hyt be houyth þat he þat schold be your Lieutenant there be a miȝty, couragews, and laborows man, to kepe þe felde … a yeynst your enemys'.[76] 'Miȝty, couragews, and laborows man' denotes someone with both physical and mental strength and an ability to overcome a struggle. The king's lieutenant would normally be a man of noble rank, in this case an earl. The higher levels in society may still *labour* but this *labour* is constituted of activities which are suitable for their standing in society. The 'laborows man' projects an image of strength and perseverance over difficulty, which it held when applied to the labouring classes, but adheres with aristocratic roles by the inclusion of 'miȝty,' and 'couragews'.

Furthermore, energy can represent a commodity, which should not be applied wastefully. This is apparent in the *Cursor Mundi* (*c*. 1400), where the narrator warns that a man should not put his effort or energy into an activity which will not be finished or brought to fruition: 'It es na spede our suinc to spend on thing we may noght bring tilend'.[77] In Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, the narrator is unwilling to spend energy in describing a distasteful character, thus highlighting the economic

[73] *Polychronicon*, 1: 3.
[74] *John Capgrave's Lives of St. Augustine and St. Gilbert of Sempringham and A Sermon*, ed. J. J. Munro, EETS OS 140 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1910), 50.
[75] *On the Properties of* Things, 1: 378.
[76] "Documents relating to charges against James, Earl of Ormonde, 1442-45," in *A Roll of the Proceedings of the King's Council in Ireland*, ed. J. Graves (London: Longman, 1877), 281
[77] *Cursor Mundi*, 3: 1193.

nature of energy: 'Me lyste nat vouche-sauf on hym to swynke, / Ne spende on hym a penne ful of ynke'.[78] The adverbial form of *travail* is used to denote expending large amounts of energy: 'þat bi þe settyng of þis hors so bisili and so traveilosely a werk wherbi he schal be worun out'.[79] The horse is made to work so hard that he is 'worun out'. There is a limited amount of energy that can be expended. *Travail* carries a unique meaning relating to exertion, exhaustion after a long journey. The prose *Life of Christ* uses *travail* in this way: 'Þai resteden hem a litil while, for þat hij weren gretlich ytrauailed'.[80] This use tends to come from poetry and devotional writing, particularly the lives of saints who suffer exhaustion from lengthy traveling or pilgrimage.

This rhetoric of an economy of energy and labour time can be seen within the Mayor's court of London. In 1366 apprentice Nicholas Salmon brought a bill of complaint against his master Robert Leddered, a draper. According to Salmon, Leddered had not fulfilled his contract to teach him the skills of drapery but rather wasted his time ('perde de son temps') by only giving him unrelated, menial household tasks.[81] Leddered defended himself by arguing that he had taught Salmon as best he could and denied giving him menial jobs. The Mayor's court found in favour of Salmon, freeing him from his apprenticeship and ordered Leddered to pay him 30s. in damages. While the bill of complaint is based on a breach of contract rather than this waste of energy or time, the use of the phrase is significant. Time and the energy used within that time were viewed as valuable commodities and wasting them or causing another's time or energy to be wasted was not looked on lightly. Waste and unproductivity are seen as an element of idleness, while exerting energy productively is integral to the vocabulary of occupation.

Suffering and Pain

Suffering and pain are frequently referenced using the vocabulary of occupation and activity. This suffering can refer to physical pain, illness, mental torment or distress.

[78] "Legend of Good Women," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 627.
[79] *The Reuele of Crysten Religioun by Reginald Peacock*, ed. William Cabell Greet, EETS OS 171 (London: Oxford Uni. Press, 1927), 268.
[80] *The Pepysian Gospel Harmony*, ed. Margery Goates, EETS OS 157 (London: Oxford Uni. Press, 1922), 46.
[81] London, London Metropolitan Archive, Plea and Memoranda Rolls, Roll A11, Membr. 5b.

Almost one third of examples of *travail* in the *MED* denote pain, struggle or suffering of a mental or physical nature. *Swink*, *labour* and *werk* similarly carry this resonance but to a much lesser degree (8, 5 and 3 percent respectively). *Toil* does not refer to pain or suffering. This may be due to its strong connection with conflict (discussed below), which concentrates on the aristocratic aspect of battle rather than its consequences. While *travail* is seen in this sense throughout a variety of genres, *swink* is only used to denote suffering or pain within devotional texts and predominantly in the thirteenth century. Although it is still used in this way in the subsequent decades, it is largely displaced by *travail* and *work*, which carry the meaning from the mid-fourteenth century onwards. A late-fifteenth-century version of Reginald Peacock's *The Donet*, places *travail* as one of the 'punnysschyngis which schulen be in þis lijf, summe ben peynes to þe body' which include 'hungir, þirst … sijknes, traueyl … mayme, deeþ and such oþire'.[82] Within the examples in the *MED* examined in this study, suffering is the third most common usage of *labour*. In *The Donet* the doubling of *labour* and pain link their meanings: 'In how manye maners of laboriose or peynful dedis stondiþ douȝtines?'[83] 'Tyme of labours' is used to describe a time of struggle or hardship such as in the *Siege of Calais*: 'Than cometh tyme of labours'.[84]

The suffering of Christ is also a motif that appears frequently. A 1430 Wycliffite treatise entitled *The Great Sentence of Curse Expounded* refers to it as the 'pore and traveilouse lif of Crist'.[85] Similarly, the romance *William of Palerne* describes *travail* as something to be suffered: 'þi tenful travayles þow hast for me suffred'.[86] These texts likely draw on the tradition of affective piety where Christians were guided to focus on the pain and suffering of Christ and to empathise with the grief of his mother, the Virgin Mary. Affective piety tended to be the reserve of the upper sections of society, those who had time for contemplation and the resources to either view vivid images of the crucifixion and read or listen to affective texts, such

[82] Reginald Pecock, *The Donet*, ed. Elsie Vaughan Hitchcock EETS OS 156 (London: Oxford Uni. Press, 1921), 92.
[83] Pecock, *The Donet*, 57.
[84] "The Siege of Calais (1436)" in *Historical Poems*, 78.
[85] *Select English Works of John Wyclif*, ed. Thomas Arnold, vol. 3 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1871), 273.
[86] *William of Palerne: An Alliterative Romance*, ed. G. H. V. Bunt (Groningen: Bouma's Boekhuis bv, 1985), 257.

as *The Mirrour of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ*.[87] A connection is made between the suffering of Christ and the suffering experienced with *travail*, *labour* and *swink*. Just as Christ's suffering washed away the sins of Christians so the struggles of hard work will lead a man to everlasting life. It is also regularly associated with penance, be it penance for one sin or the penance taken upon mankind in response to the Fall. The *Supplicatio Pessima* (Intercession for the Wicked), gives an indication as to the role expected of different members of society in regards to their devotional service in his critique of monks or 'wordely relysyous': 'Alle the wordely relygyous do nat the office of an hundred curates, ne of a seculer lord, ne of a trewe laborer, ne lyve therafter in penance ne in bodely trawayle, as religyous shuld so do'.[88] For a lord, devotional service can be fulfilled by the exercise of authority, physical work for a labourer, or for the religious suffering the penance associated with asceticism. Bodily suffering may be painful, however, this may have positive resonances throughout Middle English texts. For instance, *The Pater Noster of Richard Ermyte*, an early-fifteenth-century exposition on the 'Our Father', represents this suffering as something that should be embraced and celebrated as it symbolised the connection with God: 'Þerfor are we cast here in erþe as in prisoun, wiþ penaunce oure synnes here for to rewe, oure body wiþ traueyl for to defoule, noȝt feyntly but hertely'.[89] It seems within the devotional context *travail* remains as an activity or occupation, but one which is represented as physically difficult and uncomfortable.

While *travail* can denote suffering, the verb form travailen can also be used to represent the causing of harm and pain, having connections with being attacked: 'With rauynous beres nor wilde wolues trauailed'.[90] However, this may be self-imposed or for the benefit of the soul. *The Pater Noster of Richard Ermyte* notes that we cause our body to suffer in order to prevent falling into the sin of idleness: 'Firste aȝeyn ydilnes, þat we traueile oure fleisch here'.[91] In Richard Lavynham's mid-fifteenth-century *Litil Tretys on the Seven Deadly Sins*, one man is described as

[87] *The Mirrour of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ*, ed. L. F. Powell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908).
[88] *Chronica Monasterii S. Albani*, ed. Henry Thomas Riley, vol. 1 (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1870), 456.
[89] *Þe Pater Noster of Richard Ermyte: A Late Middle English Exposition of the Lord's Prayer*, ed. Florent Gérard Antoine Marie Aarts (Nijmegen: Janssen, 1967), 13.
[90] *Lydgate's Fall of Princes*, ed. Henry Bergen, EETS ES 123 (London: Oxford Uni. Press, 1924), 3: 948.
[91] *Þe Pater Noster of Richard*, 14.

having 'trauaylid his body wt penawnce'.[92] This sense of travailen relates to the mortification of the flesh. This could refer to continental flagellants or more likely the exhaustion and suffering induced by physical activity. A Middle English translation of Thomas à Kempis' devotional treatise *Imitation of Christ* compares the bliss of heaven with the *labour* or struggles of earth: 'Wheþer all laborose þinges be not to be suffrid for euerlasting lif?'[93]

Margery Kempe's struggle with her emotional connection to Christ is also expressed as *labour*: 'Whan sche knew that sche schulde cryen, sche kept it in as long as sche mygth … and evyr it schuld labowryn in hir mende mor and mor into the tyme þat it broke owte'.[94] Her emotions struggle inside her until they are unable to be suppressed any longer. She is also tortured by thoughts that she believes stem from the devil: 'Sche was so labowryd wyth hir gostly enmy þat sche durst not blissyn hir … and sche was labowryd wyth many fowle & horibyl thowtys'.[95] Mental distress and struggle seem to have been seen as a particularly female form of *labour* as almost all the examples of emotional *labour* are associated with women. However, *travail* and *swink* refer to mental distress in relation to men also. In thirteenth-century texts *swink* is doubled regularly with sorrow: 'Mare es þair swynk and sorow'.[96] *Swink's* main association with distress is mental as *swink's* physical resonances concentrate on the effort put into activities rather than physical pain. In a 1450 version of Henry Lovelich's *History of the Holy Grail* we see an example of this use: 'And with distorbilons maketh his herte to swenke, So myhte he fallen in disperaunce'.[97] *Travail* is also doubled with sorrow. Discussing the Fall, a Middle English translation of *Gesta Romanorum*, a collection of moral anecdotes and stories, comments: 'Wher-for for þat trespas … we wher put oute fro our heritage of paradyse and in þe kyngdome þis wrechede worlde to gret trauelle & sorowȝe'.[98]

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[92] Richard Lavynham, *A Litil Tretys on the Seven Deadly Sins*, ed. J. P. W. M. Van Zutphen (Rome: Institutum Carmelitanum, 1956), 26.
[93] *The Earliest English Translation of the First Three Books of the De Imitatione Christi*, ed. John K. Ingram (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1893), 125.
[94] *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. B. A. Windeatt (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 166.
[95] Ibid, 177.
[96] *The Pricke of Conscience: A Northumbrian Poem by Richard Rolle de Hampole*, ed. Richard Morris (Berlin: J. Asher & Co., 1863), 21.
[97] Henry Lovelich, *The History of The Holy Grail*, ed. F. J. Furnivall, EETS ES 20 (London: Trübner & Co., 1874), 260.
[98] *A Middle English Version of the Gesta Romanorum edited from Gloucester Cathedral MS 22*, ed. Karl Inge Sandred (Uppsala: Universitetet, 1971), 51.

The punishment imposed by God had implications as to how work-related activities were framed. In regards to *travail*, the suffering is mainly physical, there is, however, some references to mental struggle particularly when asleep. A mid-fifteenth-century medical treatise includes a recipe to aid those who suffer from uneasy sleep: 'For hem þat trawaylyn in here slepe … late hym hangyn betoyne abowtyn his nekke'.[99] *Travailen* can also mean to worry: 'Ich haue y-trauaylled ȝoure holynesse y-nowȝ'.[100]

Just as difficult physical exertion was the punishment of Adam, the pain of giving birth was the punishment of Eve. This is represented in the portrayals of childbirth using the vocabulary of activity and occupation. According to the Bible, the *labour* of a woman should be the pains of childbirth: 'in sorwe thow shalt bere, children'.[101] In a letter from Thomas Denyes to John Paston in 1454, Deynes' wife is described as having 'laboured of hir child' referring to the process of birth.[102] However, in most of the references to childbirth, *labour* refers not to the action of giving birth but to the physical pain involved in the process. In *The Book of Margery Kempe* we see the struggle and pain of childbirth described as the labour of 'chyldyng': 'for labowr sche had in chyldyng'.[103] *Travail* is also used to represent the difficulties and pain of childbirth. John Trevisa's translation of Bartholomew the Englishman's *De Proprietatibus Rerum* explains the purpose of a midwife: 'A midwif is a womman þat hath craft to helpe a womman þat trauaileþ of childe, þat sche bere and bringe forthe here childe with þe lasse woo and sorwe'.[104] Travail is means to represent the pain of childbirth, which the midwife can ease.

Not all resonances of pain associated with the lexicon of activity belong to the devotional discourse. We also see this represented in a surgical treatise from

[99] *Aus Mittelenglischen Medizintexten: Die Prosarezepte des Stockholmer miszellan Kodex X.90*, ed. G. Müller, KAA 10 (Leipzig: Verlag Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1929), 117.
[100] *Dialogus inter Militem et Clericum, Richard FitzRalph's Sermon: 'Defensio Curatorum' and Methodius: 'Þe Bygynnyng of þe World and þe Ende of Worldes' by John Trevisa*, ed. Aaron Jenkins Perry, EETS OS 167 (London: Oxford Uni. Press, 1925), 93.
[101] Genesis 3:16, *The Holy Bible*, 84.
[102] *The Paston Letters. 1422-1509 A.D.*, ed. James Gairdner (London: Catto & Windus, 1872), 1: 274
[103] *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 6.
[104] *On the Properties of Things*, 1: 305.

1475: 'he myȝte not haue susteyned þe traueile of þe meuynge of þe ioynctis'.[105] The adjective 'trauelous' is used to denote the seriousness of a condition: 'whan þe couȝhe is trauelous … it is a token þat þe mater of þe greuaunce is yuel to defie'.[106] Work can also be used to denote physical pain and illness with a medical recipe prescribing a remedy for 'evel and werke in bledder'.[107] *Werk* is found in a variety of different genres but specifically in scientific treatise. It is often used to represent a pain in a particular part of the body, especially the head: 'þis fever is knawene be continuel wark in þe hed'.[108] It is also used in a way similarly to the modern use of ache such as 'tethe werke' and 'heedwarke'.[109] This type of *werk* seems to be the predicament of the old. Thus Noah in the Towneley pageant of 'Noah and the Ark' comments that he is too old to take on such a project: 'My bonys ar so stark, No wonder if thay wark, ffor I am full old'.[110] As we saw in the devotional discourse surrounding sloth, pain and illness is associated with old age. Similarly, the lexicon is associated with the struggle and pains of death: 'he traueyled as men done þat dyen'.[111] Sick people who are about to die are considered as 'labouryng in theire last'.[112] The resonance of illness is also seen in texts which have a more devotional focus: 'Whan that he fill into heresie, / He was trauailed with suich a a dropesie'.[113] However, these infections may not be physical as one's soul can be infected with sin and corruption: 'If thou praye with teres of contricion whan thou art traueiled with vnchastite…'.[114]

[105] London, Wellcome Historical Medical Library, MS 564.
[106] *Healing and Society in Medieval England: A Middle English Translation of the Pharmaceutical Writings of Gilbertus Anglicus*, ed. Faye Marie Getz (Madison: Uni. of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 124
[107] *Reliquiae Antiquae: Scraps from Ancient Manuscripts*, ed. Thomas Wright and James Orchard Halliwell, vol. 1 (London: John Russell Smith, 1845), 51.
[108] cited in *MED*, s.v. "werk (n.2)".
[109] *Religious Pieces in Prose and Verse*, ed. George G. Perry, EETS OS 26 (London: Trübner & Co., 1914), 119 and *The Promptorium Parvulorum: The First English-Latin Dictionary*, ed. A. L. Mayhew, EETS ES 102 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1908), 217.
[110] *The Towneley Plays*, ed. G. England and A. Pollard, EETS ES 71 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1897), 31.
[111] *The Southern Version of Cursor Mundi*, ed. H. J. Stauffenberg (Ottawa: Ottawa Uni. Press, 1985), 3: 755.
[112] *The English Register of Godstow Nunnery near Oxford, Written About 1450*, ed. Andrew Clark, vol. 1, EETS OS 129 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1905), 94.
[113] *Lydgate's Fall of Princes*, ed. Henry Bergen, EETS ES 123 (London: Oxford Uni. Press, 1924), 3: 572.
[114] *Aelred of Rievaulx's De Institutione Inclusarum: Two English Versions*, ed. John Ayto and Alexandra Barratt, EETS 287 (London: Oxford Uni. Press, 1984), 11.

Creation

Creation or products of creation represent the most common meanings of *werk* in the sources considered. It is from this meaning that we see its connection with childbirth. 'Erl Hugelyn of Pyze' in Chaucer's "The Monk's Tale" is in deep despair and cries: 'allas that I was wroght!'[115] 'Wroght' refers not to the act of childbirth or the pain that the act causes as we have seen previously in the lexicon, but to the act of bringing into being. *Werk* tends to refer to goods produced by members of crafts: 'warc of þe hondys of men of craft' or more specifically: 'þei maken þe werkys of carpentrye', while the verb form of *werk* represents the action of making the item: 'he werk so wyþerly on werk þat he made'.[116] Used to refer to a diverse range of crafts, such as metalwork, masonry, carpentry or needlework, *werk* denotes the manipulation of materials: 'Siluer ... may wel be wrouȝt by hamour but nought so wel as gold'. [117] The noun 'werk-manshipe' is used to refer to high quality produce.[118] From the account books of the London carpenters (1438), we can see that work denoted an extra level of decoration and quality: 'Twey cloþes of werkes and twey cloþes playne'.[119] This is also highlighted in an inventory of the goods of John Paston II, where the detail of the stained glass is noted: 'Item, iij panes of glasse of xviij fete wele wrought wyth jmages and armes and other besy werk set in the chambir wyndowe over the chapell'.[120] The inventory's purpose would have been to make account of the value of the fabric and furniture of the Paston manor and therefore would necessarily highlight the quality of the decoration. *Werk* can similarly be used to denote artistry, sculpture and adornment. Embroidered or ornamented produce is described by stating the technique followed by the word

[115] "The Monk's Tale," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 247.
[116] *Dives and Pauper: Volume 1, Part 2*, ed. P. H. Barnum, EETS 280 (London: Oxford Uni. Press, 1980), 313, Exodus 35: 35 in *Wycliffite Bible: MS. Bodley 959*, ed. Conrad Lindberg (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1959), 150 and *Cleanness: An alliterative Tripartite Poem on the Deluge, the Destruction of Sodom, and the Death of Belshazzar, by the Poet of Pearl*, ed. Israel Gollancz (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1974), 8.
[117] *On the Properties of Things*, 2: 833.
[118] *MED*, s.v. "werk-manship(e (n.)."
[119] *Records of the Worshipful Company of Carpenters*, ed. Bower Marsh, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford Uni. Press, 1914), 2.
[120] *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century: Part 1*, ed. Norman Davis, EETS SS 20 (Oxford: Oxford Uni. Press, 2004), 435.

'worke': 'ij cushens of cowched worke' or to denote the colour such as 'redwerk' or 'grene werk'.[121] *Werk* represents functional and beautiful produce.

Production or the fruits of activity is found as a meaning of *travail*, *labour* and *swink* but in less than three percent of their examples. *Travail* denotes the economic livelihood of a person, the bread and ale upon which they survive. It in no way denotes a comfortable life but the basic necessities on which to live or to make ends meet: 'ffor he eteþ þe trauayle of oþere'. *Labour* is only uncommonly used to represent the accomplishments or fruits of one's labour. There are only three examples of this usage given in the *MED* and they all refer to products of writing. For example, Higden opens his *Polychronicon* with a description of how the treatise will be composed: 'Y … intende to compile a tretys … excerpte of diuerse labores of auctores'.[122] It is likely that the authors of these texts intended to emphasise their writing as a product of difficult mental exertion in order to show that their writing was a real, quantifiable occupation. However, authors or scribes usually refer to their own writing or the writing of others as 'werke'.[123] Scholarly *werk* relies heavily on the creation of new ideas and texts, which add to a growing wealth of knowledge such as in the *Cursor Mundi*: 'þerfor haf i worght þis bok'.[124] From these examples, it is clear how the lexicon was used to carry certain resonances, viz. *werk* to highlight their achievements but *labour* to keep their activity grounded in a post-lapsarian culture.

Causality

Werk is the only word used to reflect causality. While this is also seen in devotional and poetic genres, it is most clearly demonstrated in scientific and medical treatise. An anonymous early-fifteenth-century translation of John Arderne's *Practica de Fistula in Ano* discusses the action of the poison arsenic: 'Þe place wher arsenek is

[121] J. C. Cox, *Notes on the Churches of Derbyshire*, vol. 4 (Chesterfield: Palmer & Edmunds, 1879), 86, Norman Scott Brien Gras, *The Early English Customs System: A Documentary Study of the Institutional and Economic History of the Customs from the Thirteenth to the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard Uni. Press, 1918), 295 and *English Church Furniture, Ornaments and Decorations, at the Period of the Reformation*, ed. Edward Peacock (London: John Camden Hotten, 1866), 182.
[122] *Polychronicon*, 1: 7.
[123] *Thomas Norton's Ordinal of Alchemy*, ed. John Reidy, EETS OS 272 (London: Oxford Uni. Press, 1975), 6.
[124] *Cursor Mundi*, 4: 1479.

putte in, if it wirch perfitely, shal bycome blo & bolned'.[125] Here, the verb form of *werk* reflects the influence of one object over another. *Werk* similarly denotes influence over a person. For example, Gower's *Confessio Amantis* likens jealousy with an illness affecting a person: 'That ilke unsely maladie ... jelousie ... worcheth on a man'.[126] Outside medical and scientific treatise, the focus of the influence is on the person as opposed to objects or part of the body. The guild returns of 1389 note one man's ability to influence his brother: 'He may werken his broþer'.[127] 'Werken' is also used to denote causing emotions such as 'wourche wo'.[128]

Travel

Another meaning of this lexicon is travel or a journey. *Travail* is most commonly related to travel (14 percent of the *MED's* examples of *travail*), while *swink* and *labour* are also used to denote travel if to a much lesser degree (5 percent and 2 percent respectively). *Werk* and *toil* do not relate to travelling. In a version of the life of *St. Katherine of Alexandria* found in the South English Legendary, the geographical nature of *travail* is highlighted: 'of sonne and Mone and steorrene al-so, fram þe este to þe weste þat trauaillieth'.[129] Most 'travailours' are male and the purpose of their travels depends highly on the genre to which the text belongs.[130] For example, in the romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the journey is completed by a knight on a noble quest: 'for ȝe haf trauayled … towen fro ferre'.[131] The *travail* has a purpose and fulfils a role, which ensures it is not an idle activity and can still be considered as an active pursuit. Similarly in an anonymous version of *Morte Arthure* the purpose of the journey is reinforced: 'we hafe trystily trayuellede, þis tributte to feche'.[132] Travelling may also be part of an occupation. *Mandeville's*

[125] *Treatises of Fistula in Ano, Haemorrhoids and Clysters*, ed. D'arcy Power EETS OS 139 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1910), 45.
[126] *The English Works of John Gower*, ed. G. C. Macaulay, EETS ES 81 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1900), 1: 414-5.
[127] *A Book of London English, 1384-1425*, ed. R. W. Chambers and M. Daunt (Oxford: Clarendon, 1931), 43.
[128] *The Metrical Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester*, ed. William Aldis Wright (London: H. M. S. O. 1887), 845.
[129] *The Early South-English Legendary*, 92.
[130] *MED*, s.v. "travailour (n.)."
[131] *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: Re-edited from MS Cotton Nero, A x., in the British Museum*, ed. Israel Gollancz, EETS OS 210 (London: Oxford Uni. Press, 1940), 40.
[132] *King Arthur's Death: The Middle English Stanzaic Morte Arthur and Alliterative Morte Arthure*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1986), 182.

Travels includes an account of the characteristics of a good soldier: 'a worþi sowdioure forsothe was he and wel trauailid biyonde the see in many a dyuers kinges londe'.[133] Part of the occupation of a 'worþi sowdioure' is to travel and gain knowledge and make contact with 'dyuers kinges'. *Travail* as travel serves to gain knowledge for princes and rulers, in this way the resonance of travel fits within the other meanings of *travail*. Travel, like the other meanings attributed to the root words, requires energy and activity, aspects that were thought to decline with age. Robert Mannyng's *Chronicle of England* (*c*. 1400) notes that 'He was of grete elde, & myght not trauaile'.[134] This is reinforced in John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*: 'So old he was that he ne mihte the world travail'.[135]

Men and women both 'travailed' on pilgrimage: 'Me thought þat I hadde longe tyme trauailed toward þe holy cite of Ierusalem'.[136] This *travail* is a physical journey but it also refers symbolically to the spiritual journey and occupation of pilgrimage. Pilgrimage or travel in pursuit of devotional practice was one of the more legitimate ways for women to travel such as in the metrical version of the *Old Testament* (*c*. 1450): 'So trayueld scho be tyms thre / into þat place hyr god to pray'.[137] Other reasons for travel could reflect badly on a woman's honour and status. *The Properties of a Horse* (*c*. 1500) aligns well 'traveled' women with well 'traveled' horses: 'Wele traveled wymen or wele traveled horsses were neuer good'.[138] We have already seen that *travail* and all the root words in this study can carry a number of resonances simultaneously. Although 'traveled' could mean physically worked, it could also denote traveling and the consequences of travel, that is worldliness and exhaustion. By comparing a well-travelled horse, a horse that was worn down and of reduced value, the author also imputes these characteristics onto 'wele traveled wymen'. The author may be commenting on the sexually promiscuous nature of women or possibly denoting a sense that a woman who has travelled is likely to be

[133] *The Metrical Version of Mandeville's Travels from the Unique Manuscript in the Coventry Corporation Record Office*, ed. M. C. Seymour, EETS OS 269 (Oxford: Oxford Uni. Press, 1973), 3.
[134] *Peter Langtoft's Chronicle,* ed. Thomas Herne (Oxford: Printed at the Theater, 1725), 3.
[135] *The Complete Works of John Gower*, ed. G. C. Macaulay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), 2: 259.
[136] *The Booke of the Pylgremage of the Sowle*, ed. Katherine Isabella Cust (London: Basil Montagu Pickering, 1859), 1.
[137] *A Middle English Metrical Paraphrase of the Old Testament*, ed. Urban Ohlander (Göteborg: Elanders Boktryderi Aktiebalag, 1963), 4: 103.
[138] *The Middle English Harrowing of Hell and Gospel of Nicodemus, ed. William Henry Hulme*, EETS ES 100 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1907), xxv.

worldlier and not have the characteristics or sensibilities, which are needed in a good wife. Either way, the notion that a woman is 'wele traveled' has a negative effect on a woman's reputation. Such an effect, in fact, that she may be compared with an animal.

Swink similarly denotes a journey. These words highlight the struggle and penitential aspect of travel for pilgrimage in the *Ancrene Riwle*: 'Pilegrimes gað inmuche swinc to sechen ane sontes banes'.[139] This meaning of *swink* appears almost entirely in devotional texts, such as *Dialogue on Vices and Virtues* and a metrical version of the *Old Testament*.[140] This may link with *swink's* associations with the punishment of Adam by suffering hard physical labour, and therefore tasks undertaken to pay this debt, such as pilgrimage, are also seen as *swink*. *Labouren* has similar resonances as *swinken* in regards to travel. In *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Margery is described as unable to cope with long periods of travel while on pilgrimage to the Holy Blood of Wilsnack: 'Sche myth not enduryn so gret jurneys as þe man myth … And þerfor sche labowryd as long as sche myth tyl þat sche fel in sekenes'.[141] Here, her labour has the dual meaning of both travel and struggle. As a woman she is presented as not physically made to withstand long distance travel. *Labour* similarly refers to the struggles of pilgrimage. For example, John Capgrave's *Description of Rome* uses labour to refer to pilgrimage: 'Plato þat laboured þorw egipt … not aschamed he … schuld be a pilgrime'.[142] The phrasing of 'laboured þorw egipt' evokes movement and progression likely stemming from the 'fulfilment of tasks' meaning of *labour*.[143] In the *Craft of Dying* this movement is towards death: 'Seld it is seyne þat any seculer … man or relygiouse man … will dispose hym-selfe to deth … þouȝe in-dede he be laborynge faste to his ende-ward'.[144] While

[139] *The English Text of the Ancrene Riwle, Edited from B.M. Cotton MS. Cleopatra C.vi*, ed. E. J. Dobson, EETS OS 267 (London: Oxford Uni. Press, 1972), 258.
[140] *Vices and Virtues, being A Soul's Confession of its Sins, with Reason's Description of the Virtues: A Middle English Dialogue of about 1200 A.D.*, ed. Ferd Holthausen, EETS OS 89 (London: Oxford Uni. Press, 1888), 79 and *A Middle English Metrical Paraphrase of the Old Testament*, ed. U. Ohlander (Göteborg: Elanders Boktryderi Aktiebalag, 1960), 3: 54.
[141] *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 402.
[142] *Ye Solace of Pilgrimes: A Description of Rome, circa A. D. 1450, by John Capgrave, An Austin Friar of King's Lynn,* ed. C. A. Mills (London: Oxford Uni. Press, 1911), 1.
[143] Ibid, 1.
[144] *Yorkshire Writers: Richard Rolle of Hampole and his Followers*, ed. C. Horstman, vol. 2 (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1896), 412.

travel is a major meaning of *travail* and a more minor meaning of other root words, it illustrates how many meanings interacted in order to form new, nuanced resonances for words. For example *swink's* strong resonances of struggle and its devotional roots mean that it portrays pilgrimage rather than secular travel. This nuanced formation of meaning as well as the insights into culturally constructed values are likewise seen in the lexicon's meaning of conflict and battle.

Conflict

Conflict, a minor meaning of the vocabulary of activity in general, constitutes a quarter of usages of *toil*. The noun, verb and adjectival forms of *toil* are used specifically in poetry and romances to signal a battle or conflict. For example, the romance *Arthur and Merlin* (*c. 1*330) depicts a battle between Christians and Saracens: 'In þis toil, wiþ þre þousand skete / Sagremor hem com mete'.[145] A common phrase used in both *Arthur and Merlin* and the romance, *King Alexander* is 'among þe toyle'.[146] The *'*toyle*'* in question refers to combatants actively engaged in fighting. Even this nounal form of *toil* has a sense of activity and immediacy. It is a battle to be lost or won. It carries resonances of struggle, although this struggle does not represent penance or illness but a corporeal battle. The verb form of *toil* relates to the action of conflict and fighting, for example, in the *Destruction of Troy*: 'Troilus so toilus with his triet strenght'.[147]

Swink, *travail*, *labour* and *werk* all carry the resonance of conflict. *Swink* relates to conflict only within the genre of romances. This creates a link between combat and the higher levels of society. In *Richard Coeur de Lion, swink* is used to mean fight: 'Þey swonke for þe in bataylle'.[148] *Travail* is used to describe an offensive attack on Jeruselum in a late-fourteenth-century version of the *Wycliffite Bible*: 'thei traueiliden the cite fro lond and se'.[149] The martial resonances of *travail*

[145] *Of Arthour and of Merlin*, ed. O. D. Macrae-Gibson, EETS OS 268 (London: Oxford Uni. Press, 1973), 323.
[146] *Metrical Romances of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, ed. Henry Weber, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable and Co., 1810), 95.
[147] *The 'Gest Hystoriale' of the Destruction of Troy: An Alliterative Romance Translated from Guido de Colonna's 'Hystoria Troiana'*, ed. Geo A. Panton and David Donaldson, EETS OS 39, 56 (London: N. Trübner & Co., 1869 and 1874), 328.
[148] *Metrical Romances of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Centuries*, ed. Henry Weber, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: George Ramsay & Co., 1810), 150.
[149] 1 Mac. 15: 14, *The Holy Bible*, 840.

are noble and valiant. This is the *travail* of the nobility and activities that are worthy of noting for posterity. None of the examples in the *MED* deal with anger-induced fighting or wrath. In an early-fourteenth-century copy of the *Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester*, *werk* carries this meaning: 'þe emperours of rome þat wroȝte & wonne engelond & þat lond nome'.[150] This resonance is deeply entrenched in a masculine, aristocratic realm. The battles are undertaken by valiant and brave knights. While we know that the foot soldiers in a battle were far more likely to be part of the commons, this is not how the writers articulate the commons' role in society. There is no indication that this meaning is ever used to reflect female actions; battle was understood as an entirely male affair.

Toil also refers to non-physical conflict such as debate and verbal argument just as commonly as it is used to denote physical conflict. It appears in relation to court cases and legal battles. *Mum and the Sothsegger* raises this issue: 'He shal be hourled so in high courte and holde so agogge / That hym were bettre lose his lande / þenne long so be toylid'.[151] The *Cato Major,* a Middle English version of the Distichs, recommends not to fall out with friends: 'Toil nat ne stryve with hym that is thi freende'.[152] The 'parsone' who verbally attacked the St. Robert in the *Life of St. Robert of Knaresborough* is described as having 'toyled' him: 'Te parsone tonge þat toyled þis sayntt And displesed hym wyth hys playntt'.[153] *Toil* as verbal conflict has connections with all sections of society and can denote the anger that is not seen in the resonances of physical conflict above. This is interesting to compare with *labour* which tends to denote petitioning and dialogue rather than disagreement. In 1450 a representative of the University of Oxford wrote to William Waynflete, provost of Eton College and later the bishop of Winchester to urge the fulfilment of a promise of books for the university: 'Ye have shewde grete kyndnes to oure Universite … in

[150] *The Metrical Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester*, ed., William Aldis Wright, vol. 1 (London: H. M. S. O. 1887), 4.
[151] *Mum and the Sothsegger*, 73.
[152] *Archiv für das Studium der Neueren Sprachen und Literaturen 114-5*, ed. Alois Bradl and Heinrich Morf (Braunschweig: Druk und Verlag von George Westermann, 1905), 310 .
[153] *The Metrical Life of St. Robert Knaresborough: Together with the Other Middle English Pieces in British Museum MS. Egerton 3143*, ed. Joyce Bazire EETS OS 228 (London: Oxford Uni. Press, 1953), 67.

laberynge for us … to þe most excellent prince Duke of Gloucestre'.[154] In the romance *King Ponthus* (*c*. 1450), the king of Burgon sends gifts to a knight named Guenelete to encourage him to petition the king of Brittany: 'He sent to hym grete gyftes that he shuld labre to the kyng of Bretane for hym'.[155] The majority of examples of this usage, like the examples of physical conflict, derive from sources associated with the upper sections of society. However, such negotiations may indeed have been comparable to the peasants' labour in one way. Defending the kingdom, through diplomacy and war were key aspects of the God-given role of the aristocracy. Although negotiations between agricultural workers or craftspeople took place, unfortunately for the historian, they were not noted for posterity.

We have examined the major resonances of the vocabulary of work-related activities. But derivations of these words were also used in order to refer to those who carry out these activities and occupations such as *werker*, *labourer*, *swinker* and *trauailour*. The *MED* does not include a word to describe those who *toil*. In the mid-fifteenth-century Middle English to Latin glossary *Promptorium Parvulorum*, we see that 'travaylowre' is synonymous with the Latin '*laborator*' or '*laboratrix*', the latter specifically referring to a female *travailour*.[156] While Latin has grammatical gender and therefore highlights the gender difference between '*laborator*' and '*laboratrix*', Middle English does not and therefore words are gender neutral. Within the context of the *MED*'s examples of people who *werk*/*labour* etc., there is only one generic term used to refer to a specifically female *werker*.[157] The 1500 version of the prose *Merlin* describes a 'workewoman' as working 'with hir handes'.[158] The remaining quotations refer directly to working men while a lesser number refer to *werkers* in a gender neutral way which could include female *werkers*. Female *werkers* may have names associated with specific female occupations, such as brewster, spinster or huckster. These are usually identifiable from the feminine suffix '-ster'. The focus

[154] *Epistolae Academicae Oxon (Registrum F): A Collection of Letters and other Miscellaneous Documents Illustrative of Academical Life and Studies at Oxford in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Henry Anstey, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898), 285.
[155] Frank Jewett Mather, ed., "King Ponthus and the Fair Sidone," in *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 12 (1897), 89.
[156] *The Promptorium Parvulorum: The First English-Latin Dictionary c. 1440 A.D.,* ed. A. L. Mayhew, EETS ES 102 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1908), 489.
[157] This includes female travailours, labourers and swinkers.
[158] *Merlin: Part 3*, ed. H. B. Wheatley, EETS OS 10, 21, 36 (Hertford: Stephen Austin, 1869), 508.

on the 'workmen' should not be seen as evidence for a predominately male workforce but as a representation of a culturally male-centred society.

Werk carries a more diverse range of meanings and resonances than the other words considered in this lexicon. This is reflected in the use of the words *werker* or *werkman*, which encompasses a far greater realm of activities and therefore a greater variety of roles for the *werker* to undertake. For example, we see *werk* used to show cause or agency, which is not found elsewhere in the vocabulary studied. Phrases such as 'worcheris of wickidnesse' or 'werchers of treuthe' highlight that a *werker* can represent anyone who may carry out an action.[159] In this case the *werker* can be anyone, of any social group. However, in reality a *werker* tends to refer to someone who provides a service. Most prominently, *werker* refers to the craftsman or the creator of objects. Late-fourteenth-century versions of the *Wycliffite Bible* refer to types of *werkers* throughout, mentioning 'tree werkere' and 'metal wirkere'.[160] The 'werkmen' described in Thomas Norton's *Ordinal of Alchemy* love their occupation, which Norton notes is also beloved by the gentry and nobility: 'Comon workmen wil not be owt lafte, / For as wel as lordis þei loue þis noble craft'.[161] The workmen described here are likely to be metal workers who would need knowledge of metallic elements for their day-to-day occupation. These men are respected by Norton due to their love of the craft. While these *werkers* can be good or bad, there is little social judgement ascribed to the *werker* alone. However, where *werker* refers to craftsman, it carries the resonance of quality expected from the produce or *werk*. Geoffrey Chaucer's "Merchant's Tale" comments on the craftsman's *werk*: 'Ther nys no werkman, whatsoeuere he be, / That may bothe werke wel and hastily'.[162] As well as the *werk* of craftspeople, there is also a concentration on the *werk* of God: 'O thou God that Alle things wrowhte'.[163] The image of God as a creator, mirrors the image of the craftsperson. The craftsman is far removed from the connotations of pain and suffering associated with *swink*, *labour* and *travail*. They create beautiful things of

[159] both cited in *Middle English Dictionary*. 24 vols. (Ann Arbor: Uni. of Michigan Press, 1952-2001) Digital Edition at <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/>, s.v. "werker(e (n.)".
[160] *The Earlier Version of the Wycliffite Bible*, ed. C. Lindberg (Stockholm: Almqust & Wiksell, 1969), 5:146 and 181.
[161] *Thomas Norton's Ordinal of Alchemy*, 5.
[162] "The Merchant's Tale," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 161.
[163] Henry Lovelich, *The History of The Holy Grail*, ed. F. J. Furnivall, EETS ES 28 (London: Trübner & Co., 1877), 236.

quality, which are to be admired and seem untainted by the rhetoric of punishment seen elsewhere. This would suggest that *werkers* belong to what in modern economic theory would be considered the secondary level of the workforce, the production of goods, a level above basic production in agriculture etc.

A *werker* is by no means a high status individual. Social roles are depicted in the romance *Bevis of Hampton* (*c*. 1330), where the contrast between the aristocrat and the *werker* is highlighted: 'A morwe the barouns gonne arise / Sum to honten and sum to cherche, / And werkmen gonne for to werche'.[164] Barons, as members of the greater aristocracy, carry out their tasks of hunting and devotion while the 'werk men' are simply described as 'gonne for to werche'. Their activities are not mentioned possibly because they are so numerous and varied or possibly because they are not deemed worth accounting due to their banality. The social level of the *travailour* is not elaborated on, however, *Piers Plowman* does make a connection between 'travailours' and agricultural work: 'þat am I, Actif, þat ydelnesse hatie, / For alle trewe trauaillours and tiliers of þe erthe'.[165] As the poem's aim is to reinforce the importance of labour and fulfilling the role divinely assigned, a positive association with labour is expected. In Nicholas Love's devotional text, *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, the angels are said to appear at the nativity: 'The aungels in cristes Natiuitie apperynge … conforten none othere but the pouere trauailloures'.[166] The 'pouere trauailloures' are of course the shepherds who witness the singing of the angels. They are the workers of the land but they are also honourable and play an important role in society by witnessing the birth of Christ on behalf of the lay community. Honour is applied to activities that adhere to prescribed roles and do not upset the status quo.

The *swinker* seems to reside in the realm of manual labour: 'Yef he deþ workes bodylyche, as doþ þise zuynkeres'.[167] This physical occupation is usually

[164] *Four Romances of England: King Horn, Havelok the Dane, Bevis of Hampton, Athelston*, eds. Ronald B. Herzman, Graham Drake and Eve Salisbury (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1999), line 3228-30.
[165] *Piers Plowman* 1: B, 528.
[166] *The Mirrour of the Blessed Lyf*, 48.
[167] *Ayenbite of Inwyt*, 90.

related to agriculture: 'In heruest … þe swynkeres moweþ fair schef'.[168] However, it is not a commonly used term in the *MED's* examples. The *labourer* is seen as a member of the 'pour Comyns', one of the three degrees or estates of late medieval society: 'in iij degreis þe werd kepis with presthod, knyghthod, and labourere'.[169] *Labourers* were not restricted to agricultural work but describe a role in a range of manual duties in both rural and urban environments. For example, an entry in the account book of the Brewers Guild in London records that 'Robert Cok, laborer' was paid 1d for 'þe brekyng of j wall'.[170] As the third estate was seen as the lowest, they were the focus of a considerable amount of advice and guidance in the literature of the time. John Lydgate's *Fall of Princes* highlights the need for a *labourer* to engage in work in order to avoid idleness: 'the plouh was treuli holde; abak stood idilnesse ferr from the laboreer'.[171] If a *labourer* works hard at the plough he will not be tempted by idleness. In the late-fifteenth-century poem "Religious Pepille", 'laborerres' find stability in their daily wages and in their dress: 'All true laborerres paide daili þe hire, / And stabilnesse foundun, specialli in atire'.[172] This idea of the importance of clothing in the identity of the *labourer* is also seen in Chaucer's "The Knight's Tale". Here Arcite disguises himself 'as a poure laborer' by changing 'his array'.[173] The *labourer's* clothing is used as a mark of his status and position in society.

This chapter has explored the use of *swink*, *travail*, *toil*, *labour*, and *work* in Middle English writing. A number of key resonances of the vocabulary have emerged. These resonances and meanings, such as pain and suffering, physical activity and creation, are shared by a number of the different root words. The primary meaning of *swink* relates to physical labour and the exertion of energy. These are also linked with pain and suffering. From the examples compiled in the

[168] *Life of St. Cecilia from MS. Ashmole 43 and MS. Cotton Tibrius E. VII with Introduction, Variants, and Glossary*, ed. Bertha Ellen Lovewell, Yale Studies in English 3 (London: Lamson, Wolffe and Co., 1898), 62.
[169] *George Ashby's Poems,* ed. M. Bateson, EETS ES 76 (London: Kegan Paul Trench Truebner, 1899), 539 and "Ther ben iij poyntis," in *Religious Lyrics of the XVth Century*, ed. C. Brown (Oxford: Oxford Uni. Press, 1939), 58.
[170] *A Book of London English, 1384-1425,* 152.
[171] *Lydgate's Fall of Princes*, 3: 808.
[172] "The World Upside Down," in *Historical Poems*, 152.
[173] "The Knight's Tale," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 44.

MED, *swink* is predominantly found in devotional texts. This creates a direct link with the experiences of Adam and Eve, whose punishments were respectively a lifetime of physical work and painful childbirth. *Swink* can therefore be seen as a form of penance, something that must be suffered in order to reach the bliss of heaven. This resonance is carried through the various meanings such as travel where *swink* represents pilgrimage.

Travail's major referents are to physical and emotional pain, as well as travel. Travel is a resonance shared by *labour* and *swink* but the resonance is strongest in *travail*. It also refers to physical activity and exertion. The examples given in the *MED* have shown that travel could also be seen to fulfil a role and was a form of occupation. Members of the gentry and nobility travelled for administrative purposes, while *travail* was also used in respect of pilgrimage. We can see that *travail's* resonances of suffering are also aligned with the penitential aspect of travel, similarly to the penitential aspect of *swink*.

Toil has had the least attention within this chapter. This is because *toil* tends to hold different meanings from the other words considered. While it does sometimes refer to physical movement, this movement is the forced handling of people or objects rather than travel. *Toil* has some links with physical labour and labour on the land in this period, these only become prominent from the sixteenth century onwards. The *OED* gives merely one example of 'senses relating to intensive labour' before the sixteenth century.[174] The main resonance of *toil* during the late medieval period is conflict usually referring to battle and the act of fighting. As such toil tends to describe the honourable work of the members of the aristocracy to protect their lands and people.

Labour has resonances of physical and manual labour as well as carrying out a role. It also refers to difficulty, struggle and exertion. *Labour* sometimes refers to travelling and creating but far less frequently than these resonances are seen in *travail* and *work*. It is perhaps the most socially neutral term within this lexicon as we see it used in the description of all class and almost all occupations. While the

[174] "toil, *v*.1," in *Oxford English Dictionary*. Digital Edition at < http://www.oed.com/>.

labour performed by the king or by an agricultural worker may be profoundly different activities, they are both seen as labour as they fulfil that person's role in society. This role may be difficult. It may at times require suffering but this is part of the process and legitimises that they are actively engaging in their *labour* or role.

Work refers to a much wider array of meanings than *travail*, *swink*, *labour* and *toil*. It encompasses the majority of the major resonances of these words such as conflict, physical work, illness and exertion but places far less emphasis on them in comparison to the rest of the vocabulary. Instead the main resonances of *work* deal with creating and causality. Creating and the objects that are created are also signified by *travail*, *labour* and *swink* but represent minor resonances. The act of causation and the effects of an action are resonances unique to *work*. These senses of creating and causing provide *work* with a higher social value within the sources considered than *travail*, *swink*, *labour* or *toil*. Suffering of any sort is a very minor resonance with the emphasis on creating high quality material and literary produce. Those who *work*, while still members of the third estate, share their creative nature with God while *swink*, at the opposite end of the spectrum relates to fulfilling a series of tasks which in theory require less creativity.

* * *

So what does this examination of the lexicon tell us about activity and occupation in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries? In chapter one, we saw the intermingling of the temporal and spiritual nature of sloth. The constructed ideas of activity share this temporal and spiritual duality. This vocabulary is deeply rooted in a post-lapsarian context. While there is a sense that all of society actively pays for the sins of the first man and woman by performing their socially prescribed role in society, those who *labour*, *travail* and especially *swink*, perform these roles with struggle, difficulty and suffering. This is evident in the *labour* and *travail* of childbirth, which also resounds with penitential suffering. The temporal and spiritual duality is also related to the two forms of devotion in late medieval theology: meditative, spiritual devotion for those in religious orders and the active life of engaging in one's God-given social role. *Travail* has strong connections with the active form of devotional life: 'Lat vs

traveill so wele þat we mowen passe oute of the world as clene as we entrid, thurgh meritory werkes'.[175] By actively partaking in the roles which society and God had given them, medieval man's occupations were seen as devotional as well as economic in nature. Activity, as opposed to a passive life was appropriate for the majority of the population. Occupation, like sloth was presented as both spiritual and temporal in nature.

The majority of the examples used by the compilers of the *MED* consider the activities of men rather than women. Where the chapter has considered the representations of gender in this lexicon, it is in relation to the difference between the punishment of Adam, viz. hard physical activity, and the punishment of Eve, viz. pain in childbirth. This difference between male and female occupation is highlighted in John Trevisa's translation of Bartholomew the Englishman's *On the Property of Things* where men are described in terms of their ability to work:

> For synewes and brawn of men beþ igroundid in gret strengþe and beþ anil in stronge workes and dedes. Þe bones of males beþ stronge, grete, and sadde in þe ioyntis, and þerfore þey beþ kendeliche strong to al maner stronge werkes and dedes.[176]

This is how Trevisa's translation constructs masculinity: men are associated with hard work, strength, energy, and vitality. This is the opposite of the way femininity is conceived. Women are portrayed as delicate, inactive and lacking the strength to complete difficult activities: 'In the male beþ vertues formal and of schapinge and werchinge, and in þe femel material, suffringe, and passiue'.[177] While women produce children, it is men who mould them into successful adults.[178] Men are presented as having more a sanguine complexion, creating a hotter disposition. Women on the other hand are presented as being colder. When we compare these Aristotelian gender attributes with descriptions of sloth, significant correlations are seen. As we saw in chapter one, sloth is associated with melancholy or phlegm, both of which are cold humours. If men are incapable of working or are slothful, their disposition cools, undermining their masculinity. Passivity and inactivity are feminine characteristics. In the poem "How the Good Wife Taught her Daughter" the

[175] *Early English versions of the Gesta Romanorum*, 67.
[176] *On the Properties of Things*, 1: 306.
[177] Ibid, 1: 306.
[178] See "De Patre" in *On the Properties of Things*, 1: 309-11.

mother warns her daughter that if her husband is away she must actively take control of the household to ensure the servants do not fall into idleness without the male presence: 'And if they lord be fro home, / Lat not thy meneyé idell gone'.[179] If we consider the way the concept of idleness is used the gender perspectives are changed. Idleness is described in a predominantly gender neutral way and refers to mankind in general. However, in the instances where the person in consideration is female, the absence of idleness is highlighted. For example in Chaucer's "The Clerk's Tale": 'She knew wel labour but noon ydel ese'.[180] Chaucer repeats this image of the busy woman in "The Physician's Tale": 'she was ... / Constant in herte, and euere in bisynesse / To dryue hire out of ydel slogardye'.[181] While men are understood to be naturally more inclined to activity rather than sloth, women must work harder to keep themselves busy and out of idleness.

The most significant finding in the examination of the Middle English lexicon of occupation is the importance of social position. From an analysis of the vocabulary it is clear that the *werk* carries a different social value than the rest of the vocabulary. With predominant meanings of creating and craftsmanship, it is far removed from the strenuous and punishing *swink*, *labour*, or *travail*. The activities and occupations that a person undertakes are heavily connected with their position in society, defined by their birth, gender or physical attributes. In *Occupation and Idleness*, Doctrine highlights that a person's role is defined at birth asking Idleness: 'Sonne, to what levynge were thou borne?'[182] In the C-Text of *Piers Plowman*, the narrator Will, discusses his own idleness with the personified Reason. Passus V opens with the narrator Will awaking from a sleep clothed as a 'lollare' or idler. Reason attempts to identify what purpose Will plays within society. He asks Will whether he can 'seruen' or 'syngen in a churche' before listing particular activities such as guarding crops, cooking or tailoring 'or eny other kynes craft þat to þe comune nedeth'. In response Will highlights that he lacks of the physical attributes needed to work. He is 'to wayke [weak] to worche with sykel or with sythe / and to

[179] "How the Good Wife Taught her Daughter," in *Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Popular Middle English Verse*, ed. George Shuffleton (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2008), line 133-4.
[180] "The Clerk's Tale," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 140.
[181] "The Physician's Tale," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 190.
[182] Lee, "Occupation and Idleness," 29.

long, lef me, lowe to stoupe'.[183] His tall and weak physique means that he is unsuitable to 'wurche as a werkeman'.[184] Resoun then asks whether he is a landowner or a member of the ruling classes with 'lynage ryche'. Resoun believes that Will is an 'ydel man' calling him a 'spille-tyme'. He highlights the idle beggars in society before asking Will whether he has any disability or injury that excuses him from work. Will answers that he was educated in his youth to become a clerk. His occupation is learning: 'the lomes þat Y labore with and lyflode desrue / Is *Pater-noster* and my prymer, *Placebo* and *Dirige*, / And my Sauter som tyme and my seuene psalmes.'[185] These are the tools of his trade.

By using words, which are related to genuine, honourable roles to describe an action such as writing a poem, an author is able to legitimise their work as prescribing to the status quo. All the root words of the lexicon are used in this way to legitimise behaviour. The aristocracy's occupation resides in noble pursuits such as battle, travel and the administration of their estates. While their activities are unlikely to be called *swink*, they may be referred to as *travail*, *labour* or *werk*, whose resonances of suffering make their actions more prestigious. By sharing this vocabulary across social lines, a unity of purpose and goal is created. The aristocracy also *travail*, however, what this *travail* constitutes is slightly different and more appropriate to their station in life. Of course, all these resonances are socially constructed. They represent the status quo and actively work to legitimise its preservation. By reconstructing these ideals of activity, we can see the importance of an active life in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Whatever the social distinctions and values of *work*, *travail*, *swink*, *labour* and *toil*, these occupations are viewed as highly preferable to the view of idleness and sloth as wasteful, negligent and empty.

[183] *Piers Plowman*, 1: C, 169.
[184] Ibid, 1: C, 169.
[185] Ibid, 1: C, 171.

Chapter 3

'The malice of servants who were idle': Idleness and the Labour Legislation

In October 1382, John Gilford, Bishop of Hereford addressed Parliament about how to encourage productive and enthusiastic labour among the military:

> And you should know that four chief things spur all armies to work and labour for what they desire: of which four things, two are not relevant to our purpose and I shall omit them for the moment, and speak of the other two which are fear and hope. Since fear stems from evil, or seems to arise readily from it, whereas on the other hand, in hope of attaining honour, status, good repute, or other temporal or spiritual benefit, even the most slothful man is inspired to rouse himself and labour.[1]

Parliament was deciding whether to send a crusade to Flanders against pro-French schismatics or to support an army under the command of John of Gaunt to support the Portuguese in their war with the Castilians and so to aid Gaunt in his claim for the throne of Castile. To rouse an army to victory, according to Gilford, one needed to inspire hope. This would counter even the most negligent or slothful man ('*ce fait homme, combien q'il soit bien necgligent*').[2] However, during the same period, the government repeatedly enforced increasingly rigorous labour legislation to curtail the socio-economic changes that favoured the third estate. While the hope of temporal benefit was a way out of sloth for the military, demands for higher wages and shorter-term contracts were presented as avaricious and slothful for labourers. As we have seen in the previous chapters, an active, productive life was central to both moral and social thought of the time. Diligent work protected the soul against the sin of sloth and served as a form of penance to atone for the fall of man.

[1] "Richard II: Parliament of October 1382, Text and Translation," in *The Parliament Rolls of Medieval England*, ed. C. Given-Wilson et al., (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005), Scholarly Digital Edition, item 3.
[2] Ibid, item 9.

However, how these ideas were performed depended considerably on social position. The second half of the fourteenth century presents a unique case study of how the concepts of work and idleness were constructed and employed by society.

The 'problem of labour' in the fourteenth century has been a popular topic for economic and social historians.[3] While the first half of the fourteenth century was ravaged by war, famine and murrain, it was the plague of 1348-50 that truly redefined the labour landscape of England. With a dramatic drop in population, the once plentiful supply of labour began to run dry and demand quickly drove wages up. To deal with the rapidly changing labour market, the Privy Council introduced the Ordinance of Labourers (1349). When Parliament was summoned in 1351 it adjusted and reissued the legislation in the form of the Statute of Labourers.[4] On a practical level, the labour legislation aimed to curtail the rise in wages caused by the severe labour shortage. On a social level, the legislation used a rhetoric of sin to regain control over a population that was redefining itself outside the authority of landowners. In order to achieve these aims the legislators set out to control wages, regulate occupations and labour contracts, and reduce the mobility of workers.

The chapter will examine the interplay of a variety of different perspectives on idleness and work during the fourteenth century: contemporary commentators; legislators and the upper levels of society; thirteenth- and fourteenth-century scholars of economic theory; varying levels of employer; and finally the workers themselves. While the writers, legislators and scholars have left specific illustrations of how they viewed the labour issues of the period, the views of employers and employees are far more difficult to reconstruct. In order to do this we shall examine two connected sources, the labour legislation issued in England from the mid-fourteenth century and the records of the enforcement of that legislation. While these

[3] There have been numerous monographs and edited volumes on the topics. For example, see *The Problem of Labour in Fourteenth-Century England*, eds. James Bothwell, P. J. P. Goldberg and W. Mark Ormrod (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2000), *The Middle Ages at Work: Practicing Labor in Late Medieval England*, eds. Kellie Robertson and Michael Uebel (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) and *The Work of Work: Servitude, Slavery and Labor in Medieval England*, ed. A. J. Frantzen and D. Moffat (Glasgow: Cruithne Press, 1994).

[4] 23 Edward III in *Statutes of the Realm: Printed by Command of his Majesty King George the Third, in Pursuance of an Address of the House of Commons of Great Britain. From Original Records and Authentic Manuscripts*, ed. Alexander Luders et al. (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1810), 1: 307-8 and 25 Edward III, Stat. 2 in *Statutes of the Realm*, 1: 311-3.

two sources are written and constructed by those who represent the ethos of at least some employers, they can also tell us much about the actions of workers, as well as how these actions were perceived by contemporaries.

Under the tripartite model of society people were defined as those who fight, those who pray and those who labour. The labour legislation of 1348 onwards focused on '*operarii*' (workers) and '*seruientes*' (servants).[5] A servant was anyone from across the social spectrum who was employed by another person. This could include domestic, craft or agricultural occupations. Many servants were lifecycle servants who were young and as yet unmarried.[6] Workers or labourers were also defined by their employee status. Labourers tended to be employed by contracts for specific skilled occupations such as mowing or ploughing or unskilled labour. In urban areas craft workers or artisans were the significant employers of labourers and servants. While the legislation mentions these two groups there is no clear distinction between them. Rather they work as a form rhetorical doubling representing those in the third estate as a whole.

In Trevisa's translation of *De Proprietatibus Rerum,* a good servant is described as 'meke and seruysable' and 'merye and glad of chere in his seruyse'.[7] He is diligent and puts his lord's needs and profits ahead of his own: 'he is neuer idil but alwey busy aboute þe profite of his loord, for þey he ete oþir faste, slepe oþir wake, his witt and þouȝte is alwey to ordeyne and to do þe profite of his lord'.[8] However, alongside this bountiful cheer and virtuously selfless service was a life of inferiority to the employer: 'Oþit þey haue þat name of seruire 'to serue', for þey ben iput to vile seruise of office þat bene nouȝt couenabe for lordis nothir for here children'.[9] A servant is someone who will do what their employers will not do themselves. Service and employment relies on a superior employer and inferior employee. Whether the servant is a lady's maid from an aristocratic family, a mower of free-status, or a

[5] Bertha Haven Putnam, *The Enforcement of the Statutes of Labourers during the First Decade after the Black Death, 1349-1359* (New York: Longman, Green & Co. Agents, 1908), 8*.
[6] P. J. P. Goldberg, *Women, Work and Life Cycle in a Medieval Economy: Women in York and Yorkshire c. 1300-1520* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 158.
[7] *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus De Proprietatibus Rerum: A Critical Text*, ed. M. C. Seymour (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975-88), 1:314.
[8] Ibid, 1: 314.
[9] Ibid, 1: 312.

villein ploughman, their position of employment meant that they were subservient to the person who employed them.

Labour is used in *Compaynys of Beestys and Fowlys* (late-fifteenth century) as the collective noun for a group of moles: 'A Labyr of mollys'.[10] The mole is a significant animal to be associated with the word *labour* as it has strong associations with physical activity and work in the ground. Isidore of Seville wrote about moles in his *Etymologies* in the seventh century: 'the mole is blind, having no eyes, and lives in constant darkness, digging in the ground and eating roots'.[11] Although this passage comes eight centuries prior to *Compaynys of Beestys and Fowlys* it was still in circulation during the fifteenth century and it is likely that the rhetorical image of the mole had remained largely unchanged. The mole does not have the gift of sight and toils endlessly without distraction just as Adam was sentenced to endless tilling of the earth. It is possible to make comparisons with the mole and the view of the labouring class held by those writing to reinforce the three-estate structure of society in the fourteenth century. The mole's persistent physical work without external distraction represents the ideal labourer of the third estate.

This image of the body politic served to shoe horn 95% of the population into the vague category of workers, without any distinction of what Stephen Rigby terms 'the significant differences of wealth, power status, and economic function amongst them'.[12] While the image of the feudal lord and impoverished peasant may be common in modern imaginings of late medieval society, in reality fourteenth-century England had an extremely diverse and complex social system. As we have seen in the previous chapter, those termed workers or labourers did not form one socio-economic group; there was a great deal of occupational, economic and social

[10] *Proper Terms, an Attempt at a Rational Explanation of the Meanings of the Collection of Phrases in "The Book of St. Albans", 1486, Entitled "Compaynys of Beestys and Fowlys" and Similar Lists*, ed. John Hodgkin (London: Philological Society, 1910), 52.
[11] *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, eds. Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach and Oliver Berghof (Cambridge: Cambridge Uni. Press, 2006), 254. 'The mole is so called because it is condemned to perpetual blindness in the dark, for, having no eyes, it always digs in the earth, and tosses out the soil, and devours the roots beneath vegetables.'
[12] Stephen H. Rigby, "Justifying Inequality: Peasants in Medieval Ideology," in *Peasants and Lords in the Medieval English Economy: Essays in Honour of Bruce M. S. Cambell*, eds. Maryanne Kowaleski, John Langdon, and Phillipp Schofield (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 175.

variation.[13] Peasants with large landholdings had considerable economic power and made up juries at local courts, while those who did not have enough land to support themselves or simply wished to supplement their income during the harvest period would sell their labour to lords or more substantial peasants.[14] The peasant population were further divided into free and unfree or villein tenants.[15] Free tenants paid for the use of their free land with money rent. Villein tenants are usually identified by their legal connection with the land they occupied, and payment of dues such as merchet, paid when a female villein wished to marry or chevage, licence to leave the manor. These obligations meant that lords had the right to control the social or geographical movements of their villein tenants. Villeins were not permitted to seek justice outside of their lord's court.[16] In theory, villein tenants were to occupy their villein land in return for labour services to the lord on his demesne.[17] The quantity and type of labour services that were due to the lord were determined by custom. In practice there is considerable evidence to show that in periods of plentiful labour lords chose to commute customary labour services for monetary payments. Customary labour services were inflexible and the workers ill-motivated whereas waged labour was both relatively inexpensive, more flexible, better motivated and consequently more productive.[18]

Labour contracts were privately negotiated between employer and employee. The absence of evidence for written contracts suggests that labour contracts tended to be verbal.[19] While we do not have formal evidence of the hiring process, it is likely that it took place through informal social or familial links. Jeremy Goldberg suggests that neighbourhood links were an important part in the job market, as seen

[13] For a full exploration of the variation of peasant life see Phillipp R. Schofeild, *Peasant and Community in Medieval England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).
[14] P. J. P. Goldberg, *Medieval England: A Social History 1250-1550* (London: Arnold, 2004), 91-3.
[15] This of course is an oversimplification of a very complicated subject, one which has attracted significant historiographical interest over the years. See Schofield, *Peasant and Community*, Stephen H. Rigby, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages: Class, Status and Gender* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), and R. H. Hilton, *The English Peasantry in the Later Middle Ages*. Oxford: Oxford Uni. Press, 1975.
[16] Goldberg, *Medieval England*, 89.
[17] Ibid, 90.
[18] David Stone, "The Productivity of Hired and Customary Labour: Evidence from Wisbech Barton in the Fourteenth Century," in *The Economic History Review* 50, no. 4 (1997), 640-656.
[19] P. J. P. Goldberg, "What was a Servant?" in *Concepts and Patterns of Service in the Later Middle Ages*, eds. Anne Curry and Elizabeth Matthew (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2000), 11.

in the case of Joan ate Enges hired in Clementhorpe, York.[20] Servants tended to be employed by the year and started their contracts at certain points in the calendar such as Michaelmas (29 September) or Martinmas (11 November).[21] However, as the labour legislation gives us a picture of the post-plague labour market, earlier local by-laws present snapshots of the issues that faced the labour market when the population was much higher. Even before the demographic catastrophe of the Black Death, seasonal labour shortages occurred in rural areas.[22] Whether arable or pastoral in nature, the agricultural year has certain points of significant labour need. For example, the lambing, calving and mowing periods were labour intensive in pastoral areas. The harvest was a period of high labour requirements and it was necessary to ensure all members of the community participated. A 1275 by-law passed in the village of Cheddington in Buckinghamshire ordered that 'no one shall harbour anyone male or female who is able to reap, under pain of half a mark'.[23] The substantial fine of half a mark underscores the need for a ready supply of workers during busy agricultural periods. All men and women who were capable of working were to do so. This is also reinforced with the regulations on gleaning, which Ault argues aimed to ensure a sufficient supply of labour for agricultural work.[24] For example, in Great Horwood, Buckinghamshire, no one that could earn half a penny a day plus food was allowed to glean.[25] Only if a person was incapable of other more physically taxing tasks should they be allowed to glean. This rhetoric is consistent throughout the fourteenth century. Therefore it can be argued that at harvest time, even in years of demographic plenty there was sometimes a need for more workers than were easily available. Mobility had also been restricted during harvest time for all members of the community. For example, in 1340 in Brightwaltham, Berkshire a by-law ordered that 'no worker (*operarius*) shall go outside this liberty to work

[20] Goldberg, "What was a Servant?", 13.
[21] Ibid, 11.
[22] For a thorough discussion of the economic issues of the early fourteenth century see *Before the Black Death: Studies in the 'Crisis' of the Early Fourteenth Century*, ed. Bruce M. S. Cambell (Manchester: Manchester Uni. Press, 1991), in which Mavis Mate, "The Agrarian Economy of South-East England Before the Black Death: Depressed or buoyant?" is particularly useful in its examination of the effect of murrain, depopulation and war on the rural labour market.
[23] W. O. Ault, *Open-Field Farming in Medieval England: A Study of Village By-Laws* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1972), 81.
[24] This will be discussed further in chapter 4. Warren O. Ault, "Some Early Village By-Laws," in *The English Historical Review* 45 (1930), 213.
[25] Ault, *Open-Field Farming*, 86.

without leave'.[26] The status of the worker is not mentioned and the use of *operarius* is loose enough to cover anyone whose activity would be useful during the harvest.

In times of necessity for employers, such as during the harvest, workers did appeal for higher wages. There is evidence for wage restrictions at a local level in the first half of the fourteenth century. For example, in the manorial accounts of Halton, Cheshire in 1325 and Newington, Surrey in 1331 the wages for a reaper were restricted to 1 d. a day plus food.[27] While the employee could refuse to work unless they received higher wages, due to the plentiful supply of labour this was unlikely to be successful. Labour was easy to come by and therefore it was a buyers' market. There was nothing to stop a worker from breaking a contract or moving to find better working conditions, however, finding another employer was by no means certain. There was no impetus or benefit to an employer to employ unknown or untried workers when they already had a dependable, regular and plentiful workforce to choose from. For the most part the by-laws mentioned above served to regulate local labour as and when problems arose. In the period up until 1348, Parliamentary legislation was simply unnecessary.

In 1348 the Black Death descended on England. While the demographic effects of the Black Death have been much debated by historians – suggested mortality rates vary from 30 to 80 per cent – the pestilence deeply affected the way in which labour was organised and legislated.[28] This dramatic drop in population had immediate economic effects on society. While the famines and murrains of the early-fourteenth century had begun to ebb the growth of the population, the mortality of the Black Death was significant and dramatic.[29] The labourers, who prior to the Black Death had to compete to gain employment, now found themselves in a far more favourable position. The number of workers was reduced and employment, once scarce, became abundant, giving labourers the upper hand in negotiating

[26] Ault, *Open-Field Farming*, 99.
[27] Ault, "Some Early Village By-Laws", 213.
[28] Samuel K. Cohn, *The Black Death Transformed: Disease and Culture in Early Renaissance Europe* (London: Arnold, 2003); John Hatcher, *Plague, Population and the English Economy, 1348-1530* (London: MacMillan Press, 1977); and Jim Bolton, "'The World Upside Down': Plague as an Agent of Economic and Social Change," in *The Black Death in England*, eds. W. M. Ormrod and Phillip Lindley (Stamford: Paul Watkins, 1996).
[29] See *Before the Black Death*.

contracts. The *Historia Roffensis*, the chronicle for the cathedral priory in Rochester, written nearly contemporaneously to these events by a monk of the house, highlights the labour situation in 1348. The chronicle describes 'a shortage of servants, craftsmen, and workmen, and of agricultural workers and labourers'. Along with this shortage those who were available for work 'turned their noses at employment, and could scarcely be persuaded to serve the eminent unless for triple wage'.[30] Even by 1349, there was awareness that the social order was being radically altered. The chronicle describes the food shortages and allegedly dilapidated state in the monastery of Rochester and comments that the labourers had plenty of cash and did not experience the hardships felt by the rest of society: 'those who were accustomed to have plenty and those accustomed to suffer want, fell into need on the one hand and into abundance on the other'.[31] The supposed maliciousness of the servants continued into 1350, at which point 'no workman or labourer was prepared to take orders from anyone, whether equal, inferior or superior, but all those who served did so with ill will and malicious spirit'.[32] The Chronicle portrays a troublesome labour situation in Rochester. The labourers are painted as aggressive and threatening. Within a year of the plague reaching England, labourers began to be described as 'rebellious'.[33]

Commentators, such as the Rochester chronicler give us some idea of how the social, economic and demographic changes were perceived by the educated elite. Henry Knighton, a canon of Leicester Abbey, whose chronicle was written in the 1370s, described the immediate effects of the plague in 1348: 'In the following autumn it was not possible to hire a reaper for less than 8d and his food, or a mower for 12d with his food. For which reason many crops rotted unharvested in the fields'.[34] It is likely that crops were not harvested due to the scarcity of labour after the plague and that an upward movement of wages was a further result of this scarcity, however, Knighton and other commentators understand the problem in moral terms. For Knighton, labour was scarce because workers were lazy and

[30] *Historia Roffensis* translated in *The Black Death*, ed. Rosemary Horrox (Manchester: Manchester Uni. Press, 1994), 70.
[31] Ibid, 73.
[32] Ibid, 73.
[33] Ibid, 72.
[34] *Chronicon Henrici Knighton vel Cnitthon Monachi Leycestrensis*, ed. Joseph Rawson Lumby, vol. 2, (London: H. M. S. O, 1895), translated in *The Black Death*, 78.

unwilling to work and similarly wages were high, not because of a change in the market but because the labourers were greedy. Wages had risen to the extent that many employers were unable to obtain enough labour to harvest their crops. Labourers are presented as migrating to obtain the best price for their labour and take up now vacant tenancies. Knighton accounts that landowners were forced to remit 'part of the rent so that their tenants did not leave'.[35] These changes, while possibly exaggerated, were treated with resentment by contemporary commentators who likely perceived the crisis from the position of institutions that were also significant employers such as Leicester Abbey where Knighton was writing.

John Gower's *Vox Clamantis* is thought to have been written around the time of the Peasants' Revolt in 1381.[36] Some of the negative language used in the poem may have been in direct response to this uprising, however, the offences associated with the peasants in the poem are the same as the labour legislation sought to control. Gower claims that 'scarcely a farmer wishes to do such work; instead, he wickedly loafs everywhere'.[37] Gower goes on to say that this 'evil disposition is widespread among the common people, and I suspect that the servants of the plow are often responsible for it. For they are sluggish, they are scarce, and they are grasping'.[38] Gower lists their misdemeanours, highlighting their demand for double what was once paid for their labour while only completing one third of the work.[39] The peasants are described as having no discipline, only one in a thousand is willing to uphold an agreement and most are 'unwilling to serve anyone by the year'.[40] Servants needed to be forced to labour: 'Whatever the serf's body suffers patiently under compulsion, inwardly his mind ever turns toward utter wickedness'.[41] Here we

[35] *Chronicle of Henry Knighton* translated in *The Black Death*, 80.
[36] Steven Justice, *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381* (London: Uni. of California Press, 1994), 211-3.
[37] *Nunc tamen illud opus vix querit habere colonus, / set magis in viciis torpet vbique suis*' in *The Complete Works of John Gower*, ed. G. C. Macauley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902), 4: 216-7, translated in *The Major Latin Works of John Gower: The Voice of One Crying and The Tripartite Chronicle*, ed. Eric W. Stockton (Seattle: Uni. of Washington Press, 1962), 208.
[38] '*Inter quos plebis magis errat iniqua voluntas, / Sulcorum famulos estimo sepe reos. / Sunt etenim tardi, sunt rari, sunt et auari*' in *The Complete Works of John Gower*, 4: 217 and translated in *The Major Latin Works of John Gower*, 208.
[39] *The Major Latin Works of John Gower*, 208-9.
[40] '*Hii sunt qui cuiquam nolunt seruire per annum*' in *The Complete Works of John Gower*, 4: 218 and translated in *The Major Latin Works of John Gower*, 210.
[41] '*Quicquid agit paciens corpus seruile aubactum, / Mens agit interius semper in omne malum*' in

see the resonances of suffering which were so evident in the Middle English vocabulary of work. Although they complete the task, they do so begrudgingly and without recognising or appreciating labour's penitential properties.[42] Because the labourers are working less than they had before, the *Historia Roffensis* describes them as inverting the norms of society, having 'time for idleness, thieving and other outrages, and thus the poor and servile have been enriched and the rich impoverished'.[43]

The labourers' perceived subordination and disrespect for both the laws of God and of the King is illustrated in *Piers Plowman*. When Piers instructs representatives of the different orders of society to work on his field, the wasters in the group are not the poor, the beggars or the mendicants, but those labourers who put down their tools in the field half way through the working day.[44] They lack discipline and what Aers describes as 'regular work ethic'.[45] While this could be seen as anachronistic language resonant of Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic*, there is truth in Aers' comment.[46] Langland's Wastour is a petulant and stubborn man. Wastour refuses to work diligently on the land when requested to do so by Piers Plowman, he cries 'I was nat woned to worche … and now wol Y nat bygynne'.[47] There is a serious concern in the literature and legislation of the time that the labourers do not take pride or gratification in the work that they do. By not productively working, they are seen by those in power as disrespecting not just their employers but the fundamental cornerstone of their identity as members of the third estate, hard work. Devaluing the activity and role of work in turn devalues the social system. The workers stand up to the Knight's threats of secular law and dismisses the risk of being put in the stocks: 'Curteisly the knyȝte thanne, as his kynde wolde, / Warnede Wastour and wissed hym bettere: / "Or þow shalt abigge by þe lawe, by the

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The Complete Works of John Gower, 4: 218 and translated in *The Major Latin Works of John Gower*, 209.

[42] This is reminiscent of the branch of hypocrisy in devotional discourse of sloth in chapter one.

[43] *The Black Death*, 70.

[44] David Aers, "Piers Plowman and Problems in the Perception of Poverty: A Culture in Transition," in *Leeds Studies in English* 14 (1983), 11.

[45] Ibid, 11.

[46] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Stephen Kalberg (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

[47] William Langland, *Piers Plowman: A Parallel-Text Edition of the A, B, C and Z Versions*, ed. A. V. C. Schmidt (London: Longman, 1995), 1: C, 289.

ordre þat I bere!"[48] Wastour is moved neither by the knight's plea to do better nor his threat to punish him under the law. In fact, the knight's warning of punishment does not materialise through the secular laws of the king but from God after Wastour has rebelled against the king's authority. Wastour is punished by Hunger, from whom his fellow labourers retreat, hurriedly engaging in work and toil to avoid his ruin. The labourers satisfy Hunger with diligent production, however, when the Passus ends they have become used to plenty once more:

> Laborers þat han no lond to lyue on but hire handes
> Deyned noȝt to dyne aday of nyȝt-olde wortes;
> May no peny ale hem paie, ne no pece of bacoun,
> but if it be fressh flessh ouþer fissh fryed ouþer ybake –
> and þat *chaud* and *plus chaud*, for chillynge of his mawe.[49]

The labourers represented by Wastour have disassociated themselves with their prescribed social position. They do not value the penitential nature of labour and hard work. Instead they reap high wages for less work and use this money for gluttony and pride as they appropriate the lifestyle of their social superiors. Unless the labourers are 'hieȝliche hyred', meaning hired at a high wage, Wastour complains of the injustice of his position:

> He greveþ hym ageyn God and gruccheþ ageyn Resoun,
> And þanne corseþ he þe Kynge and al his Conseil after
> Swiche lawes to loke, laborers to greue.
> Ac whiles Hunger was hir maister, þer wolde noon of hem chide,
> Ne stryven ayeins his statut, so sterneliche he loked.[50]

The only punishment that will reform Wastour's behaviour is prolonged hunger. According to Piers Plowman, labourers must be kept at a lower position in order to ensure that society is productive.

Gower also presents the workers as stepping above their God-given station, desiring 'the leisure of great men' while 'none has control over them'.[51] Henry

[48] *Piers Plowman*, 1: B, 288 The Statute of Cambridge in 1388 specifically ordered that every town should erect a pair of stocks with which to enforce the labour legislation. 12 Richard II, c. 3, *Statutes of the Realm*, 2: 56.
[49] Ibid, 1: B, 312.
[50] Ibid, 1: B, 312.

Knighton's image of the post-plague countryside portrays the desolation of society: 'In the following winter there was such a lack of workers in all areas of activity that it was thought that there had hardly been such a shortage before; for a man's farm animals and other livestock wandered about without a shepherd and all his possessions were left unguarded'.[52] This description of the desolate country echoes the descriptions of the effects of the sin of sloth on the body. Due to the lack of diligent labour, society is left unguarded against the sin of sloth, just as the human body must work to ensure the devil is unable to enter the soul while it is idle.

The demographic catastrophe of the Black Death did not just affect the labour supply of England. The ideological and legislative response in England was part of a wider European model. King Pedro IV of Aragon also issued legislation in 1350, which stated that workers were demanding 'excessive and immoderate wages … against equality and right reason'.[53] King Jean II of France highlighted the idle behaviour of his workforce saying that they 'did not want to expose their bodies to do any work [*et ne veullent exposer leurs corps a faire besognes*]'.[54] This description of exposing the body to work is coloured by the images of tenderness, one of the branches of sloth, which resided in those who care for their bodies rather than submitting it to the physical pains of devotion and penance. The alignment here with the post-lapsarian association of work and penance are unlikely to be accidental. The payment of excessive wages could allow the workers to spend significant time purchasing leisure in alehouses or other less virtuous activities. Therefore the construction of regulated wages by rulers, as protectors of their realms may have been a defensive measure, to protect the unlearned labourers from their sinful behaviour. Gower endorsed the legal solutions to the problem of labour in order to save all of society from their poisonous sin: 'let the law accordingly cut down the

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[51] *The Major Latin Works of John Gower*, 209.
[52] *Chronicle of Henry Knighton* translated in *The Black Death*, 80.
[53] cited in Steven A. Epstein, "The Theory and Practice of the Just Wage," in *Journal of Medieval History* 17 (1991), 66.
[54] '*Pour ce que plusiers personnes, tant hommes comme femmes, si tiennent oyseux parmy la ville de Paris et es autres villes de la prevosté et viconté d'icelle, et ne veullent exposer leurs corps a faire besognes, ains truandent les aucuns et se tiennent es tavernes et es bourdeaux*,' cited in Steven A. Epstein, "The Theory and Practice of the Just Wage," in *Journal of Medieval History* 17 (1991), 66.

harmful tassels of rabble, lest they uproot the nobler grain with their stinging'.[55] The law was seen as an instrument for moral reform.

Due to the threat of the plague, Parliament did not sit between March 1348 and February 1351. However, owing to the pressing nature of the situation the Crown issued an Ordinance in 1349 that sought to address the labour crisis. Prior to this Ordinance there had never been national labour legislation. Regulation of labour had been the concern of local authorities such as the Mayor of London or of village by-laws as highlighted above.[56] For example, the Mayor of London capped the wages of crafts involved in the rebuilding of London after a devastating fire in 1212.[57] The Mayor and alderman were able to use their power to ensure that these crafts did not take advantage of the catastrophe for economic gain and to ensure that the rebuilding of the city could take place quickly. This reactionary legislation also set a precedent for further caps of construction wages in London from the late-thirteenth and early-fourteenth centuries.[58] In 1342, just six years before the Black Death, London had suffered an outbreak of pestilence. The Mayor and aldermen issued an ordinance to counter the demographic and economic effects that an outbreak was having on the city:

> That all men of mysteries, victuallers, workers, labourers and servants, of which condition they are accustomed will sell, work, and serve therewith as they were previously accustomed in times passed before the pestilence on pain of imprisonment and of whatever they may forfeit to our lord the King and to the city.[59]

This proclamation does not attempt to stipulate wages or working conditions other than freezing them to what they were before the outbreak of pestilence. However,

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[55] '*Vulgi cardones lex amputet ergo nociuos, / Ne blada pungentes nobiliora terant*', in *The Complete Works of John Gower*, 4: 217 and translated in *The Major Latin Works of John Gower*, 209.
[56] For village by-laws see Ault, "Some Early Village By-Laws", 208-31.
[57] Robert Braid, "Behind the Ordinance of Labourers: Economic Regulation and Market Control in London before the Black Death," in *Journal of Legal History* 34 (2013), 17.
[58] The dates for the two surviving civic ordinances are not precisely known. Braid, "Behind the Ordinance of Labourers," 17-8.
[59] '*Item que totes gentz des mesteres, vitalers, overeurs, laborours, et servanez, de queles condicions qils soient, vendount, oiverent, et servount solom a ce q'ils soloint fere ou temps passe devant la pestelence sur paine de imprisonement et de qanque q'ils porront forfere a nostre seigneur le roy et a la citee*.' London, Metropolitan Archive, Plea and Memoranda Roll A4, Membr. 9b.

with the Ordinance of Labourers in 1349, the King took ownership of labour regulation. There is no surviving evidence of petitions to Edward III to implement labour legislation. Although, parliament had not been called, the King was surely aware of the damage that the plague was causing within his kingdom and likely heard of the struggles of great estates from members of his court.[60] As with London's reactions to the fire of 1212 and the pestilence of 1343, action needed to be taken to ensure the continued productivity of the realm in exceptional circumstances. While these crises were contained within London, the Black Death's effect stretched across the realm and needed a broader approach than anything seen before.

The labour legislation aimed to restore the divinely-sanctioned order of society by introducing new laws that would regulate the population both economically and socially. While this legislation evolved and changed over the next century, its basis was the Ordinance of Labourers issued in 1349. The preamble to the Ordinance explains and justifies the necessity of the new legislation. It is this preamble and the preamble to the subsequent Statute that present the most explicit link between the labour legislation and the concept of idleness:

> *Quia magna pars populi et maxime operariorum et seruientum iam in ista pestilencia est defuncta, nonnulli videntes necessitatem dominorum et paucitatem seruientum seruire nolunt nisi salaria recipiant excessiua, et alii mendicare malentes in ocio quam per laborem querere victum suum; nos pensantes grauia que ex carencia presertim cultorum et operariorum huiusmodi peruenire possent incommoda, super hoc cum prelatis et nobilibus et peritis aliis nobis assistentibus deliberacionem habuimus et tractatum; de quorum vnanimi consilo duximus ordinandum …*[61]
>
> Since a great part of the population, and especially workers and employees, has now died in this pestilence many people, observing the needs of masters and the shortages of employees,

[60] Braid, "Behind the Ordinance of Labourers," 23.
[61] Putnam, *The Enforcement of the Statutes of* Labourers, 8*-9*.

> are refusing to work unless they are paid an excessive salary. Others prefer to beg in idleness rather than work for their living. Mindful of the serious inconvenience likely to arise from this shortage, especially of agricultural labourers, we have discussed and considered the matter with our prelates and nobles and other learned men and, with their unanimous advice, we have ordained that…[62]

The preamble to the Ordinance serves to justify the legislation on a number of grounds which were feeding the rhetoric of contemporary commentators. Firstly, the pestilence greatly reduced the labouring population, which in economic terms reduced the productivity of the country. It was important to counteract this by ensuring that resources were properly utilised in order to guarantee the economic prosperity and subsistence of the realm. Secondly the blame for lack of productivity is placed clearly and solely on the workers and servants. The masters, which here refer to the employers, have a need for employees. They are presented as actively wishing to employ people to facilitate the proper running of the realm, however, the labourers themselves refuse to serve. There is further denunciation of the labourers who will not serve 'unless they are paid an excessive salary'. While the labourers should pull together in a time of difficulty, they are instead taking advantage of the situation for their own financial gain. Other labourers are described as begging in idleness for their livelihood rather than engaging in labour. The use of '*in ocio*' or 'idleness' or is noteworthy. We have seen in the previous chapters how idleness was constructed in the later Middle Ages. Culturally, idleness was a branch of the sin of sloth representing inactivity but was also used in Middle English more generally to refer to emptiness and a lack of purpose or role. Here this theological and social concept is deployed to further taint the unproductive labourers with an implication of sinfulness. The writers of the Ordinance placed considerable effort in the construction of a narrative that legitimised their legislation as serving both the economic and moral needs of the realm.

[62] 23 Edward III, translated in *The Black Death*, 287-8.

This justification was especially important because the changes that the labour legislation attempted to introduce were significant. The Ordinance itself consisted of seven clauses:

I. The compulsory service clause ordered all able-bodied men and women to accept employment suitable to their status. All tenants, both servile and free, were now required to accept employment from their lord before any other employer. This is a notable change from the pre-plague era, where only villein tenants were legally required to perform labour services to their lord. The clause also capped wages to the level which was considered appropriate in 1346, prior to the demographic catastrophe of the Black Death and when labour was in far greater supply. This cap on wages to pre-plague levels mirrors the 1343 London proclamation above. Any man or woman who refused to work in the manner of the first clause was to be imprisoned and only released when surety was found that they would enter employment.

II. Workers were forbidden from breaking contracts with their employer by leaving before the term of the employ ended. This was punishable by imprisonment for both the employee and any employer who wished to entice another man's workers into his employment.

III. Employers were not to promise or pay 'excessive' wages measured against 1346 levels and employees were forbidden from demanding or accepting these excessive payments. Payment or receipt of excessive wages was punishable by fines twice the amount of the excess.

IV. If the employer were a lord this penalty rose to three times the amount of the excess. However, if prior to the Ordinance, an employer had entered into a contract that paid above the 1346 wage levels, the higher wages were to be replaced by the comparable 1346 wage. This gave employers the right to break any contracts that had already been made with their employees and replace them with a contract more favourable to themselves.

V. Craft workers' wages or prices were also to be capped to the level that was common in 1346.

VI. Victuals were to be sold at a 'reasonable price'. Mayors and bailiffs were ordered to enforce these prices and wages. Financial penalties were to be imposed if they were found negligent of their duties.

VII. It was forbidden to give alms to any beggar who was fit to work. This final clause of the Ordinance refers directly to the supposed idleness which is referenced in the preamble: 'and since many sturdy beggars - finding that they can make a living by begging for alms - are refusing to work, and are spending their time instead in idleness and vice'.[63] The beggars are idle and hence sinful. This view or judgement of the idle within society, such as beggars, vagabonds and the unemployed will be examined in more detail in chapter four.

While the preamble and clauses of the Ordinance appear to seek a restoration of the pre-plague status quo, in reality the legislation was revolutionary. It did not distinguish between free and unfree tenants but placed both groups under the same labour regulations.[64] It gave employers the power to break existing labour contracts and simultaneously prevented workers from doing so. While we have seen that some village by-laws had encouraged all members of the community to play their part during peaks in the agricultural year, according to the Ordinance all capable men and women were required to work if there was a need for labour. These community endorsed by-laws had placed temporary controls of wages, mobility and labour but the Ordinance standardised this regulation under the control of the crown. While the Ordinance may have been considered a temporary or emergency measure at the time, it had a significant social and economic influence on the remainder of the fourteenth century.

When Parliament was finally able to meet in 1351, the Commons petitioned the king to reinforce the Ordinance of Labourers. The Commons felt that the Ordinance had failed to alter the behaviour of workers. In the parliamentary rolls for 1351 the labourers are described as having 'no regard for fines or redemptions, but go day to day from bad to worse'.[65] The Commons even asked for the introduction of corporal punishment for breaches of the labour legislation. In response to this

[63] 23 Edward III, c. 7, *Statutes of the Realm*, 1: 308 and translated in *The Black Death*, 289.
[64] Judith Bennett extensively discusses the implications of the compulsory service clause on society in Judith M. Bennett, "Compulsory Service in Late Medieval England," in *Past & Present* 209 (2010), 7-51.
[65] '*ne ils ne ount regard a fynes ne a redempcions, mes fount de jour en autre de pire ou pis*.' "Edward III: Parliament of February 1351, Text and Translation," in *PROME*, item 12.

petition, Parliament passed a Statute that altered and elaborated on the earlier Ordinance. The preamble to the Statute presents a tone of greater indignation towards the behaviour of the labourers than that of the earlier Ordinance:

> *Come nadgairs, contre la malice des servauntz queux furent perceouse, et nient voillantz servire apres la pestilence sanz trope outrajouses louers prendre, nostre seignur le roi eust ordeigne par assent des prelatz, nobles et autres de son conseil, qe … Et ja, par tant qe done est entendre a nostre dit seignur le roi en cest present parlement par la peticion de la commune, qe les ditz servantz, nient eaunt regard a la dite ordinance, mes a lour eses et singulers coveitises, se retreent de servir as grauntz ou as autres, s'ils n'eient livereisons et louers au double ou treble de ceo q'ils soleint prendre le dit an vintisme et devant, a grant damage des grantz et empovrissement de touz ceux de la dite commune; dont il estoit prie par mesme la commune de remedie. Par quei en mesme le parlement, par assent des prelatz, countes, barons et autres grauntz, et de la ditecommune illoeqes assemblez, pur refreindre la malice des ditz servantz sont ordeignez et establis les choses subescrites…*[66]
>
> It was lately ordained by our lord the king, with the assent of the prelates, nobles and others of his council against the malice of employees, who were idle and were not willing to take employment after the pestilence unless for outrageous wages, that … [overview of the clauses of the Ordinance] And now the king has been given to understand by a petition of the Commons in the present parliament that the said employees – having no regard to the said ordinance but rather to their own ease and exceptional greed – withdraw themselves to work for great men and others, unless they are paid livery and wages double or treble what they were accustomed to receive in the said 20th year and earlier, to the great damage of the great men and the

[66] 25 Edward III, Stat. 2, *Statutes of the Realm*, 1: 311.

> impoverishing of all the Commons, for which the said Commons pray for remedy. Wherefore, to restrain the malice of the said employees, the things below written have been ordained and established in the said parliament by the assent of the said prelates, earls, barons and other great men.[67]

There are a number of points to highlight here. The preamble to the Statute of Labourers is far more detailed than the preamble to the Ordinance. The labourers are now explicitly associated with two vices, viz. idleness or love of 'ease' and covetousness, which is seen in their demand for higher wages. While idleness is used in modern translations of the Statute, the original Anglo-Norman reads '*perceouse*'. This is likely a variant of the more common '*peresçous*', which refers to idleness or slothfulness and thus carries strong resonances of sin.[68] While the Ordinance discusses the choice of idle begging over working for a livelihood, the Statute is more concerned with the damage that the labourers, with their new working conditions had upon the kingdom. Their demands for 'excessive' wages and refusal to work the lands of their lords had damaged 'the great men' and impoverished all of the 'Commons'. These two groups represent the lords and members of the Commons who had brought the complaint to Parliament. The Commons refers to the knights of the shire elected from a county and burgesses elected from a borough.[69] While the burgesses were less likely to be landowners, they would have been employers. These groups would have experienced this 'damage' to the economy first hand. While the labourers described in the Ordinance took advantage of a crisis for their own benefit, two years later the labourers are clearly presented as having directly impoverished the inhabitants of the realm. The preambles both to the Ordinance and to the Statute served not just to legitimise the legislation but also to reaffirm social boundaries. This is achieved by constructing a narrative of victim and offender. The workers are immediately labelled as malicious. The labourers no longer fulfil their role within society. Their refusal to do so after the enforcement of the Ordinance two years previously is no longer presented as exploiting a damaged realm but as intentionally impairing the proper order of society by breaking both the laws of God and the King.

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[67] Ibid, 1: 312-3.
[68] *Anglo-Norman Dictionary*, s.v. 'peresçous', Digital Edition at < http://www.anglo-norman.net/>.
[69] See H. G. Richardson, "The Commons and Medieval Politics," in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 28 (1946), 21-45.

The content of the Statute served to clarify, improve upon and reinforce the former Ordinance. Three items in the Ordinance were excluded, such as the section on idle beggars.[70] Loopholes were closed and enforcements tightened. For example, clause II of the Statute includes an oath to be sworn twice a year by servants to ensure that they would adhere to the Statute, which was not present in the Ordinance. This oath was intended to ensure that all workers were aware of their legal obligations and guaranteed that workers recognised the authority of the Statute of Labourers as well as their own subservient status. If a worker refused to swear the oath they were to be put in the stocks for three days or until they agreed to the terms of the Statute. Restrictions were also introduced to the length of contracts: 'And that they be hired to serve for a whole year, or for the other usual terms, and not by the day'. [71] This served to commit workers to long-term employment, providing consistency to the labour market while keeping wages low by reducing the number of workers actively seeking employment.

The Statute also served to clarify one of the main points of the ordinance, the payment of excessive wages. While the Ordinance allowed the measurement of what was commonly paid in 1346 to be decided locally, this had proved impossible to enforce.[72] The Statute combatted this problem with a specific set of wage levels, which were to be applied nationally:

> And no one shall take more than 1d the day for weeding the fields or hay making; and mowers 5d an acre or 5d a day; and reapers of corn 2d the day in the first week of August, and 3d in the second week and so until the end of the month, and less in places where less used to be given; without food or other bonus being asked, given or taken. And that such workers bring the tools of their trade openly to market and there shall be hired in full view and not secretly.[73]

[70] This will be discussed in chapter four.
[71] 25 Edward III, Stat. 2. c. 1, translated in *The Black Death*, 313.
[72] Chris Given-Wilson, "Service, Serfdom and Englsh Labour Legislation, 1350-1500," in *Concepts and Patterns of Service in the Later Middle Ages*, eds. Anne Curry and Elizabeth Matthew (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2000), 25.
[73] 25 Edward III, Stat. 2. c. 1, translated in *The Black Death*, 313.

While the wages specified above relate specifically to the seasonal tasks for agricultural labour when wages annually peak due to the rise in demand for workers, clause three of the Statute dealt with specific wages for craftspeople. The Statute also removed the punishment for givers of excessive wages, placing this responsibility solely on employees. Perhaps this is tacit recognition that employers had to pay higher wages if they wished to secure labour. There is also no mention of lords having first preference on hiring their tenants. Instead, the Statute introduced geographical restrictions on the mobility of labour: 'No one shall leave the town where he lives in winter to work elsewhere in the summer if there is work for him in the same town'.[74] This clause sought to ensure that employers would have sufficient labour supply during the busy summer months. This type of restriction in movement, while recognisable to villein tenants – viz. chevage – or tenants tied to their land as their means of making a living, had not previously been applied to labourers generally or free men and women who had options other than working their landholding.

After this first decade of unprecedented labour regulation, subsequent legislation in 1352, 1357, 1361, 1362, 1368, 1378, 1383, 1388, 1390 and into the fifteenth century, served to reinforce and supplement what had come in 1349 and 1351.[75] These further pieces of labour legislation tended to concentrate on two main areas: mobility and wages. In 1376 a Bill of Labourers was put forward by the Commons. It contains a clear discussion of why the current legislation on labour was ineffectual. According to the Bill, if a master raised the issue of labour laws with their employee the worker would 'flee and suddenly run away from their employment, and from their own region, going from county to county, from hundred to hundred, from vill to vill, into foreign places unknown to their said masters.'[76]

[74] The original Statute uses the term 'ville', which has been translated by both Alexander Luders and Rosemary Horrox as 'town'. However, it is likely that this is referring to a 'vill' a much vaguer term which can refer to settlements both small and larger rather than to a specifically urban 'town'. 25 Edward III, Stat. 2. c.2, translated in *The Black Death*, 313.
[75] 25 Edward III, Stat. 7, *Statutes of the Realm*, 1: 327; 31 Edward III, Stat. 1, c. 6, *Statutes of the Realm*, 1: 350; 34 Edward III, c. 9, *Statutes of the Realm*, 1: 366; 36 Edward III, c. 8 & 14, *Statutes of the Realm*, 1: 373-5; 2 Richard II, Stat. 1, c. 8, *Statutes of the Realm*, 2: 11; 7 Richard II, c. 5, *Statutes of the Realm*, 2: 32; 12 Richard II, c. 3-6, *Statutes of the Realm*, 2: 56-7; and 13 Richard II, Stat. 1, c. 8, *Statutes of the Realm*, 2: 63.
[76] "Edward III: Parliament of April 1376, Text and Translation," in *PROME*, item 117.

The Bill presents the movement of labour as endemic and far reaching. The Commons put forward a solution to the issue that all fugitive employees be 'put in stocks, or sent to the nearest gaol, to remain there until they admitted whence they had come'. This, the Commons believed would make fleeing service a fruitless endeavour. However, it took over ten years for the Common's petition to be accepted into law. The most thorough enhancement of the legislation came with the Cambridge Parliament in 1388.[77] The parliament roll itself does not survive, however, Henry Knighton's *Chronicle* contains a brief account of the parliament and a copy of the Statute.[78] The need for further legislation was generally accepted as all thirteen petitions relating to labour were made into law.[79] The legislation follows the previous trend of tightening loopholes and giving more specific examples to guide enforcement (discussed more fully below). According to J. A. Tuck, by 1388 many of the Commons would have had first-hand experience of the enforcement of the labour legislation as Justices of the Peace.[80] They would have been more acutely aware of the issues with its implementation and enforcement. One particular issue that was dealt with in detail in the Statute of Cambridge is the movement of labourers and servants. While the Statute of Labourers had restricted where labourers could look for work, according to the Statute of Cambridge, all men and women who left their place of dwelling required a letter stating 'the cause of his going, and the time of his return … under the King's Seal'.[81] Those who were found without such a letter were to be put in the stocks until surety was found for their return to service.

Social as well as spatial mobility was a concern for legislators in 1388. Earlier in the decade, John Gower had warned of the unjustified consumption of the lower levels of society: 'Born of poor man's stock and a poor man himself, he demands things for his belly like a lord'.[82] In order to curb this social mobility and to ensure a sufficient supply of agricultural labour, carters, ploughmen and others in the 'service of husbandry' were forbidden from changing occupation after the age of

[77] The Statute of Cambridge was still very much in the shadow of the 1381 revolt and this likely influenced the anxiety regarding mobility.
[78] J. A. Tuck, "The Cambridge Parliament, 1388," *The English Historical Review* 84, 331 (Apr., 1969), 227.
[79] Tuck, "The Cambridge Parliament, 1388," 236.
[80] Ibid, 236.
[81] 12 Richard II, c. 3, *Statutes of the Realm*, 2: 56.
[82] *The Major Latin Works of John Gower*, 210.

twelve.[83] This aimed to prevent apprenticeships outside of agricultural labour, to keep workers within the same role for their entire lives and restrict emigration to urban areas. This was reinforced in the 1406 Statute where anyone with less than 20s. a year in rent or land, who put their child into a craft apprenticeship or allowed them to labour outside their own social estate was to be punished with one year imprisonment. Anyone who received an apprentice from a family of a lesser wealth would be fined 100s.[84] According to the commons this was a response to 'the pride in the clothing and other bad customs' as well as the scarcity of labour. The creators of the labour legislation concentrated on regulating the terms of work and preventing a haemorrhaging of agricultural labour to urban communities and craft activity.[85]

Wages were another area of the labour legislation that received extensive revision over the course of the fourteenth century. The 1361 Statute of Westminster aimed to further tighten loopholes and improve the clarity and precision of the previous legislation, particularly in relation to the building trades. For example, carpenters and masons were to be paid daily rather than by the week. This meant that they could only receive wages for work that was completed rather than being paid for a week of which they only worked part. The Statute of Westminster also attempted to standardise the wages of the building trades and to prevent mutually beneficial business agreements between these crafts.[86] The Statute of Cambridge also specified wages for different occupations such as ten shillings per annum for a shepherd or carter and seven shillings for 'a driver of the plough'. However, in the succeeding Statute (1390) the setting of wage rates was given to the Justices of the Peace, who were to decide on the wages per day plus meat and drink to be given depending on the local 'dearth of victuals', occupation and the degree of the person.[87] The justices were to proclaim these terms twice a year between Easter and the Michaelmas.[88] This may be due to a realisation that wage caps did not necessarily work on a nationwide basis as the demand and supply of labour varied in

[83] 12 Richard II, c. 5, *Statutes of the Realm*, 2: 57.
[84] 7 Henry IV, c. 17, *Statutes of the Realm*, 2: 157.
[85] Given-Wilson, "Service, Serfdom and English Labour Legislation," 29.
[86] 34 Edward III, c. 9, *Statutes of the Realm*, 1: 366-7.
[87] 13 Richard II, Stat. 1, c. 8, *Statutes of the Realm*, 2: 63.
[88] From Easter to the end of September was the busiest time in the both the arable and pastoral agricultural calendars. Michaelmas was also a popular time for hiring new servants.

different occupations across the country. For example, the demand for labour in Essex was particularly high as employers and artisans required sufficient labour to keep production in line with the demand from London.[89] However, some areas, such as the Wolds of Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, experienced a reduced demand for labour due to a change from labour intensive arable to mixed or even pastoral agriculture in areas.[90] There was also a movement away from national control, however, this is likely due to practicality rather than a move to return economic jurisdiction to local authorities. The Justices who decided wage rates were still appointments of the crown.

In 1414 we once again hear that the mobility of servants was causing damage to those who employed them:

> Forasmuch as the Servants and Labourers of the shires of the realm do flee from county to county, because they would not be justified by the Ordinances (and Statutes) by the law for them made, to the great damage of gentlemen and others, to whom they should serve because that the said Ordinances and Statutes for them ordained be not executed in every shire.[91]

The frustration of the legislators is evident. Although the labour legislation had been reinforced over the previous sixty years, it was still not effectively enforced on the ground. Labourers still moved in order to find higher-paid work. The taking and giving of 'excessive' wages is still discussed as a problem in the Statutes of 1416, 1423 and 1427.[92] The labour legislation arguably became more rigorous as the fourteenth century progressed. For example, the contract clause which required all those able to work to do so for the person who required them, developed into workers having to return to their place of origin to work and likely, to work for that

[89] See Nora Kenyon, "Labour Conditions in Essex in the Reign of Richard II," in *The Economic History Review* 4, no. 4 (1934), 430, Lawrence R. Poos, *A Rural Society After the Black Death* (Cambridge: Cambridge Uni. Press, 1991), 41-3 and Derek Keene, "Medieval London and its Supply Hinterland," in *Regional Environmental Change* 12, no. 2 (2012), 263-81.
[90] Richard Britnall, "Markets and Incentives: Common Themes and Regional Variations," in *Agriculture and Rural Society After the Black Death*, eds. Richard Britnall and Ben Dodds (Hatfield: Uni. of Hertfordshire Press, 2008), 17 and Goldberg, *Medieval England*, 168.
[91] 2 Henry V, Stat. 1, c. 4, *Statutes of the Realm*, 2: 176-7.
[92] 4 Henry V, Stat. 2, c. 4, *Statutes of the Realm*, 2: 196-7; 2 Henry VI, c. 18, *Statutes of the Realm*, 2: 225; and 6 Henry VI, c. 3 *Statutes of the Realm*, 2: 233-5.

landowner.[93] The focus of the legislators shifted from the laziness and greed of the works in the post Black Death labour crisis, to a persistent concern to ensure that the legislators, as substantial employers themselves, would have enough workers. Nonetheless, the preambles of either the Ordinance or the 1351 Statute were reiterated as preambles for each reinforcement of the labour legislation throughout the later-fourteenth and into the fifteenth century. The same problems remained: the labourers and servants refused to work unless they received 'excessive' wages and, due to this supposed 'withholding' of work, the whole realm suffered.

There has been considerable discussion as to the success of the legislation in regulating labour practices. Mark Ormrod has argued for at least some level of effectiveness in the first decade of the enforcement.[94] The early stages of enforcement highlight how many people engaged in activities that were contrary to the Statute. For example, in Essex in 1352, after the introduction of the Statute of Labourers, approximately a quarter of the population were brought forward on labour violations.[95] Chris Given-Wilson and Samuel Cohn have both given interpretations of these figures.[96] Do they signify strict enforcement and the seriousness of the legislators' threats, or do the numerous cases in Essex highlight a disregard for the legislation by labourers in a county where labour was in particular demand? Ormrod argues that financial incentives such as tax benefits as well as the specificity of their task may have encouraged the Justices of Labourers to be productive. Combining this with fresh and innovative legislation, enforcement of the labour legislation in the 1350s generated far more cases than at any other time in the century.[97]

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[93] Christopher J. Given-Wilson, "The Problem of Labour in the Context of the English Government," in *The Problem of Labour in Fourteenth-Century England*, eds. James Bothwell, P. J. P. Goldberg and W. Mark Ormrod (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2000), 88.
[94] W. M. Ormrod, "The English Government and the Black Death of 1348-49," in *England in the Fourteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1985 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. W. M. Ormrod (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1986), 178.
[95] See Simon A. C. Penn and Christopher C. Dyer, "Wages and Earnings in Late Medieval England: Evidence from the Enforcement of the Labour Laws," in *Economic History Review* 43, no. 3 (1990), 356-76 and Given-Wilson, "The Problem of Labour in the Context of the English Government," 86.
[96] Given-Wilson, "The Problem of Labour in the Context of the English Government," 86 and Samuel K., Cohn, "After the Black Death: Labour Legislation and Attitudes towards Labour in Late-Medieval Western Europe," in *Economic History Review* 60, no. 3 (2007), 469.
[97] Ormrod, "The English Government and the Black Death of 1348-49," 178.

The constant adjustment and tweaking of the legislation highlights that while the statutes may not have had the results desired by legislators, the defiance of the labourers was a persistent concern. In 1368, 1377, 1378, 1390, 1402 and 1414 the Commons petitioned the king to ensure that the labour legislation was enforced rigorously and legislators continued their attempts to control and restrict wages into the fifteenth century. From what we have seen of the perspective of the contemporary commentators and legislators, the labouring population were thought to be acting immorally by demanding the higher wages that were supposedly 'impoverishing' the realm. The idea of workers dictating the wages they should receive was seen as an affront to the social order prescribed by God. Their role as the third estate was to labour and to serve.

The continued attempts to control and limit the wages of workers through the labour legislation was positioned by both contemporary commentators and the preambles to the legislation as combatting the immoral demands of workers by restoring what was considered an appropriate or just wage. Indeed, some early twentieth-century historians, such as William Ashley and Herbert Heaton, argued that the medieval concept of a just price or wage correlated with the contemporary social hierarchy.[98] They suggested that the medieval 'just wage' could rise with inflation but not to a point that would allow the labourer to improve his social position. However, with a closer examination of the scholastic writers of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, we can see that the actual concept of just price in the medieval period is based on equality of exchange rather than social status.

Just wage was considered by theologians and scholars as one element or application of the theory of just price. The theory of just price determines how an ethical price can be established for commodities. In this case the commodity is labour sold by workers for a price or wage. Roman legal tradition saw employment as a commodity that was rented as it was a temporary contract, such as renting a house, rather than a permanent sale of goods.[99] However, most medieval scholars treated labour as a commodity to be sold and therefore as an extension of just price

[98] William Ashley, *An Introduction to English Economic History and Theory* (London: Longmans, 1920) and Herbert Heaton, *Economic History of Europe* (New York: Harper, 1936).
[99] Epstein, "The Theory and Practice of the Just Wage," 58.

theory. The writings of thirteenth-century scholars such as Albertus Magnus (*c*. 1200-80), Thomas Aquinas (*c*. 1225-74) and John Duns Scotus (*c*. 1265-1308) formed the basis of the majority of discussion of just price in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

As has been mentioned above, prior to the Black Death, labour contracts were privately negotiated between parties. Negotiation was integral to the concept of just price. Bargaining over rates of pay was thought to produce a more just system of wages because it took the individual circumstances of both employer and employee into account.[100] John Duns Scotus is clear that both buyer and seller were unlikely to agree on what constituted a just price for their exchange. The idea of a just price is therefore subjective, each party having a different estimation of the worth of the commodity. Thus, bargaining is necessary in order to reach the 'actual price' that will satisfy both parties.[101] Thomas Aquinas writes about just price in his *Summa Theologiae*. The first question which Aquinas asks is whether anybody is 'entitled to sell something for more than it is worth?':[102]

> It would not seem to be wrong to do by contract what would in any case be due in honour. But Aristotle maintains that in friendship based in utility the person who has benefited should make recompense according to the use he has got out of it, which is sometimes worth more than the thing given. This happens where somebody badly needs something, whether to avoid danger or to secure some advantage. It is, therefore, legitimate in a contract of sale to give something for a greater price than it is worth.[103]

This passage reflects the majority of the discussions of just price before the Black Death. If the buyer of the product had great need of the commodity then the price may rise to suit his need. The value of the commodity is a product of its usefulness. While this may be a legitimate business practice, Aquinas then questions whether

[100] Epstein, "The Theory and Practice of the Just Wage," 65.
[101] Odd Langholm, *Economics in the Medieval Schools: Wealth, Exchange, Value, Money and Usury according to the Paris Theological Tradition 1200-1350* (New York: Brill, 1992), 411.
[102] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Marcus Lefébure (London: Blackfriars, 1975), 38: 213.
[103] This is a reference to Aristotle's *Ethics*. Ibid, 38: 213-5.

this is virtuous. Aquinas bases his estimations of justice in exchange on 'equality'.[104] The sale must take place for the 'common benefit of both parties'.[105] While it is seen as agreeable to increase the price of a commodity if the sale will be a burden for the seller, Aquinas is morally against one party knowingly taking advantage of another's situation: 'nobody is entitled to sell another what is not his own though he is justified in charging for any loss he may suffer'.[106] The idea of sustaining the employee must also take into account market conditions and whether the employee will lose by selling for a lower price than he would receive elsewhere. Therefore the issue of a just wage must take into consideration the employee's perspective.

The concept of supply and demand was not unknown to scholastics in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Scholars and theologians were aware of how the market worked and used practical examples of how this market affected the just price. Albertus Magnus (*c*. 1200-80) highlighted the necessity of demand in his second commentary on Artistotle's *Ethics* (*c*. 384-322 BCE): 'In fact, such exchange is not to be made by equality between things exchanged, but rather according to a proportion between the value of one thing and the value of the other thing, this proportion being taken with regard to need which is the cause of exchange'.[107] Without demand there can be no exchange and therefore demand is integral to exchange. If we follow the logic of Albertus Magnus, then the employers' demand for labour was sufficient to enhance the just price. However, in this example, if the employee is not paid enough he will not be able to make a living and therefore will turn to a different trade. Again, this could be read as a just price based on the social position of the employee, where the employee should be paid just enough to sustain himself and his family. However Aristotle, the basis for much of the scholastic discussion of just price, is clear that social status is not a factor in just exchange: 'In (commutative) justice the mean does not vary according to different personal conditions, but takes account only of the quantity of the thing. He who buys a certain thing ought to pay what it is worth, whether he buys it from a pauper or from a rich man'.[108] St. Bernardino of Siena (*c*. 1380-1444) directly applies the theories of

[104] Ibid, 38: 215.
[105] Ibid, 38: 215.
[106] Ibid, 38: 215-7.
[107] Cited in Langholm, *Economics in the Medieval Schools*, 189.
[108] Aristotle, Quodlibet VI, (5), 10 cited in Langholm, *Economics in the Medieval Schools*, 225.

supply and demand to the labour market. Rather than wages relating to social rank, Bernardino highlights the scarcity of a commander's military knowledge and skill compared to the abundance of foot soldiers, to explain the differing levels of pay.[109]

According to Aristotle the commodity is central to the exchange process, not the social position of either buyer or seller. It is the utility of the commodity to both parties which should be considered. A lord who took up a plough should be paid the same as a landless labourer if they carry out the same task. If this task were in high demand then it would have a higher value. The French Franciscan Peter Olivi (d. 1298) recognised that corn was worth more in times of scarcity than when it was plentiful.[110] This was supported by theologian Henry of Hesse (*c*. 1340-97), who argued that it was not the 'natural value' of a commodity but its usefulness which determined just price.[111] Value was therefore reliant on need. St. Bernardino also considered the just price to be that which the market constructed, free from fraud.[112] As long as both buyer and seller were aware of the market conditions, the contract that they formed is a just price. However, payment of a higher price is not seen as unjust. Aquinas argues that 'all of this is not, of course, to deny that somebody who has benefited greatly from a transaction might spontaneously offer more than the due price; this is a matter of his honourable feeling'.[113] Therefore, the provision of supplementary payments outside of the just wage, such as food or a portion of a harvest, could be deemed as acceptable and virtuous.

The fixing of wages or prices entered scholastic discussion in the second half of the fourteenth century. This was likely in response to the labour crisis and to legislation, similar to that of the Ordinance and Statute of Labourers, which was implemented across Europe during this period. These national controls on wages presented scholars with a new factor to integrate into their estimations of justice in exchange.[114] Prior to the Black Death scholars rarely went so far as to present a

[109] Raymond de Roover, *San Bernardino of Siena and Sant'Antonino of Florence: The Two Great Economic Thinkers of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1967), 24.
[110] Diana Wood, *Medieval Economic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge Uni. Press, 2002), 137.
[111] Ibid, 138.
[112] de Roover, *San Bernardino of Siena*, 21.
[113] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 38: 217.
[114] For post Black Death labour legislation across Europe see Cohn, "After the Black Death," 457-85.

figure for market price but rather stated the criteria for determining just market price as demand for the commodity, risk involved in its provision, and subsistence with moderate profit for the seller. Taking these determinants into account the just price could then be distinguished at a local level.[115] The just price was not an exact figure but fluctuated with and adapted to market conditions. According to Aristotle: 'We cannot always fix the just price precisely; we sometimes have to make the best estimate we can, with the result that giving or taking a little here or there does not upset the balance of justice'.[116]

While the late-fourteenth-century legislators and commentators were quick to label the workers as 'idle' for refusing to work for what the legislators considered extortionate wages, this rise in wages seems to fit with what Aquinas, St. Bernardino, Albertus Magnus and Henry of Hesse suggest is a fair and just determination of price. A fairly negotiated contract with the agreement of both parties was seen as sufficient to determine just price. However, the labour legislation did not follow this theory. For example, clause IV of the Ordinance of Labourers allowed employers to renege on contracts already made, if they did not comply with the new labour regulations. Clause I capped wages at levels which intentionally disregarded the effect of demand on the market price. In doing so the legislators redefined what constituted a just price on their own terms. The labour legislation also required negotiation to be carried out in a public place, preventing contracts that were contrary to the legislation but also heightening social pressure to conform.[117] The 1388 Statute of Cambridge sought to specify exact annual wages for different types of work, for example, 10s. for a carter, 6s. 8d. for a cowherd and 7s. for a ploughman.[118] However, the average wages for these occupations in Essex at this point were 13s. 4d. and 3 bushels per month for a carter, 6s. 8d. and 1 bushel per week for a cowherd and 13s. 4d and 3 bushels per

[115] Wood, *Medieval Economic Thought*, 135. There has been some discussion by theologians such as Gerald Odonis (1290-1348), on the factors which should influence wages and prices. The example usually given is the merchant, who should be reimbursed for the risk in travel as well as cost accrued during this travel and the amount needed to sustain himself and his dependants. Odonis still notes that these should not rise above the worth to the community that buy his commodities. However, in conclusion he still places the market as the final decider for just wages arguing that if there is a scarcity of labour, labour will inevitably require a higher price. See Langholm, *Economics in the Medieval Schools*, 517.
[116] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 38: 217.
[117] 25 Edward III, Stat. 2. c. 1, *Statutes of the Realm*, 1: 311-2.
[118] 12 Richard II, c. 4, *Statutes of the Realm*, 2: 57.

month for a ploughman.[119] The writers of the Ordinance and the subsequent labour legislation constructed a just price based on their own social position and moral outlook, rather than the more objective formulation of just price advocated by the scholars of the thirteenth century.

However, in 1389, just a year after the Statute of Cambridge, parliament amended this clause to allow Justices of the Peace to determine wage levels in their area:

> but because men cannot determine the price of corn and other victuals, the king wills that the justices of the peace in each county, in their sessions held around Easter and Michelmas, shall proclaim at their discretion, according to the scarcity of victuals, how much each mason, carpenter, tiler and other artificer and workmen, and also labourers by the day both at harvest-time and other times of the year, according to their degree, should take each day, with food and drink or without food and drink, between the two aforesaid seasons.[120]

The just price of victuals is directly related to market forces. The just wage, however, is a balance between the price of victuals to ensure subsistence and regulation of the government to prevent what they deem to be excessive profit. Henry of Hesse justified legal price fixing as he considered it necessary to prevent the wicked in society, in which he includes the idle, from taking advantage of honest workers and the poor.[121] This definition of a just price aligns most clearly with the intentions of the writers of the Ordinance and Statute of Labourers. They, alongside the king as ruler and protector of the state, attempted to safeguard society from the dangers of the idle. After the Black Death we see marked movements in both the practical and theoretical concept of just price away from one primarily shaped by market conditions to a just price based more substantially on social morality. This shift in scholastic thought was likely a product of the same social and labour crisis which necessitated the introduction of labour legislation. In the decades after labour

[119] Nora Kenyon, "Labour Conditions in Essex in the Reign of Richard II," in *The Economic History Review* 4, no. 4 (1934), 444-51.
[120] "Richard II: Parliament of January 1390, Text and Translation," in *PROME*, item 38.
[121] Wood, *Medieval Economic Thought*, 143.

legislation was first implemented there were numerous peasant uprisings across Europe. The response to the threat of social change and unrest permeated writings of the period. Sant'Antonino of Florence (*c*. 1389-1459) argued that a just wage should compensate an employee for his labour and provide for him and his dependants according to their social rank.[122] As such, each member of society was portrayed as carrying a specific social value that helped determine their just wage.

This new construction of just price is illustrated when we look at the enforcement of the labour legislation. John Gate, servant of Margaret de Ongre, described at a session of the Peace at Clavering, Essex in July 1378 as '*fallax et debilis*' (untrustworthy and weak), was prosecuted for having taken 16 s. for the year and food.[123] John's wages were particularly reprehensible in the eyes of the court because his physical state did not meet the requirements for receiving the same rate of payment as an able-bodied man. John's value as a worker was reduced and therefore the Justices of the Peace did not deem him worthy of 16 s. *per annum* with food. A by-law from Great Horwood, Buckinghamshire in 1356 ordered that 'no one among them shall go gleaning who is able to earn a penny and a half or 2 d. without food under pain of 2 s.'.[124] To be exempt from harvest work it was necessary that the value of a person's labour was less than 2 d. a day without food. This served to ensure anyone who was capable of working was doing so, however it also highlights that the value of a person's labour was defined by their social, economic and physical condition.[125] The construction of a legally defined just price through both the national and local labour legislation highlights how society placed social value on its members. By attempting to prevent the rise in wages, the legislation sought to freeze this social value thus preventing the social mobility that contemporary commentators denounced.

So far we have seen how those who wrote about and legislated against the labourers' activities linked these workers to the economic and social issues of the

[122] Sant'Antonino of Florence, Summa Theologica, Part II, cap. 17, cited in de Roover, *San Bernardino of Siena*, 25.
[123] '*Item presentant quod Iohannes Gate, seruiens Margarete de Ongre, fallax et debilis, capit per annum xvjs et cibum*.' *Essex Sessions of the Peace: 1351, 1377-79*, ed. Elizabeth Chapin Furber (Colchester: Essex Archaeological Society, 1953), 167.
[124] Ault, *Open-Field Farming*, 103.
[125] Those who were incapable of making a living will be discussed in chapter 4.

period. The workers were presented as damaging the economic stability of employers and as breaking down the order of society by rising above their station. Their behaviour was framed morally. Within the Ordinance and Statute the labourers were implicated in sinful behaviour, in particular idleness and covetousness. The covetous or avaricious behaviour of the labouring classes is clearly identified as their demand for supposedly exorbitant wages, which continued throughout the period. Indeed, the many of the prosecutions under labour legislation could be seen as working against those who are guilty of covetousness, demanding excessive wages that they had no right to receive. Idleness on the other hand is far less visible or quantifiable from extant evidence. Clause VII of the Ordinance specifically connects idleness to begging. The legislation presents an element in society allegedly unwilling to work and who prefer to beg and receive alms to provide for themselves and their families. However, within the presentments under the legislation studied here, there are no cases of men or women prosecuted solely for not working or for begging. We will look at vagrancy and the perceived dangers of unemployment or inactivity in the next chapter.

As well as 'the malice of employees, who were idle' the preamble of the Statute of Labourers also links the workers' supposed idleness with a preference for 'ease'. In order to examine what this 'ease' may refer to we must look to the enforcement of the legislation across the second part of the fourteenth century. While the upper level of society's perception of the labourers' behaviour is clearly documented through contemporary commentaries, parliament rolls and the labour legislation itself, there is no similar window into how the rest of society viewed the actions of the labourers. One way in which we may partially reconstruct or approach this perception is to examine how labourers and both large and small employers reacted to the labour legislation. This can be seen in the records of the Sessions of Labourers and Sessions of the Peace, which enforced the labour legislation. I will specifically look at the Sessions of Labourers and of the Peace in Essex, Lincolnshire, Warwickshire and Yorkshire. The Ordinance of Labourers contained no designated enforcement protocol for this ground-breaking legislation, instead what took place was what Bertha Putnam calls 'various administrative

experiments'.[126] The Statute sought to clarify how this national labour legislation should be consistently enforced across the country. Justices were to be appointed to rule on labour offences in sessions held at least four times a year. It is unclear whether these justices and sessions refer to the already present Justices of the Peace or particular Justices of Labourers; however, until the end of 1359 the majority of labour legislation was enforced through Commissions of Labourers separate to those of the Sessions of the Peace.[127] These justices were members of the local gentry or prominent landholders, the very group whose interests this legislation aimed to protect. Many served as both Justices of Labourers and of the Peace. While the 1361 Statute of Westminster, which dealt with labour, did not specifically allocate the enforcement of the labour legislation under the jurisdiction of the Justices of the Peace, from 1361 onwards labour offences were solely prosecuted within these Sessions. Mark Ormrod has argued that this consolidation was likely an effect of the increasing demands of the military campaign in France at the end of the 1350s.[128] Whatever the reasoning behind it labour regulation thus entered the mainstream justice system. The predominant labour offences in the Peace Session rolls are receiving excessive wages and breaking labour contracts; however, there are also cases relating to the mobility of workers, the type of work they are engaged in and how and when they engage in that work. These activities can be associated with idleness in two main ways. Firstly, many of the offences against the legislation highlight the changing position or role of the labourer in fourteenth-century society. Secondly, the offences highlight the threat that idleness posed to employers and the practical value and importance of work in society.

Unlike the preambles to the Ordinance and Statute of Labourers, the records of the enforcement of the labour legislation do not provide the reader with emotive or moralising reports of the idleness and sinfulness of those accused of labour offences. Entries are largely formulaic and devoid of overt emotion. However, some offer glimpses of the concerns and attitudes of those enforcing the legislation, the Justices of Labourers or of the Peace. These mainly appear in the first decade of the labour legislation when the labour enforcement was under the authority of the

[126] Putnam, *The Enforcement of the Statutes of Labourers*, 10.
[127] Ibid, 15.
[128] W. M. Ormrod, "The Politics of Pestilence: Government in England after the Black Death," in *The Black Death in England*, eds. W. M. Ormrod and P. G. Lindley (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2003), 156.

Justices of Labourers. For example, a case from Barnstable in Devon in 1353 describes wage demands of one labourer as 'outragousement'.[129] In the same court session another group of labourers were described as having contributed to the 'impoverishment of the people' through their refusal to adhere to the Statute and their demands for excessive wages.[130] The language in these cases closely mirror that of the legislation itself, perhaps due to their chronological proximity to the introduction of the Ordinance and Statute. Furthermore, in 1358 a number of labourers were described as having taken 'diverse wages, salaries and excessive profits in contempt (*in contemptu)* of the Statute of the Lord King'.[131] From 1360, the Sessions of the Peace tend to refer to offences as 'against (*contra*) the statute'.[132] While *contra* is quite a neutral term describing an activity contrary to the legislation, '*in contemptu*' represents a conscious disrespect of the legislation on the part of the offender. In the first decade of the enforcement of the labour legislation, the Justices seem outraged that the legislation failed to bring about an immediate change to labour practices. While the emotive language used in these examples is not typical, it does allow a glimpse into the thoughts of those Justices hearing and adjudicating labour infringements in the first and arguably most effective period of labour enforcement. The perception of the situation by the labourers themselves, however, is much more difficult to ascertain. Stephen Rigby in reference to this post Black Death rhetoric has asked whether 'such discourses constitute a functionalist 'common culture' which encouraged the peasants toward a deferential acceptance of asocial hierarchy within which their social positions appeared fixed?'[133] To attempt to demystify this area, I will examine a number of different offences against the

[129] '*Ils presentent qe Thomas Morman de Tillyngham est vn fauchour des prees e vn commun laborere e ad prys de diuerce geanz outragousement pur son louer puis cele temps qe il fust iure deuaunt monsire Iohan de Stotton e ces compaignouns*.' Putnam, *The Enforcement of the Statutes of Labourers*, 171*.
[130] '*Item ils presentent qe Rober Totereg de Burnham, laborer, Iohan Totereg, couerour des mesouns, Iohan Boregh, laborer, Thomas Sare, laborer, refusunt douerer ascun manere douereine saunz ceo qe ils porrount prendre a double outre ceo qe est ordeine par lestatut en enpouericement du puple*'. Putnam, *The Enforcement of the Statutes of Labourers*, 171*.
[131] '*…ceperunt diversa mercedes, salaria et lucra excessiua in contemptu statuti domini Regis*.' Putnam, *The Enforcement of the Statutes of Labourers*, 157.
[132] For example in Coventry in April 1384 it is phrased as '*contra formam statuti*'. *Rolls of Warwickshire and Coventry Sessions of the Peace 1377-1397*, ed. Elisabeth Guernsey Kimball (London: Oxford Uni. Press, 1939), 127.
[133] Rigby, "Justifying Inequality," 190.

Statute to understand how the legislation and its enforcement in the fourteenth century affected the labourers' view of their occupations and roles in society.

Immediately after the introduction of the Ordinance of Labourers, there was clear opposition towards the regulation of labour, especially in urban areas. In London in 1349, a group of twenty-one bakers' servants were brought before the Mayor's court for forming a '*confederationem et conspirationem*' that none of them would work unless they received triple wages.[134] Such confederations had been undertaken before the labour crisis; however, the aim had been to ensure that foreign workers did not undercut their wages. In 1339 a group of carpenters were charged with making a confederation to prevent external or non-local carpenters from coming to the city (*carpentarii extrane' ad ciuitatem*) and accepting wages below 6d per day.[135] However, after the labour legislation the focus of these confederations was the legislators. In 1350, Adam le Brewer was attached for defaming the members of the jury and saying that the mayor and alderman had no right to regulate the activities of the London brewers.[136] He was said to have threatened to gather the brewers together to agree that they would only serve by the day and at a cost of 12d.

Nineteen cordwainers brought a bill of complaint in November of 1349 against a group of servants who had come together to demand that they be contracted by the day at a wage of their choosing. The servants, who were in attendance, admitted to the confederation and were imprisoned, however, two weeks later they were released under the condition that they would work as they had before (*fidelia servire quandam habunt*).[137] It was their masters who entered into mainprise for their good behaviour. Before the plague, labour was replaceable, although this was less the case in crafts than in agriculture. The new shortage of workers after the plague meant that the masters, who were the victims of the confederation's actions, were so in need of labour that they were willing to pay for their release so that they could return to work. It is unclear on what terms the servants actually returned to their masters. They may have obeyed the court or reached a new, more favourable

[134] Plea and Memoranda Roll A6, Membr. 1b.
[135] Plea and Memoranda Roll A3, Membr. 4.
[136] '*dicens ubitas et pro seorsum effirmans quod nec maior vicer nec aldermanis officum brewtores regulere deberent.*' Plea and Memoranda Roll A6, Memb. 5b.
[137] Plea and Memoranda Roll A3, Membr. 3b.

agreement. However, it is unlikely that the masters could have afforded to prosecute their employees further, as this would once again have reduced their access labour and damaged them financially. They would have been left with a choice to increase their outgoings or suffer a loss of income.

While many of the workers who breached the terms of the Statute of Labourers took the chance that their offences may not have been brought to the attention of the jurors or constables, there is evidence that not everyone was willing to pay lip service to the authority of the legislation. The Statute introduced the requirement of an oath at the beginning of employment. Some individuals refused to swear this oath and by doing so refused to adhere to the labour legislation. At Fleet in Lincolnshire in August 1395, four men, two mowers and two roofers, were accused of refusing to take the oath as well as taking excessive wages or moving to find employment.[138] These four men were all skilled workers whose labour would have been in demand in the summer months. Their disregard for the terms of the labour legislation reflected in their movement for work and taking of excessive wages was thus compounded by their refusal to swear an oath of obedience recognising the authority of the legislation. For example, in June 1378 in Braintree in Essex, Gilbert Rougge of Sturmer was described as a rebel as he has refused to take the oath or provide evidence of his right to work in the vicinity.[139] In Chipping Walden, Essex in July 1378, three more men were described as '*rebellis contra constabularios*' after refusing to take the oath in line with the Statute.[140] Refusal to take the oath was a clear act of defiance or, in the case of Gilbert Rougge and the men in Chipping Walden, rebellion. While other workers may have taken the oath and still sought out higher wages or shorter contracts from their employer, those who refused to swear the oath challenged the authority of Parliament and the King over their labour and their freedom to negotiate labour contracts. The refusal to take an oath can also be seen as a refusal to accept subordination. While Musson and Ormrod have described the inclusion of the oath in the Statute of Labourers as one of

[138] Records of Some Sessions of the Peace in Lincolnshire 1381-1396, ed. Elisabeth G. Kimball (Lincoln: Lincoln Record Society, 1936), 76-7.
[139] '*Item presentant quod Gilbertud Rougge de Storemere laborator est rebellis contra constabularios iurare nec iusticare nolens*' in *Essex Sessions of the Peace*, 158.
[140] *Essex Sessions of the Peace*, 163.

the 'more subtle forms of social control' it is clear that the labouring classes were aware of its implications.[141]

At Clavering in Essex in August 1378, three men were brought forward for not working in the occupations in which they were skilled: 'Richard Waterford is a good ploughman and refused that office'.[142] John Vyly and John Thake were both presented for the same offence and were each fined 20d. Ploughmen were skilled agricultural workers and their removal from the labour force would have had consequences on the local economy. While all of these men broke the law by refusing to work in the manner required of them, this was seen as particularly objectionable due to their level of skill. Richard and his fellow ploughmen were good at their job. They were skilled and productive workers in this role; however, they chose to turn down an offer of employment. It is unclear whether these men had taken employment elsewhere or whether they had chosen not to sell their labour at all. In her examination of labour conditions in Essex in this period, Nora Kenyon found more examples of ploughmen refusing to serve in their vill and in these cases the court records stipulate that the men have taken up employment outside of their vill or county instead.[143] Whatever motive led to their presentment at court, these men were able to exercise agency in the terms and conditions of their work. Greater actual agency and autonomy may have been felt by the labouring classes to define and construct their role in society rather than having it dictated to them. The legislation, and in turn the courts, aimed to curtail this change to how the workers' determined their role within society; however, the sustained legislation and its enforcement throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries suggests that this role continued to alter over this time.

An awareness of the importance of labour can be seen for both the employer and the employee. While labourers attempted to assert their changing roles in the new demographic environment, it was also important that they maintained enough income to support their families. Outright refusal to serve or take employment appears uncommon. What is repeatedly found alongside *renuit*, *nolunt* and *non volt*

[141] Anthony Musson and W. M. Ormrod, *The Evolution of English Justice: Law, Politics and Society in the Fourteenth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1999), 95-6.
[142] '*Item presentant quod Ricardus Waterford est bonus carucator et renuit illud officium*.' *Essex Sessions of the Peace*, 168.
[143] Kenyon, "Labour Conditions in Essex," 431-2.

is *nisi*. The labourer who is described as refusing to work presented alternatives to the employer: 'he will not work but only for an excessive salary'.[144] In April 1384, John Gilbert and William Rotour were brought before the Justices of the Peace: 'They say that John Gilbert junior labourer and William Rotour labourer of Bonynton will not serve unless by the day and with excessive wages and travel out of the locality to mow in Autumn against the statute'.[145] The two men had broken a number of sections of the Statute. They had refused to serve in their locality. They had refused to accept contracts within the terms stated by the legislation. Their actions were illegal. However, they were willing to make such demands and since they seemingly found work elsewhere, their demands were being met. There are some noted examples of this hard bargaining as a social movement. One such case is that of John Loue of Dunmow, Essex in August 1378. He was 'a common mower and moved for excessive wages and persuaded others to do the same against the statute'.[146] These men were aware that their labour was important. While workers had always had the agency to bargain for better working conditions they relied on their employer's acceptance of terms. Labour was in demand and in order to survive employers had to win labourers into their service. In London in 1349, Agnes Wombe of Bedford and Joan de Sloghteford were enticed away from their master to the employment of Joan la Whycchere by her flattering speeches (*sermones aduloses*).[147] Finding a mutually beneficial agreement benefitted both parties, but the shortage of labour would always cause some employers to be left without the means to earn their living.

Employees receiving excessive wages is the most prominent issue in both labour legislation and enforcement. Repeated wage restrictions highlight the consistent desire to keep wage levels from ballooning. For example, in Hereford, in

[144] '*non vult laborare nisi tantomodo pro excessiuo stipendio capiendo*.' *Essex Sessions of the Peace*, 159.
[145] '*Item dicunt quod Iohannes Gilbert iunuor laborarius et Willelmus Rotour laborarius de Bonynton' nolunt seruire nisi per diem et hoc excessiuo salario et tranciunt in autumpno extra patriam ad falcandum contra formam statuti*.' *Rolls of Warwickshire and Coventry*, 163.
[146] '*Item presentant quod Iohannes Loue de Alta Estre est communis falcator et dueillat pro excussu et procurat alios facere eodem modo contra statutum*.' *Essex Sessions of the Peace*, 170.
[147] While it is Agnes and Joan de Sloghteford who are attached for breaking contract, the critique of Joan la Whycchere is heavily gendered. The presentation of women as provocateurs of idle behaviour will be discussed in chapter 5. Plea and Memoranda Roll A6, Membr. 3b.

1355 there were one hundred and four indictments of 'common taker of excess' and 'common and notorious taker of excess'.[148] The use of 'common' in these descriptions of the offenders highlights the widespread nature of this activity. Just four years after the introduction of the Statute, men and women from across a wide range of crafts and occupations were receiving wages above the stated cap. This offence was so frequently reported across the later-fourteenth century that the names of offenders and the excessive wages they received are written out in long lists within the Session rolls. A Session of the Peace in Braintree, Essex in June 1378 contains 32 cases of excessive payments with just two other cases within the court roll, both relating to other breaches of the labour legislation.[149] This type of enforcement is similar to that of the assizes of bread and ale.

While the legislation of labour was new to late medieval society, there had been commercial law since the thirteenth century. The assizes of bread and ale, which regulated production and pricing of these products, played a significant part of local law throughout the high and late Middle Ages.[150] James Davis highlights the lucrative nature of the assizes for local authorities, both urban and rural.[151] Davis argues that the 'standardized, regular and low nature of baking amercements' functioned as a tax or licence fee rather than a fine aiming to discourage offenders. This is an argument shared by David Postles, Christopher Dyer, R. H. Britnell and Judith Bennett.[152] Davis has calculated that the average baker would have paid approximately one percent of their annual income on these fines. In 1421, in a petition under the heading 'Concerning Labourers' the determination of wages and prices of work and victuals are discussed alongside the assize of bread and ale.[153] While I have not carried out exhaustive research on this, a similar pattern of fines can be seen in the Sessions of the Peace in the later-fourteenth century, with long

[148] Putnam, *The Enforcement of the Statutes of Labourers*, 174.
[149] *Essex Sessions of the Peace*, 157-60.
[150] Lloyd Bonfield, "What did English Villagers Mean by 'Customary Law'?" in *Medieval Society and the Manor Court*, edS. Zvi Razi and Richard Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 105.
[151] James Davis, "Baking for the Common Good: A Reassessment of the Assize of Bread in Medieval England," in *Economic History Review* 57, no. 3 (2004), 488.
[152] David Postles, "Brewing and the Peasant Economy: Some Manors in Late Medieval Devon," in Rural History 3, no. 2 (1992), 135; Christopher Dyer, *Lords and Peasants in a Changing Society: The Estates of the Bishopric of Worcester, 680-1540* (Cambridge: Cambridge Uni. Press, 1980), 346; R. H. Britnell, *Growth and Decline in Colchester, 1300-1525* (Cambridge: Cambridge Uni. Press, 1986), 89, 195-7 and 269-71; and Judith M. Bennett, *Ale, Beer, and Brewsters in England: Women's Work in a Changing World, 1300-1600* (Oxford: Oxford Uni. Press, 1996), 4.
[153] "Henry V: Parliament of May 1421, Text and Translation," in *PROME*, item 26.

lists of labourers being given a de facto standard fine for excessive wages which could have functioned in effect as a levy or licence. Christopher Given-Wilson has argued that while the restricted rates of payment 'were not enforced … the penalties for exceeding them quite frequently were'.[154] Like those who brewed ale and baked bread, labourers could have included the fine within their budgets and still improved their earning position. That is not to say that legislators themselves sought to normalise fines for excessive wages. In fact the Commons repeatedly pushed for corporal rather than pecuniary punishment for this very reason.

This clustering of labour offences in one roll could also be due to a crackdown in the local area or perhaps the acuteness of the problem in this part of Essex. There is considerable evidence of enforcement of the labour legislation surviving in Essex in comparison to other counties. Its proximity to London and trade with the Continent meant that its inhabitants had significant opportunity to move to find more favourable working conditions, which led to employers pushing wages higher in order to meet their labour needs.[155] North Essex also had a high concentration of rural industry and hence unusually high levels of competition for labour. While excessive wages continue to be prosecuted throughout the fourteenth century, there is evidence to suggest that the problem was much greater than legislators, justices or employers were able to control. Studies of wage levels in the fourteenth century have shown wages rose almost 50 per cent between the 1340s and the 1390s.[156] For example, the average wage of a ploughman in Hutton, Essex rose from 5s. 6d. and 3 bushels per month in 1353 to 13s. 4d. and 3 bushels per month in 1389.[157] The 'excess' wages, which the legislation and the courts continually highlight, became the norm by the end of the fourteenth century. While the legislation may have prevented wages from rising even more dramatically, employees were still able to successfully apply their agency to achieve better terms of work, including a significant rise in wages over the second half of the century. The socio-economic changes of the fourteenth century helped redefine the wages that an occupation could secure.

[154] Given-Wilson, "Service, Serfdom and English Labour Legislation," 25.
[155] Kenyon, "Labour Conditions in Essex," 430.
[156] Penn and Dyer, "Wages and Earnings," 356.
[157] Kenyon, "Labour Conditions in Essex," 448.

We also see this growing autonomy and practical agency of workers in their mobility during this period. According to the assessment completed by Penn and Dyer, the average distance travelled by offenders against the labour legislation during the later-fourteenth century was just less than seven miles.[158] This suggests labourers had expanded the area in which they looked for work, rather than long distance migration. Penn and Dyer also found that the majority of those prosecuted for mobility belonged to occupations specific enough to necessitate covering a wider geographical area, such as building trades. For example, in 1378 in Braintree, Essex, a roofer named John Boneyre, is described as 'moving for excessive wages'.[159] Excessive wages are often paired with movement offences. In Braintree, there were ten cases of labourers moving for work in June of 1378 alone.[160] All of these earned excessive wages in doing so. This group included seven men and three women. One of the women fined for moving from place to place and taking excessive wages was Alice Gylot of Ashen. She may have been related to Richard Gylot of Ashen who was also fined in the same court for hiring a female employee, Agnes Derby, in Autumn for excessive wages. Agnes was employed by Richard at the same point that Alice moved to find higher wages, perhaps taking up the duties which Alice had vacated in the home. While we cannot be sure of the exact circumstance of these cases, both men and women moved from place to place to find higher paid work. Although the labour legislation had particularly attempted to control the mobility of all employees, some workers were still determining where their labour was contracted, although the enforcement suggests that this movement was not as dramatic as the legislation makes out.[161]

As well as redefining the wage and location of their occupation, labourers also had the potential to dictate successfully when and for how long they would work. This is evident from the many discussions of the length of contracts in the Peace Session rolls. For example, in May 1363 a ploughman, Robert Bond was

[158] Penn and Dyer, "Wages and Earnings," 363.
[159] *Essex Sessions of the Peace*, 159.
[160] Ibid, 158-60.
[161] Mobility and migration will be discussed in more detail in chapter four.

prosecuted for refusing to serve for a year and only accepting daylong contracts.[162] In January 1385 near Warwick, Adam Irissh and William Rigge were brought in front of the Justices of the Peace for refusing to enter into contracts of service longer than a day.[163] Penn and Dyer have found a correlation between wages and the length of contracts, which highlights that contracts of less than two weeks tend to provide a higher daily wage in comparison to longer contracts.[164]

Shorter contracts also allowed for more frequent renegotiation therefore a higher chance of a periodical increase in wage.[165] However, Dyer has argued that medieval workers may have set themselves goals in relation to consumption needs and may have temporarily stopped working after reaching this point.[166] A reconstruction of working patterns by Richard Allen and Jacob Weisdorf substantiates Dyer's argument. They note that their evidence of shorter contracts at higher wages 'implies idle labour in the countryside'.[167] Allen and Weisdorf do not expand on exactly what the term 'idle labour' signifies. Likely they are using it to refer to a periods of activity followed by periods of passivity and leisure. Gunnar Persson has employed a theoretical framework to illustrate the changes in labourers' working hours and leisure time during the fourteenth century. This is based on consumption theory where rises in wages increase consumption of goods, including leisure. When leisure is increased, the labour supply is reduced.[168] Persson's theory relies on the assumption that wage labour carries associations with 'subordination, authoritarian command relations and unfreedom that violate also modest standards of human dignity' that are similar to how *On the Property of Things* described the

[162] '*Et quod Robertus Bond carucarius renuit seruire per annum set per dietam*.' *Yorkshire Sessions of the Peace, 1361-1364*, ed. Bertha Haven Putnam (Wakefield: Yorkshire Archaelogical Society, 1939), 50.
[163] '*Item dicunt quod Adam Irissh*' et Willelmus Rigge recusant seruiere per terminum et nolunt seruire nisi per diem contra statutum.' in *Rolls of Warwickshire and Coventry*, 166.
[164] Penn and Dyer, "Wages and Earnings," 370.
[165] Epstein, "The Theory and Practice of the Just Wage," 65.
[166] Christopher Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages: Social Change in England c. 1200-1520* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 224.
[167] Richard C. Allen and Jacob Weisdorf, "Was there an industrious revolution before the industrial revolution? An empirical exercise for England, c. 1300-1830," in *Economic History Review* 64, no. 3 (2011), 722.
[168] G. Persson, "Consumption, Labour and Leisure in the Late Middle Ages," in *Manger et Boire au Moyen Age,* ed. Denis Menjot (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1984), 212.

position of the servant above.[169] Wage labour relies on superior and inferior roles. Persson argues that over time a rise in real wages encouraged workers to labour for shorter periods for less money in order to have marginally more satisfaction in leisure.[170] This is generally termed as a back bending labour supply curve. The shift to market that favoured employees after the Black Death allowed for both wages to rise and for labourers to enjoy extra bargaining strength in terms of hours. This behaviourist approach has gained some substantiation from the evidence of increased wages and shorter contracts.[171] While the rhetoric of employees' preference for leisure rather than labour may seem like the protests of a disgruntled landholder, historians are leaning towards this narrative in their explanation of late medieval work patterns.[172] Perhaps the writers of the preamble to the Statute of Labourers were correct in their view of the labourers' 'inclination for ease'.

While shorter-term contracts provided a higher income for the labourer, longer-term contracts provided the employer with labour security and lower expenditure. However, there was also a high proportion of the population who wished to continue working longer term-contracts.[173] Employees also needed to ensure that they had sufficient income and many may not have been persuaded of the risks of bargaining their labour for higher wages. While short term and higher paid work may have been appealing to young and independent workers who needed less money to sustain themselves, this was not the case for the entire population. For workers with dependants, the security of a slightly lower paid role that could offer consistent employment with a predicable income was preferable. On the other hand for married women, casual or seasonal work was likely more attractive as a way to supplement the household income.[174] While there were many motivations for adhering to or breaching the legislation, workers were utilising their agency to construct their working lives on their own terms.

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[169] Ibid, 213.
[170] Ibid, 213.
[171] Penn and Dyer, "Wages and Earnings," 356-76.
[172] J. Hatcher, "England in the aftermath of the Black Death," in *Past & Present* 144 (1994), 27.
[173] Penn and Dyer, "Wages and Earnings," 368.
[174] For a discussion of how women's labour supplemented household income see the chapter "Women and Work" in P. J. P. Goldberg, *Women, Work and Life Cycle in a Medieval Economy: Women in York and Yorkshire* c. *1300-1520* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

We have previously seen the relationship between the concept of idle behaviour and a person's specific role. Idleness represents a state where a person's role is unfulfilled or is not fulfilled productively. As such the definition of a person's role is integral to the definition of idleness that relates to them. It seems that in all of the above examples the labourer had a different view from the legislators of what their role comprised and their ability to adapt and evolve this role as they saw fit. The agency utilised by the labourers in the decades following the Black Death to shorten contracts, increase wages, and expand the geographical sphere of employment by choice rather than necessity, highlights that the employer and employee held different perceptions of what the employee's role was. The framers of the Ordinance and of the Statute of Labourers held a specific view of the role of the labourer, clearly articulated in the legislation, and their definition of idleness is related to this: the labourers were not fulfilling their roles as the legislators defined them and were therefore idle. However, what a person's role consists of is subjective. The labourers were unlikely to view their own activity through the same lens as those who employed them. Instead they likely viewed their role to have changed in the new economic environment in the second half of the fourteenth century. The self-organisation and continued flouting of the labour legislation for generations after the first Ordinance and Statute is testament to this. The changing perceptions of roles by the labourer and the conservative views of the labourer's role are at the crux of this legislation. Idleness is present not through the labourer's inactivity, as they are clearly prepared to work. However, the work which was undertaken did not align with the status quo and therefore was considered idle. The perceptions of idleness no longer correlate with each other.

So far we have examined the perception of the Black Death labour crisis from the perspectives of contemporary moral commentators, legislators, and the labourers themselves. However, there is another perspective that is crucial for this examination, the perspectives of the employers who, according to the labour legislation, suffered considerably from the workers' sinful activities. However, 'employer' does not signify one social group but rather anyone who may have paid for labour, be it on a regular basis or to aid in busy periods. How did employers from across the social spectrum engage in or respond to the crisis of labour and

subsequent labour legislation? The Ordinance of Labourers forbade a person from leaving service 'without reasonable cause or licence, before the term agreed'.[175] On 23 September 1381 Thomas Baxter and John Carter refused to serve the warden of Stratford, Warwickshire, for whom they were legally required to work. Instead, the two men took employment from William Westynton and Thomas Compton:

> That Thomas Baxter and John Carter, recently serving the warden of Stretford, refuse to serve because of certain terms according to the statute, but by day they take 3 d. with food from William Westynton and Thomas Compton and many others now in the first year of the reign of the King and at a number of other times.[176]

The two men are given 3 d. and a meal for their day's work. They were also paid by the day rather than the longer-term contracts that the Statutes tried to enforce. Thomas and John had broken their contract with the warden of Stratford in order to negotiate a better one. The men were aware of the value of their labour as a commodity and were willing to sell it to whoever was able to offer the best terms of employement. In fact, the two men have gained short-term employment from a number of employers on different occasions. These employers are not mentioned, possibly because they were not known or possibly because it was the intention of the legislation to punish employees rather than employers.

While the Ordinance of Labourers had sought to punish those who paid excessive wages as well as those who received them this was dropped in the Statute of Labourers two years later. In fact it was not until 1388 that the givers of excessive were particularly noted and even then they were rarely prosecuted within the Sessions of the Peace. There could be a variety of reasons for this. There are likely to have been fewer employers than there were employees and therefore we expect to see a lower number of employers in the court rolls than the labourers themselves. Those enforcing the legislation while coming from a variety of social positions were prominent members of the either the vill, in the case of jurors and constables or the

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[175] 23 Edward III, c. 2, *Statutes of the Realm*, 1: 307.

[176] '*Iuratores dicunt quod Thomas Baxster et Iohannes Carter nuper seruientes custodis de Stretford' recusant seruire per certos terminos iuxta formam statuti set per diem capiunt iij d. cum prandio videlicet de Willelmo Westynton' et de Thoma Compton' et sic de pluribus alijs anno regni Regis nunc primo et alijs diuersis temporibus*.' *Rolls of Warwickshire and Coventry*, 127.

county in the case of the justices. This would suggest that they likely employed labourers. These men, with experience of the difficulties in employing and retaining labourers may have been more sympathetic to the plight of an employer, whatever level of society that employer may have belonged within reason. It is more likely that an employer would file a complaint against a labourer than against one of his peers, or possibly a person with whom he conducted business. Christopher Given-Wilson suggests that if employers had known they were to be fined it might have prevented them from putting forward their own workers who refused to work by the rules of the statue.[177] The question of fining the giver or taker remained an issue throughout the later-fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In 1402, the Commons petitioned that both giver and taker of excessive wages be punished with a fine of 20s. The King answered this petition by agreeing that the labour legislation should be enforced, however, that 'the penalty should be incurred by the taker only'.[178] In 1416, the Commons complained to the king that givers were not willing to bring charges against their servants as they themselves would also be punished:

> Yet now it is the case that the givers, when they are on oath before the justices of the peace, absolutely refuse to bring a charge of excess payment of this kind, in order to avoid their own punishment, to the very great loss of our lord the king of his fines and amercements through such a concealment, and to the great injury of the lords and the other commons of this realm through the lack of due punishment for the faults of the aforesaid servants and labourers. May it please our lord the king, for the aforesaid reason, to abolish the penalty for the giver. And let the penalty specified in the said statute fall entirely on the receiver.[179]

Some employers were brought forward for labour violations, however, these rarely come from a social level above large tenant agriculturalists.[180] The landholding aristocracy had far more power than employers of a lower social level.

[177] Given-Wilson, "Service, Serfdom and English Labour Legislation," 27.
[178] "Henry IV: Parliament of September 1402, Text and Translation," in *PROME*, item 59.
[179] "Henry V: Parliament of March 1416, Text and Translation," in *PROME*, item 25.
[180] Given-Wilson, "Service, Serfdom and English Labour Legislation," 27.

Anthony Musson has argued that the competition between employers to employ labourers highlights the employers' or landlords' attempts to assert their 'rights to control workers irrespective of the Statute'.[181] The attempts of the lords to assert a monopoly over their tenants is clear in both the legislation and also the prosecution of labourers for violation of the legislation. In 1368, the Commons specifically highlighted the plight of its non-aristocratic members who did not have 'lordship or villeins to serve them'.[182] The Commons asked for an increase in fines, however, the king replied that a single fine as stipulated in the Statute, would suffice. Christopher Given-Wilson argues that the employers who were to be fined for paying higher wages in the labour legislation were not intended to be the large employers, a group the Commons themselves belonged to.[183] Instead, Given-Wilson argues that the legislators aimed to prevent smaller employers, who possibly only required casual workers and so could afford to pay higher wages on a short contract, from fragmenting a larger employer's work force and pushing wages upwards. Competition for labour was significant. Labour was an important commodity and losing it could have disastrous results on the productivity and prosperity of any level of employer.

A court in Barking, Essex in 1351 recorded the refusal of three men to work echoing the tone and language of the Ordinance of 1348: 'they refuse to labour, against the ordinance of the lord King … to the great oppression and injury of the people'.[184] The abhorrent view of the men's behaviour is made clear by the reference to the dire state of the nation at that time. The actions of the three men are directly linked to the economic difficulties of the employers. While this could easily be dismissed as a rhetorical device, there is evidence that the labourers' actions had a negative effect particularly on small-scale employers. In 1406, it was the community of Great Horwood in Buckinghamshire who ordered that fellow members of their community should not be allowed to leave the town when there is work available: 'It is ordained at this court by all the tenants both free and native that no one who is

[181] Anthony Musson, "New Labour Laws, New Remedies? Legal Reactions to the Black Death," in *Fourteenth Century England I*, ed. Nigel Saul (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2000), 77.
[182] "Edward III: Parliament of May 1368, Text and Translation," in *PROME*, item 15.
[183] Given-Wilson, "Service, Serfdom and English Labour Legislation," 27.
[184] '*set laborare nolunt, contra ordinaciones domini Regis inde factas, in magnam oppressionem et dampnum populi, et quilibet eorum capit per diem quando laborat in Essex viii d. et plus, vbi solebat capere iii d. tantum.*' Putnam, *The Enforcement of the Statutes of Labourers*, 404.

able to earn next autumn 4d. a day and food shall go outside this town to work for any one under pain of 6s. 8d'.[185]

Employers came from across the social spectrum and the demand for labour was unlikely to have affected all employers in the same way. A servant of Stephen Pousin, himself a labourer was brought in front of the Justices of the Peace for refusing to serve for less than 40 s. a year. Small-scale employers, such as Stephen Pousin were more dependent on finding consistent, reliable labour as they could not afford the losses incurred when a worker left before a contract was complete. The type of damage that these breakers of the Statute were described as causing is most evident in the Nottingham borough court where in 1357, a packer sought private action against an employee for a breach of contract:

> John Grim, complainant, appeared against Adam Packer, defendant, on a plea of agreement; and he makes plaint that whereas the said John agreed with the said Adam to stay with him in the calling of packing, to wit, from the feast of Easter, in the 31st year of the reign of the present king, until the same feast a year later, receiving for each sack 1 d., the said Adam broke the agreement thereupon made between them, so that through his default he [John Grim] is now wandering about and unemployed, to the serious damage of the said John of twenty shillings, wherefore he enters suit. And the aforesaid Adam appears, by his attorney, and says that he broke no agreement, and this he is prepared to verify.[186]

Behind the 'great men' of the preamble who framed the labour legislation there are employers far lower down the social scale. These employers, such as John Grim, whose livelihood depended on having a reliable workforce, were the ones most deeply affected by the agency that we have seen was acquired by the labourers. It was not the aristocracy who would have truly struggled to gain labour in this period. They would likely have afforded to pay the excessive wages. Smaller landholders

[185] Ault, *Open-Field Farming*, 115.
[186] In original Latin and modern English translation in *Records of the Borough of Nottingham: Being a Series of Extracts from the Archives of the Corporation of Nottingham, 1155-1625*, eds. W. H. Stevenson and James Raine (London: Quaritch, 1882), 167.

and those who were employing few people were likely those who were most negatively affected.[187]

Within the first decade of the legislation it is clear that there were many who truly experienced the 'impoverishing' that the Statute of Labourers bemoaned. John Grim was left unemployed due to Adam Packer's refusal to work. Work was an important commodity, and one that needed to be sustained. Employers required a work force in order to continue their business and in doing so fulfil their social, economic and moral role. The idleness which is clearly identified as the sin of the labourer in the legislation, has spread through society and in the case of John Grim, left the employers themselves, unproductive and idle.

While the change in the terms of labour in the period had a detrimental effect on both large and small scale employers, the labour legislation itself and the way in which it was enforced did not have the absolute support even by those negatively effected. On 10 July 1351, five men released a reaper and labourer named Walter Quapelet from stocks in the village of Rettendon, Essex.[188] Walter had been placed in the stocks as prescribed by the Statute of Labourers for refusing to adhere to the legislation. Four of the five men were from the neighbouring village of East Hanningfield, to where they returned with Walter. It would seem that these men who came to Walter's rescue intended to employ him themselves in their own village rather than have his labour wasted during the approaching busy harvest season. While the Commons had specifically requested the introduction of corporal punishment in 1351, the average employer was likely to be far more interested in ensuring that his labour needs were met and avoiding the unproductive idleness experienced by John Grimm.

* * *

The labour legislation is illustrative of a longer-term trend of regulating social changes.[189] This legislation has been seen as just one of the ways that the late

[187] Musson and Ormrod, *The Evolution of English Justice*, 95.
[188] *Essex Sessions of the Peace*, 105-6.
[189] Musson and Ormrod, *The Evolution of English Justice*, 95.

medieval government aspired to have more and more influence on daily life such as the attempts to enforce sumptuary legislation and the regulation of leisure practices in 1388.[190] The labour legislation has been deemed important by some as it clearly illustrates the ways in which the landholders attempted to suppress the labourers and their social group.[191] Contemporary commentators also present the workers as rebellious and insubordinate. Like the legislators their aim was to prevent change and retain the status quo, be it for religious or socio-economic reasons. The increasing ferocity of the prescribed punishments and the attempts to control day to day life have been ascribed to the changing relationship between the social groups which contributed to the 1381 revolt.[192]

What was not clear and not acceptable to the legislators was that the form and structure of labour in this period had changed. The legislation is widely believed by historians to have been unsuccessful in the long term at least, although it may have slowed the speed of change.[193] The necessity for its consistent adjustment and reinforcement highlights that the concerns of the legislators were unresolved. The evidence of rising wages and changing terms of work at the end of the fourteenth century shows that the labourers' understanding of their own role had altered. Workers now had the power to demand shorter contracts, higher wages and to decide who they would sell their labour to. These changes had multiple effects on the concept of idleness in this period. It is unlikely that the labourers themselves felt they were indulging in the idleness that the preambles proclaim. The majority of labour violations referred to the terms under which labourers worked rather than any lack of activity or indeed productivity. According to Christopher Dyer the problem of labour in the fourteenth century 'lay not in medieval laziness, but in an understandable antipathy to drudgery'.[194] Labourers experienced greater practical agency and independence to explore possibilities rather than to conform and to 'swink' in the manner of Adam as the legislators and moralists would have preferred.

[190] Anthony Musson, *Medieval Law in Context: The Growth of Legal Consciousness from Magna Carta to the Peasants' Revolt* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 208.
[191] Musson and Ormrod, *The Evolution of English Justice*, 95.
[192] Ormrod, "The Politics of Pestilence," 158.
[193] For example, N. Ritchie, "Labour Conditions in Essex in the Reign of Richard II," in *Essays in Economic History* 2, ed. E. M. Carus-Wilson (London: Arnold, 1962) and Given-Wilson, "The Problem of Labour in the Context of the English Government."
[194] Dyer, *Standards of Living*, 224.

While the preamble to the legislation is deeply engrained with a rhetoric of sin, on closer inspection the concern regarded the threat of idleness not to the soul of the sinner, but to the wider economy and to the employer. The aim of the legislation tended to be social and economic rather than moral. It is idleness the preventer of economic prosperity rather than the branch of slothfulness, which was the concern in both the framing of the legislation and in its enforcement.

Legislators and contemporary commentators both highlight the destructive nature of idleness. In the debate poem *Wynnere and Wastoure* written within two decades of the plague, the character of Wynnere calls Wastoure a thief and complains of the harm that his lack of productivity will have on society: 'This wikkede weryd thefe that Wastoure men calles, That if he life may longe this lande will he stroye'.[195] Wastoure's unproductivity is a parasite on the land, slowly destroying it by inaction. Wastoure is a thief because he steals or wastes time and good resources through his lack of productivity. This image of wasting time is also present in *Piers Plowman*. In his attempts to put the world to rights Reason tells the 'wastoures' to get to work: 'He bad wastoures go worche and wynne here sustinaunce / Thorw som trewe trauail, and no tyme spille'.[196] Time lost or time spent working is the concern for the majority of both large and small employers. This seemingly moral discourse is steeped in concerns of power. Employees who worked less for higher wages placed the pressure of survival on the employer who had to find enough workers for their land or resources to be processed into commodities. On the other hand, a concentration on time spent working, the focus of the literature, placed the stress on the employee to increase their workload in order to prevent their own poverty. In reality, neither group chose idleness over activity.

[195] *Wynnere and Wastoure*, 21.
[196] *Piers Plowman*, 1: C, 179.

Chapter 4

'Idel for defaute of werke'
Idleness and the Borders of Society

From the previous chapters we have seen the importance placed on diligent labour over the course of the fourteenth century. Work carried a high social value and sustained the body, soul, society and economy. It was constructed as a natural and essential activity for people to engage in. It was what they were born to do and through their activity, they paid for the sins of the first man and woman. However, what of those that for various reasons did not fit this model of the diligent worker: the begger, the vagabond, children and the elderly? Inclusion within a society requires some form of conformity to the values and mores of that society.[1] As such, these groups are often positioned on the margins by both contemporaries and historians.[2] Some such as children, the elderly and those physically or mentally incapable of making a living were exempt from normal expectations of work but their relationship to the concept still reflects wider social ideals of labour and idleness. This chapter aims to examine those groups to understand how their idleness was perceived and negotiated by their contemporaries.

One of the main issues the historian encounters when examining those at the borders or margins of society is paucity of evidence. The unemployed, the itinerant and the indigent leave little documentary trace and what does remain is disconnected and sometimes contradictory. The majority of those who were truly poor in late medieval society, by which I mean those who had little to no resources at their disposal other than their labour and who constantly struggled to survive, have left no

[1] Elaine Clark, "Social Welfare and Mutual Aid in the Medieval Countryside," in *Journal of British Studies* 33, no. 4 (1994), 386.
[2] See A. L. Beier, *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England, 1560-1640* (London: Methuen, 1985), Bronislaw Geremek, *The Margins of Society in Late Medieval Paris*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge Uni. Press, 1987), Barbara A. Hanawalt, *'Of Good and Ill Repute' Gender and Social Control in Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford Uni. Press, 1998), and John Pound, *Poverty and Vagrancy in Tudor England* (London: Longman, 1971).

written record for us to understand their existence.[3] Some were 'undersettles', subletting land from the lord's tenants and so did not participate in local courts.[4] For the most part we receive the poor, the unemployed and the vagrant through those who speak of them, either in criticism or sympathy. To define 'the poor' in medieval society is a thesis in its own right. Poverty was and still is connected to the economic and social climate. It was also, as Dyer observes, 'cyclical, episodic and seasonal', varying alongside the labour market.[5] This means that the very nature of poverty differed across time and region.[6] Historians such as Michel Mollat and Miri Rubin lean towards a social rather than solely financial or economic definition of the concept: in Rubin's words 'well-being is not mere physical functioning, rather it is the capability to function effectively and to maintain some control over one's environment, the ability to take part in social life, to move and improve one's own fortune'.[7] Such a definition could easily apply to a substantial proportion of the population of late medieval England. With little quantitative economic information to compare with those labelled as the 'poor' by contemporaries, it is difficult to understand what constituted poverty in late medieval terms. There is evidence to suggest that those viewed as poor by medieval society would have struggled or found it impossible to make ends meet. However, the purpose of this chapter is not to quantify or classify the poor in fourteenth-century England. This has been attempted elsewhere and is not directly relevant to this thesis.[8] Instead the chapter aims to understand how those who did not fit the model of diligent occupation examined in chapter two fitted into a society so deeply concerned with labour and work.

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[3] Phillipp R. Schofield, "Approaching Poverty in the Medieval Countryside," in *Poverty and Property in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Cynthia Kosso and Anne Scott (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 96.
[4] M. M. Postan, *Essays on Medieval Agriculture and General Problems of the Medieval Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge Uni. Press, 1978), 117.
[5] Christopher Dyer, "Poverty and its Relief in Late Medieval England," in *Past & Present* 216 (2012), 42.
[6] Marjorie K. McIntosh, "Local Responses to the Poor in Late Medieval and Tudor England," in *Continuity and Change* 3, no. 2 (1988), 211.
[7] Miri Rubin, *Charity and Community in Medieval Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge Uni. Press, 1987), 7-8.
[8] See Schofield, "Approaching Poverty in the Medieval Countryside,"; Rubin, *Charity and Community*; Michel Mollat, *The Poor in the Middle Ages: An Essay in Social History*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (London: Yale Uni. Press, 1986); and Ellen Wedemeyer Moore, "Aspects of Poverty in a Small Medieval Town," in *The Salt of Common Life: Individuality and Choice in the Medieval Town, Countryside, and Church, Essays Presented to J. Ambrose Raftis*, ed. Edwin Brezette DeWindt (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), 117-156.

In the thirteenth and early-fourteenth-century poverty was endemic as a swath of the population lacked any or sufficient land to support a family or improve their position.[9] Mavis Mate has argued that the deaths caused by dearth at the beginning of the fourteenth century highlight that 'a significant section of society was existing on the edge of subsistence'.[10] The scale of poverty in medieval society is extremely difficult to quantify, precisely for the reasons stated above. However, some scholars have attempted this endeavour. According to Mollat and Dyer, 80% of the population of Dijon and 60% of the population of England in the period were exempt from taxation due to their classification as poor.[11] Subsistence, rather than profit would have been the goal for most, especially in the late-thirteenth and early-fourteenth century. Miri Rubin states that by 1279 41% of villeins and 68% of freeholders in Cambridgeshire would have had less than seven and a half acres of land while it has been estimated that the minimum needed for subsistence was double that.[12] Dyer argues that this increased to half of the population by 1332.[13] While many of those with small plots of land would have supplemented their income by working, a significant proportion of the population had no land at all, relying exclusively on their labour. In the decades before the Black Death, which Dyer suggests were the peak of poverty levels in England, wages were particularly low and competition for work was significant. Labour, when available, would not have provided substantial relief from the burden of indigence.[14] As we saw in the previous chapter, at the beginning of the fourteenth century the land was struggling to cope with the continued rise in population.[15] This demographic growth increased the competition for work and consequently reduced wages. The struggle that labourers experienced, financial or otherwise, may have been seen as simply part of their lot in life. Poverty was not a fixed position in society. Many of those who were otherwise self-sufficient could easily fall into poverty during difficult times, notably the poor

[9] Dyer, "Poverty and its Relief," 42.
[10] Mavis Mate, "The Agrarian Economy of South-East England Before the Black Death: Depressed or buoyant?" in *Before the Black Death: Studies in the 'Crisis' of the Early Fourteenth Century*, ed. Bruce M. S. Cambell (Manchester: Manchester Uni. Press, 1991), 107.
[11] Mollat, *The Poor in the Middle Ages*, 234 and Dyer, "Poverty and its Relief," 43.
[12] Rubin, *Charity and Community*, 19.
[13] Dyer, "Poverty and its Relief," 43.
[14] Ibid, 43.
[15] Clark, "Social Welfare and Mutual Aid," 383.

harvests of the late-thirteenth and early-fourteenth centuries that culminated in the Agrarian Crisis.[16] While quantification is problematic, a large proportion of the population would have or at least could have been classed as 'poor', with varying levels of suffering.

What we can grapple with is how those on the bottom rungs of society were viewed and perceived by their contemporaries. One of the main Articles of the Faith was the Seven Works of Mercy. This set out how Christian men and women were to interact with those less fortunate than themselves. *The Lay Folks' Catechism*, written by Archbishop Thoresby in 1359 and translated to Middle English by a monk of St Mary's Abbey York, gives an overview of these works:

> Of whilk the first is to fede tham that er hungry.
> That othir, for to gif tham that er thirsty.
> The third, for to clethe tham that er clatheless.
> The ferthe is to herber tham that er houselesse.
> The fifte, for visite tham that ligges in sekenesse.
> The sext, is to help tham that in prison er.
> The sevent, to bery dede men that has mister.[17]

These acts of mercy were based on Matthew 25:31-46, the parable of the last judgement, which Jesus taught during the Sermon on the Mount. By helping the lowest in society, Christians were simultaneously showing their love and reverence to God: 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me'.[18] Charity was an integral element of Christian teaching. *The Lay Folk's Catechism* justifies it as such: Christ 'gaf hys precious herte blod on þe cros to bryng vs owt of mischef of synnys and peynys. Þan resonnably ow we to ȝeue mete and drynke to nedy men of his owne goodis'.[19] However, from the middle of the fourteenth century scholars argue that this concept began to change. As we have seen through much of this thesis, the mid-fourteenth century is seen as a turning point in perception of the lower orders of society. As the population declined, the

[16] McIntosh, "Local Responses to the Poor," 210.
[17] *The Lay Folks' Catechism, or The English and Latin Versions of Archbishop Thoresby's Instruction for the People: Together with a Wycliffite Adaption of the Same, and the Corresponding Canons of the Council of Lambeth,* ed. Thomas F. Simmons and Henry E. Nolloth (London: Kegan Paul Trench Truebner, 1901), 70.
[18] Matthew 25: 40.
[19] *The Lay Folks' Catechism*.

labour market turned, giving bargaining power to employees. The need for labour pushed wages higher. As the population continued to decline for the next century, opportunities for those who depended on selling their labour increased. David Aers calls the period a time of 'desacralisation of poverty' due to the rise in numbers or visibility of the poor and increasing prevalence of religious poor.[20] While levels of poverty see an overall reduction across the late medieval period as wages rose considerably especially in the period post 1370, the standard of living rose at a much slower rate. The poorest in society would have remained trapped in this state due to a lack of significant resources to improve their lot by gaining formal training or to increasing their landholdings.[21]

It is with the post-Black Death labour legislation that we begin to see criticism of undeserving beggars appear. The increase in wages and favourable working contracts for labourers created a distrust of those who chose to work less and earn the same as before the plague.[22] Elaine Clark quite rightly argues that 'the threat of economic insecurity' for large employers and lords in the post Black Death labour crisis led to ethical and legal debate around begging, vagrancy and the poor.[23] This concern around those claiming to be poor was articulated in the Ordinance of Labourers. According to the preamble of the Ordinance, alongside those workers who refused to work unless they receive higher wages, there were many people who 'prefer to beg in idleness rather than to work for their living'.[24] The writers of the Ordinance were suspicious of the motives and deservingness of some of the country's indigent poor. This is further expanded in chapter seven of the Ordinance concerning able-bodied beggars:

> And since many sturdy beggars – finding that they can make a living begging for alms – are refusing to work, and are spending

[20] David Aers, "Piers Plowman and Problems in the Perception of Poverty: A Culture in Transition," in *Leeds Studies in English* 14 (1983), 9.
[21] Barbara F. Harvey, "Introduction: The 'Crisis' of the Early Fourteenth Century," in *Before the Black Death: Studies in the 'Crisis' of the Early Fourteenth Century*, ed. Bruce M. S. Campbell (Manchester: Manchester Uni. Press, 1991), 23.
[22] Discussed in chapters three and five.
[23] Clark, "Social Welfare and Mutual Aid," 381.
[24] '*et alii mendicare malentes in ocio quam per laborem quere victum suum*', Bertha Haven Putnam, *The Enforcement of the Statutes of Labourers during the First Decade after the Black Death, 1349-1359* (New York: Longman, Green & Co. Agents, 1908), 9*. Translation from Rosemary Horrox, *The Black Death* (Manchester: Manchester Uni. Press, 1994), 287.

> their time instead in idleness and depravity, and sometimes in robberies and other crimes; let no one presume, on pain of imprisonment, to give anything by way of charity or alms to those who are perfectly able to work, or to support them in their idleness, so that they will be forced to work for a living.[25]
>
> *Et quia multi validi mendicantes, quamdiu possent ex mendicatis elemosinis viuere, laborare reuunt, vacando ociis et peccatis, et quandoque latrociniis et aliis flagiciis, nullus subpena imprisonamenti predicta, talibus qui commode laborare poterunt, sub colore pietatis vel elemosine quicquam dare seu eos in sua desidia confouere presumat, vt sic compellantur pro vite necessario laborare.*[26]

What is significant here is that it is not the idle beggars themselves who were to be punished for begging rather than working but those who provided alms to these 'sturdy beggars'. By punishing those who gave charity to the wrong sort of person, the legislation sought to make people more discriminating when discerning who deserved their charity. Could this have led to more suspicion of the poor and unemployed within the community or society as a whole?

Some historians, such as Mollat, Rubin and Dyer have seen this clause as the beginning of significant changes to the perception of poverty in the period.[27] Mollat, looking at Western Europe in general, has found that charitable contributions increased in the immediate aftermath of the plague crisis. He concludes that this was a reaction to the proximity of death, while overall perceptions of the poor had generally cooled.[28] For Mollat the increased social unrest in the fourteenth century and a rise in humanistic thought created a 'disdainful and philosophical' contempt for the poor, which later materialised in the harsh treatment of the Tudor poor laws.[29] For Miri Rubin the change in charitable giving is twofold. Firstly, she argues that the rise in wages would have had a negative economic effect on employers, who were

[25] Translation from Horrox, *The Black Death*, 289.
[26] Putnam, The Enforcement of the Statutes, 11*.
[27] Mollat, *The Poor in the Middle Ages*, 231-2, Rubin, *Charity and Community*, 52.
[28] Ibid, 199.
[29] Ibid, 255.

also the group most capable and most likely to give charitably. With rising wages, employers had less spare funds for almsgiving. Secondly, Rubin argues that the socio-economic changes of the later-fourteenth century including the labourers' demands for higher wages changed the relationships between employer and employee and, more broadly, between the upper and lower levels of society. Those who refused to work as they had before were viewed as shirking their role in society. Cracking down on this idle behaviour in part with a restriction on who was entitled to alms was one way of controlling these changes.[30] Rubin argues that the upper and middling levels of society chose to promote their socio-religious interests through institutional foundations and gilds rather than charity, which subsequently led to a decline in hospital foundations and patronage.[31]

This argument of a marked change in the perception of the poor after the Black Death has not been universally accepted. Patricia Cullum has examined charitable bequests in the Diocese of York after the Black Death. While Cullum also finds a drop in charitable giving overall in the later Middle Ages, this is not as significant as others have suggested. The fifteenth century experienced a growth in the number of lower-level members of society making wills. This group had fewer resources to leave to charity, which created the impression of a reduction in charitable giving. Cullum finds that 78.9% of diocesan wills from 1389-98 were considered 'potentially charitable' rose slightly to 79.7% in the period 1440-59.[32] Cullum concludes that contrary to Rubin's argument, there is significant continuity in bequests to the poor in the post-plague period. The main change, she argues is that the means of charitable giving became more practical and focused on provision of and donations to local almshouses and maisonsdieu rather than concerned with social display such as the hospital foundations and patronage mentioned by Rubin.[33]

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[30] Rubin, *Charity and Community*, 31.
[31] Ibid, 290
[32] Cullum uses the term potentially charitable as we do not know whether the executors carried out the terms of the will as instructed. P. H. Cullum, "'And Hir Name was Charite': Charitable Giving by and for Women in Later Medieval Yorkshire," in *Women in Medieval English Society*, ed. P. J. P. Goldberg (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1992), 187.
[33] Patricia H. Cullum, "'For Pore People Harberles': What was the Function of the Maisonsdieu?'", in *Trade, Devotion and Governance: Papers in Later Medieval History*, eds. Dorothy J. Clayton, Richard G. Davies and Peter McNiven (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1994), 39. See also P. H. Cullum, "Poverty and Charity in Early Fourteenth-Century England," in *England in the Fourteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1991 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. Nicholas Rogers (Stamford: Paul Watkins, 1993),

While historians differ in their understanding of overall changes in the perception of the poor, clause seven on sturdy beggars was not reissued in the Statute of Labourers and therefore ceased to be law after 1351. While we cannot know for certain why this clause was dropped there are some possible reasons for this. Firstly, the legislation would have been almost impossible to enforce. As we have seen in the previous chapter, one of the main issues with the Ordinance of Labourers is that there was no clear direction on enforcement. Who would identify and police the giving of alms? While it may be possible to regulate alms coming from religious institutions and almshouses, smaller scale personal charity or begging at the kitchen door would have been impossible to control.

Further to the logistical issues of enforcement, there were substantial theoretical issues with this chapter of the legislation. To punish those who are tricked into giving alms to the undeserving stands against the Seven Works of Mercy and the virtue of charity, to show love to fellow Christians and to God. In *The Lay Folk's Catechism*, Archbishop Thoresby cursed 'ypocritys' that took the alms of rich men intended for the poor and used them for feasts and 'vanitees'.[34] This could be seen as part of a larger fourteenth-century critique of the mendicant orders; however, the behaviour and intentions in misusing alms also align with descriptions of the idle beggar. Indeed, Thoresby was Lord Chancellor during the introduction of the Ordinance and Statute of Labourers.[35] Both the earliest surviving Latin and Middle English editions of the *Catechism* come from Thoresby's own manor of Cawood and date to November 1357, just a year after he stood down from his post as Chancellor.[36] It would not be surprising if his involvement in the labour legislation influenced his writings. *The Lay Folk's Catechism* is clear that the 'fend castys be sotel ypocrisy to fordo þys almes'.[37] The devil interrupts the process of almsgiving by placing the undeserving rather than the deserving as the recipient. If a person's alms are not being used correctly then they are undone and are useless in the remission of sins. However, charity in itself is a 'fulnesse of loue to god almyȝty and

140-51.
[34] *The Lay Folks' Catechism*, 72.
[35] Ibid, xiii.
[36] John de Taystek, a monk of St. Mary's Abbey at York translated the Middle English Catechism directly from the Latin. *The Lay Folks' Catechism*, xv and xvii.
[37] *The Lay Folks' Catechism*, 72.

to oure eueyn-cristyn'.[38] Charity resides in the giver rather than in the recipient. Therefore while one may not benefit penitentially from giving charity to those who do not deserve it, a person may benefit spiritually through increase of their virtue. The giving of alms remained an essential element of the Christian faith and punishing men and women for engaging in this practice did not correspond with doctrine.

While chapter seven of the Ordinance was not transferred to the Statute of Labourers, subsequent legislation and discussion of the poor showed an increased rhetoric of discrimination between those deserving and undeserving.[39] The deserving poor were those otherwise respectable members of the community who had fallen on hard times. The list of who deserve and who does not deserve alms is repeated in various forms. In a proclamation concerning beggars in the city of London dated 1359, those deserving of alms are listed as 'poor folks, such as lepers, blind, halt, and persons oppressed with old age and divers other maladies'.[40] *The Lay Folk's Catechism* highlights the 'febyl, crokyd and blynde' as the poor men to whom a Christian should give alms.[41] The deserving poor were stuck in a situation where they were incapable of helping themselves and therefore deserved the aid of their community. The undeserving poor were those who, as was pronounced in the Ordinance of Labourers, chose to beg rather than to labour. They were portrayed as having the physical and mental ability to work as well as an opportunity to do so but made a choice not to. These beggars were given the term 'idle beggars' not only because they refused to work, but they also fulfilled the other meanings of idleness highlighted in chapter two. They were false, unproductive and their appearance of begging was seen as merely a vanity, a front for their true sinful selves.

[38] *The Lay Folks' Catechism*, 81.
[39] Anthony Musson, *Medieval Law in Context: The Growth of Legal Consciousness from Magna Carta to the Peasants' Revolt* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 170.
[40] *Memorials of London and London Life in the XIIIth, XIVth, and IVth Centuries: Being a Series of Extracts, Local, Social, and Political, from the Early Archives of the City of London, A.D. 1276 – 1419*, ed. Henry Thomas Riley (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1868), 304.
[41] *The Lay Folks' Catechism*, 72.

The 1359 London proclamation against beggars highlights the numbers of migrants who had come to London.[42] Particularly of note is how the proclamation describes these immigrants to the city. The language appears to be modelled on the preambles to the Ordinance and Statutes of Labourers, referring to the 'ease' of the beggars 'not wishing to labour or work for their sustenance'.[43] The proclamation states that all beggars capable of work were to leave the city by the following Monday. If they failed to leave they would be put in the stocks for a half a day, a full day if found begging again and be sent to prison for forty days and forbidden from the city if found a third time. While the Ordinance of Labourers had attempted to punish those who gave alms to the undeserving poor, the proclamation against beggars sought to punish the idle beggars themselves.

While the city of London attempted to take action against these supposedly idle beggars, the commons also petitioned for similar national legislation. In 1376, a petition to parliament describes how 'fleeing labourers become indigent beggars, leading an idle life'.[44] There are two separate petitions to parliament in 1376 concerning the issue of idle beggars and vagrants but neither were incorporated into the final 1376 Statute. However, the 1383 Statute of Westminster associated false beggars or 'faitours' with wandering thieves and vagabonds.[45] In the Statute of Cambridge, 1388, parliament attempted a number of means to curtail the risk of giving alms to unworthy beggars.[46] First, all truly impotent beggars were to remain in the place where they heard the Statute proclaimed. This ensured that they would be known by their community and therefore be easily identified and supported. Unknown beggars or newcomers to the area would therefore be more obviously deemed as suspicious, reducing the likelihood that they would be offered alms. Pilgrims and scholars travelling for legitimate purposes were required to carry a

[42] *Memorials of London*, 304.
[43] Horrox, *The Black Death*, 287-8 and 313.
[44] "Edward III: Parliament of April 1376, Text and Translation," in *The Parliament Rolls of Medieval England*, eds. C. Given-Wilson et al., (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005), Scholarly Digital Edition, item 117. 'les avaunditz laboreres corores devenont mendivantz beggeres, pur mesner ocious vie.'
[45] 7 Richard II, c. 5, in *Statutes of the Realm: Printed by Command of his Majesty King George the Third, in Pursuance of an Address of the House of Commons of Great Britain. From Original Records and Authentic Manuscripts*, ed. Alexander Luders et al. (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1810), 2: 32.
[46] 12 Richard II, c. 3, in *Statutes of the Realm*, 2: 56.

testimonial letter to show that, although they were capable of work, they were allowed to receive alms for the limited period of their travel.

Mollat and Rubin have argued that this distrust of beggars created a change in how the poor were perceived and a greater distinction in the minds of contemporaries of who did and did not deserve charity. However, the majority of contemporary criticisms of the poor articulate that the critique was focused only at the undeserving and not the poor in general. This is evident in William Langland's *Piers Plowman*, which was written in London in the second half of the fourteenth century, with the four main versions dating between 1365 and 1387.[47] It seems that Langland wrote about the topic of false begging in relation to the particular issues found in London at the time, seen for example in the proclamation against beggars just noticed. As was discussed in chapter two and three, the character of Piers pays particular attention to putting all members of society to their rightful occupations and roles. In the prologue of *Piers Plowman*, beggars are described as having full bellies and coin purses suggesting that they were not truly poor but profiting considerably from their begging rather than making ends meet: 'Bidders and beggeres faste aboute yede / Til hire bely and hire bagge were bredful y-crammed; / Faiteden for hire foode, fouȝten at þe ale'.[48] The undeserving beggar is described as having plenty to eat and plenty of money left over to spend without having to lift a finger to earn it.

In London in 1373, a female beggar was put in the pillory for kidnapping the daughter of a grocer, stripping her of her clothing and forcing her to beg.[49] Poor children likely received more sympathy and alms than adults. Children, exempt from the adult world of work, deserved alms as they could not provide for themselves. However, Langland highlights how some beggars took advantage of this for their own gains:

> For þei lyue in no loue, ne no lawe holde:
> Thei ne wedde no wommen þat þei eiþ deele,
> But as wilde bestes with 'wehee' worþen vppe and werchen,

[47] William Langland, *Piers Plowman: A Parallel-Text Edition of the A, B, C and Z Versions*, ed. A. V. C. Schmidt (London: Longman, 1995), 2: 281.
[48] Ibid, 1: B, 6.
[49] *Memorials of London*, 368.

> And bryngen forþ barnes þat bastardes men calleþ.
> Or þe bak or som boon þei brekeþ in his youþe,
> And goon and faiten with hire fauntes for euermoore after.
> Ther is moore mysshapen amonges þise beggeres
> Than of alle oþere manere men þat on þis moolde walkeþ.[50]

Piers is damning towards the behaviour of beggars. They corrupt society by having children out of wedlock. For moralists, these beggars would have been viewed as creating a cycle of poverty by producing children outside the support system of a family unit. Beggars are presented as not taking responsibility for their actions. Not only are the children born of the sin of fornication but they are also used by the beggars for financial gain. Langland's beggars physically abuse their children by breaking their backs so that they can obtain more sympathy and alms. Piers substantiates this by arguing that there are more 'mysshapen' people in this group than in any other. The fact that those who are 'mysshapen' legitimately could not work and needed to beg does not seem to mean much to Piers, the moral centre of the poem, who sees the beggars as manipulative and worthy of suspicion rather than sympathy. Even those legitimately allowed to beg were to be viewed with wariness. However, this also shows that in the eyes of Langland at least, the beggars themselves are acutely aware of what makes them deserving of aid.

While Piers is critical and somewhat suspicious of beggars in the first half of the poem, he does show sympathy towards the plight of the truly needy and desperate in passus XIV. While rich men have the wealth and time to have 'murþe in May', beggars cannot afford to have bread with their meagre meals. The poem elicits more sympathy for the beggars by describing their wet feet in wintertime: 'and yet is wynter for hem worse, for weetshoed þei gange'.[51] Those who are truly poor are given sympathy. In "The Good Wife Taught her Daughter", a poem popular from the mid-fourteenth century onwards, the mother speaks of the importance of helping those in need: 'Þe poore & þe beedered, loke þon not loþe; / Ȝeue of þin owne good, and be not to hard, / For seelden is þat hous poore þere god is steward.[52] The mother tells her daughter to be both giving and respectful to the poor. There is no sense of

[50] *Piers Plowman*, 1: B, 334.
[51] Ibid, 1: B, 554.
[52] "How the Good Wife Taught her Daughter," in *The Babees Book*, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall, EETS OS 32 (London: Trübner & Co., 1868), 37.

suspicion or caution. These examples all add credence to Cullum's argument that there is 'considerable concern for the genuine poor and their plight' within the late medieval community.[53]

It was not just moral commentators who encouraged respect and charity for the truly poor, there is significant evidence to show that local communities sought to help those they viewed as deserving throughout the late medieval period. It is common to see leniency towards the poor in manorial court rolls before and after the Black Death. While there is no legislative or official information on what the criteria for relief 'because of poverty' were, it is likely that the local community were aware of which members were struggling more than others. In 1338 in the manor court of Wakefield, Alice del Bothe de Wolvedale was pardoned for brewing against the assize because she was deemed poor.[54] Ten women were also fined for brewing against the assize in this court but all were fined 3d for the offence. Alice del Bothe's poverty made her an exception. Brewing required resources such as malt and lead brewing vessels.[55] The fines for breaking the assize of ale appear so commonly in the manorial court rolls that it is generally accepted by historians that rather than being a deterrent, the fines acted as a de facto licensing system.[56] While we do not know the circumstances of Alice's pardon, as she was the only one to be excused, she must have been struggling more than the other brewers. She was not idle but actively trying to make money to supplement her household income. Under the rational of the deserving and undeserving poor, she deserved the help of her community.

Confraternities and gilds aimed to support the spiritual and physical needs of their members. As part of the 1388 Statute of Cambridge, a proclamation was sent to all gilds in the country requesting that they send any patent letters or charters that they might have possessed.[57] The result of this order were the 1389 gild returns, a

[53] Patricia Helena Cullum, "Hospitals and Charitable Provision in Medieval Yorkshire, 936-1547" (D.Phil thesis, Uni. Of York, 1989), 277.
[54] *The Court Rolls of the Manor of Wakefield from October 1338 to September 1340*, ed. K. M. Troup (Leeds: Yorkshire Archaeological Society, 1999), 17-18.
[55] David Postles, "Brewing and the Peasant Economy: Some Manors in Late Medieval Devon," in *Rural History* 3, no. 2 (1992), 135.
[56] Ibid, 135.
[57] For a copy of this proclamation see *English Gilds, The Original Ordinances of more than One Hundred Early English Gilds: Together with Þe Olde Usages of Þe Cite of Wynchestre; The*

collection of ordinances for gilds across England. While some of the ordinances may have predated the plague, the returns give us a sense of how these institutions saw their responsibility to their members. Of 90 gild returns, 46 contained clauses relating to the care of poor or ill members.[58] Out of these, 25 or 54 percent of clauses relating to the poor contained stipulation on who was deserving of this aid. These stipulations say who is or is not entitled to financial aid from the gild. Seven gilds highlight poverty caused by the will of God or 'auenture' as deserving of alms. The majority of the remaining gilds clearly stipulate in their ordinances that they would support members of the gild who fall into poverty but only if that poverty or difficulty is '*aliquo casu fortuite ad in opiam devenerit absque culpa*', i.e. not by their own fault.[59] While the wording differs, the sentiment remains the same. A person is only entitled to aid from the gild if they have played no part in causing their own poverty. In some cases this is clearly articulated with examples of the type of behaviours that could cause poverty. In Chesterfield, the Gild of the Blessed Mary stipulated precisely what they understood as deserving of aid: 'if in the haps of life, heavy loss befalls any brother, whether by fire, by murrain, by robbery, or by any other mishap, so that such loss come not through his own lust, or gluttony, or dice-play, or other folly'.[60] Poverty must not be the result of a person's sinful exploits if he is to be deserving of aid. The Cambridge Fraternity of St. Mary in the Church of St. Botulph and the Gild of St. Katherine in the Church of St. Andrew both highlight the necessity of good moral conduct in order to be entitled to support by the gild.[61]

For the period after the Black Death, Christopher Dyer is sceptical about putting too much weight on the role of the community in aiding the needy within society, highlighting what he believes to be a lack of evidence of 'such acts of kindness'.[62] Instead, Dyer finds that more prosperous landholders in a position to help the needy were the same as those writing and enforcing local and national legislation that led to 'restrictions on gleaning, or the expulsion of suspicious

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Ordinances of Worchester; and The Costomary of the Manor of Tettenhall-Regis, From the Original MSS. of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries, ed. Toulmin Smith EETS OS 40 (London: Treübner & Co, 1870), 130-1.

[58] *English Gilds*.

[59] *Cambridge Gild Records*, ed. Mary Bateson (Cambridge: Macmillan & Bowes, 1903), 72.

[60] *English Gilds*, 165.

[61] *Cambridge Gild Records*, 80 and 93.

[62] Dyer, "Poverty and its Relief," 51.

strangers, lepers and other misfits'.[63] However, I think it is important to distinguish between the poor within the community and the groups identified by Dyer. Community aid would have likely been given to known members of that community, just as the members of gilds would have been able to identify which members of their community deserved their help and were not the kind of idle beggar that the legislators mention. Cullum and Goldberg argue in their 1993 article that while many wills are vague and formulaic in their treatment of the poor, many testators were concerned with helping specific poor individuals or groups, such as widows within their community.[64]

One such example is Maud Katersouth who appears as a key witness for the plaintiff in a marriage dispute in the ecclesiastic courts of York in 1355.[65] A number of witnesses were called to answer to Maud's reputation and trustworthiness. They each gave the length of time that they had known Maud and her teenage son: between 2 and 4 years on average. She is a known and identifiable member of the community. Maud is described by a witness for the defendant as a 'poor and needy woman and has nothing in goods, but for a little bread or a draught of ale she will fetch water for the use of her neighbours and mill in their homes and work as one poor little woman is able and thus she lives and is supported among her neighbours'. [66] While this seems a positive illustration of Maud's position as deserving of aid – she is willing to work but incapable of earning enough to support herself and her son – the witness goes on to clarify that he does not view Maud as trustworthy or of good repute. The criticism of Maud's credibility hinges not on her poverty but the fact that she has lied to her creditors regarding a realistic schedule of repayments. While for the purposes of opponents of the marriage case, Maud is portrayed as an untrustworthy witness, her poverty and begging is not what affects her reputation. Her neighbours were willing to maintain her. She was not idle but attempted to engage with occupation fitting to her position as the witness comments that she works 'as one poor little woman is able'. Her condition was not by choice

[63] Ibid, 51.
[64] P. H. Cullum and P. J. P. Goldberg, "Charitable Provision in Late Medieval York: 'To the Praise of God and the Use of the Poor'", in *Northern History* 29, no. 1 (1993), 37.
[65] *Women in England c. 1275-1525: Documentary Sources*, ed. and trans. P. J. P. Goldberg (Manchester: Manchester Uni. Press, 1995), 156-62.
[66] Ibid, 160.

and she fulfilled her role to the best of her ability. Therefore she was viewed as deserving of her community's aid.

Gleaning, clearing the fields of any residual crop after initial work had been completed, was an activity commonly associated with support of the poor. However, the right to glean was bestowed by the owner of the land and was not an inherent right of the poor.[67] Control of who could and could not glean was always a prominent feature in village by-laws. At the busy periods of the agricultural calendar, such as harvest, all members of the community were expected and usually required by village by-laws to take part. However, the work of gleaning was usually left to those members of the community whose labour was not required or not useful elsewhere. For example, the 1340 by-laws of Brightwaltham in Berkshire state that 'no inhabitant shall glean grain within this liberty unless they be under age or over age'.[68] The life cycle defined whether a person was capable of working or not; children and the elderly were not otherwise of use to the harvest process.

By-laws were introduced in the Manor of Basingstoke in 1389 to regulate who could and who could not glean. At this point the population was still in decline, unable to recover from the repeated assault of pestilence in the second half of the fourteenth century. The Statute of Cambridge, the most significant labour legislation since the 1351 Statute of Labourers, had been issued the previous year. There was still a shortage of labour and we have seen how by-laws were used to encourage labour in chapter three. The by-law states that only 'the impotent, passed by view of the Bailiffs and Constables, with the assent and consent of the tenants, and permission obtained, may commence gleaning from the beginning of the harvest'.[69] While the by-law's primary purpose was to ensure all those who could work the harvest did so, there was also a need to legislate on who was allowed to glean. 'Impotent' is a common term for those who, because of their physical or mental state, can legitimately abstain from work and especially harvest work. In the Statute of

[67] W. O. Ault, "By-Laws of Gleaning and the Problems of Harvest," in *The Economic History Review* 14, no. 2 (1961), 215.
[68] W. O. Ault, *Open-Field Farming in Medieval England: A Study of Village By-Laws* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1972), 99.
[69] *A History of the Ancient Town and Manor of Basingstoke in the County of Southampton with a Brief Account of The Siege of Basing House, A. D. 1643-1645*, eds. Francis Joseph Baigent and James Elwin Millard (London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co., 1889), 217.

Cambridge, impotent is used to refer to beggars who are incapable of working: 'et que les mendinantz impotenz de servir'.[70] The need for visual confirmation of impotence by the bailiff and constables set out in the by-law above highlights a concern to avoid the 'idle poor', who would supposedly rather glean than take part in the more arduous harvest activities. This represents a marked change from by-laws on gleaning from earlier in the fourteenth century. A by-law of 1324 for Roxhill, Bedfordshire, states that 'no one shall harbour an outsider or someone known to him as a gleaner in autumn who is able to find employment at a penny a day and food'.[71] The emphasis changes after the introduction of labour legislation from those unable to find work to those who are incapable of work. From an assessment of a selection of by-laws, I have found that after the Black Death there is a presumption that there is work available for all who want it and therefore that gleaning should only be undertaken by the impotent or physically incapable.

So far our discussion of those on the borders of society has concentrated on more general perceptions of poverty in legislation and literature. We can see this illustrated in the case of William de Bridsall of Scampston. William de Bridsall was a key witness for Alice Roding in her suit to enforce a marriage contract with John Boton in York in 1366.[72] Boton denied that there had been a contract of marriage, however, William testified at the Church court that he had overheard the couple exchange words of contract. Because he was a key witness in the case, a number of members of the community were brought forward by both the plaintiff and the defence to testify as to whether William was a trustworthy witness. The deponents had clear allegiances with either Alice Roding or John Boton and therefore both attempted to support or discredit William's character and thus his testimony. Their reasons for viewing William's testimony as untrustworthy are extremely telling as to how post Black Death society viewed the idle in their community.

William was approximately 30 years old in 1366 and certainly of labouring age. He had no land or goods other than the clothes he wore. As to his occupation

[70] 12 Richard II, c. 7, in *Statutes of the Realm*, 2: 58.
[71] W. O. Ault, *Open-Field Farming.*
[72] CP.E 92, Borthwick Institute for Archives, York. Translated to English by Jeremy Goldberg.

William is described as 'sometimes a beggar and so obtaining his livelihood and at other times a worker during the hay and grain harvests in summer and autumn'.[73] During the busy times of harvest all able-bodied members of the community were required to lend their labour to the cause. As we have seen in relation to gleaning, even those who were generally unfit for labour the rest of the year would be given some variety of occupation within their ability during this busy time.

All those deposed, both in support of and against William's reliability as a witness, agreed that William was poor and begged to supplement his living. William was repeatedly described as a person '*mendicaris panis ab parochia*' or one who begged his bread from the parish community.[74] Robert Webster testified that William begged and was sometimes seen drunk but that he was still a trustworthy man ('*homo fidelis*') .[75] It is John Dogeson who seeks to legitimise William's begging and distinguishes William as a man who takes part in the busy summer and autumn agricultural periods but is unable to work for most of the year due to what we are left to presume are health reasons: the reason John gives is 'because of the cold'. William is particularly presented as deserving of the aid and as someone who attempted to contribute as much as he possibly could to society. William's testimony could not be discredited because he was poor. Poverty itself was not dishonourable.[76]

For those who wished to refute his evidence William Bridsall was portrayed as the archetypal idle beggar, not deserving of the aid of the community. Thomas son of Ydonson described William as a man who '*querebat mendicand(us)*' or 'used to seek begging'.[77] He was a persistent beggar and relied on the community for support. The main criticism of William was not that he was not able to work but how he filled this non-work time. He was regularly found intoxicated, especially on feast days. While Richard Pelette of Rillington believed that William was trustworthy he admitted that the last time he saw William, William was so intoxicated that he had to be helped home by Richard and others. John Dogeson agreed that William was 'entirely trustworthy … of sound mind and having an adequate degree of common

[73] Ibid.
[74] CP.E 92.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Brian Tierney, *Medieval Poor Law: A Sketch of Canonical Theory and Its Application in England* (Berkeley: Uni. of California Press, 1959), 117.
[77] CP.E 92.

sense other than when drunk with ale'. Geoffrey Ratneson of Rillington, however, testified that William was regularly drunk and would lie in fields and ditches and therefore he considered William to be a fool. Although William's position was variously appropriated to credit and discredit his testimony, the description of his life gives us a glimpse of how the community treated William. As a man of some thirty years he had survived so far through what must have been successful begging. He had no home and yet he found shelter amongst his neighbours. The community cared for its members even if Parliament and Church pushed for a greater distinction between those deserving and those who were idle. This was likely an inconvenient truth for those who wished to enforce the legislation and regain control over labour and mobility.

The evidence given by Robert son of Philip of Scampston gives some indication as to why the community may have viewed William as particularly deserving of their support. He testified that William was:

> poor and so burdened by poverty that he seeks his food by begging from door to door and through the villages neighbouring the village of Scampston, and he does not consider him in full possession of his faculties [*sapientem*] because he has not seen him buy or sell [*emere neque vendere*], but beg from house to house, consequently he does not know his powers of perception [*non cognoscit sensum suum*], and whether he was corrupted or instructed when he made his deposition.[78]

The defendant and witnesses for the defence are attempting to suggest that William could have been manipulated to put forward false testimony, however, Robert's comments on William's 'faculties' are significant. Because William did not conduct business he was not seen as partaking in the values of adulthood. The description of childhood in John Trevisa's translation of Bartholomew the Englishman's *De Proprietatibus Rerum* contains striking parallels with William's lack of business ability. As well as not being physically capable of occupation, children's sensibilities

[78] CP.E 92.

are not yet ready to process the responsibilities and knowledge involved in the world of work. They have not been tainted by the adult world and therefore prefer apples to gold. Boys also have difficulty thinking objectively or planning for the future. Their focus is on the present day. These tendencies highlight that boys are not yet ready for the responsibilities of adult life as they do not have the concentration to be successful:

> Seþ smale children often han iuel maneres and tacchis, and þinken onliche on þinges þat beþ and recchiþ nouȝt of thingis þat schal be, hy loueþ playes and game and venytes and forsake most þinges worth, and aȝenward, for most worth þey holde lest worth or nouȝt worth. Þey desiren þat is to hem contrarye and greuous, and tellen more ofþe ymage of a man, and maken sorowe and woo and wepiþ more for þe losse of an appil þanne fore þe losse of þeire heritage … They holde no counsaile but þey wreyen and tellen out alle þat þey see and here.[79]

Children were unable to differentiate between the proper conduct of business and childhood endeavours. They prefer to play games and are unable to distinguish good from bad. According to the thirteenth century legal manual attributed to Henry Bracton, an adult of age is 'not defined in terms of time but by sense and maturity'.[80] Therefore the son of a burgess reaches maturity when he 'knows how properly to count money, measure cloths and perform other similar paternal business'.[81] While there is no suggestion that William is the son of a burgess, he is still framed as not quite of adult nature as he does not have the cognition to buy or sell in order to make his living. Like a child he is not fully engaged with the world of work. It is not within his ability. Financial incompetence is used to highlight a person's incapacity for the defined social roles. This rhetorical device links the financially incompetent with acceptable inactivity or lack of occupation. The relationship between childhood and work will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter. By infantalising William, the deponent also calls into question whether he should be treated as an adult of discretion and his ability to testify in canonical court.

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[79] *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus De Proprietatibus Rerum*, eds. M. C. Seymour et al. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 1: 301.
[80] '*Sed sic non definitur certum tempus, sed per sensum et matutitatem*' in *Bracton on the Laws and Customs of England*, trans. Samuel E. Thorne (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1968), 2: 250.
[81] '*Si autem filius burgensis, tunc aetatem habere intellegitur cum denarios discrete scriverit numerare at pannos ulnare, et alia negotia paterna similia exercere*', *Bracton*, 2: 250.

In the mid-fifteenth-century interlude *Occupation and Idleness*, the personified Idleness is also portrayed as financially incompetent: 'While Y have aught Y wyl spende; / Whan Y have non God wyl sende. / Thus every company Y wyl amende / And gadere felawship to-hepe'.[82] Idleness does not rely on his own labour for his livelihood. Instead he spends what money he has and then depends on God and his friends to support him. While he does not necessarily beg, he is presented in the same way as the idle beggars. Idleness is not ignorant to the possible good use of the money, nor is he incapable of managing it correctly. Instead, he finds reasons not to invest the money in his future, such as the chance of a house burning down or bad weather causing the death of livestock.[83] Idleness can weigh the possible outcomes but chooses to believe in the options that allow him to remain idle rather than changing his ways. His thoughts are always on his present state rather than his future, spending his time in 'slowthe' rather than in 'labour'. However, he is not feeble minded and describes himself as clever or 'quente'.[84] His cleverness could be cunning and skill at deception but it also highlights that, unlike Bridsall or the children in *On the Property of Things*, he is of his full mind and abilities. He is not excused from work due to a disability. Although financial incompetence is a characteristic of idleness this is distinctly different from that of Bridsall. While it is impossible for us to know the nature of William Bridsall's mental capacity, it is clear that his inability to conduct business allows him to deserve some sympathy from his fellows. They support him and provide him shelter, but what could exclude him from work could also prevent him from commanding respect, even his being viewed as an untrustworthy witness in court.

In chapter three we discussed the case of Adam Packer and John Grim. In 1357, John Grim brought Adam Packer to court for breach of contract. John testified that they had an agreement that Adam would work packing logs for John for the period of one year. Adam broke this agreement, which led to John losing his livelihood. John is described as '*vagans et otiosus*' or 'wandering about and

[82] Richard Beadle, "Occupation and Idleness," in *Leeds Studies in English* 32 (2001), 17.
[83] Beadle, "Occupation and Idleness," 20.
[84] Ibid, 17.

unemployed'.[85] By bringing this case to court John publicly highlighted that the blame for his social condition, his idleness, lay not with himself but with Adam. It was Adam's negligence and not John's that led to John being rendered idle. It is important to note that Adam refuted the case and testified that he would verify that no contract had been made. Just as the gild ordinances in Cambridge highlighted that the gilds would only support members whose poverty was no fault of their own, this same perception of culpability and idleness may also have been held by society as a whole, outside of the structure of the gild.

The second marginal group that this chapter looks at are vagrants. As we shall explore below, the vagrant was identified throughout the medieval period as an insidious threat to society. But what defined a person as a vagrant? Primarily, a vagrant or a person without a permanent link to a place or employment lacked a connection with the controlling structures of society. Vagrant comes from the Latin *vagor*, (v.) and *vagabundus*, (adj.) via the Anglo Norman *wacrant*.[86] If we look at how variants and varying grammatical forms of the root word *vagraunt* are used in Middle English, vagrancy as a concept carries strong resonances of aimless movement. For example, in an anonymous translation of Richard Rolle's *Emendatio Vitae*, *vagaraunt* is used to express a wandering mind: 'Sum while ther comen in mannes hert thoughtes whiche disparagen his wittis and maken hem vagaraunt in vayne thynges'.[87] This lack of direction also conveyed, to medieval society at least, a lack of purpose or role. If a person does not have an aim it is impossible for them to contribute to society in a conscious and meaningful way. From a spiritual standpoint, vagrants did not pay the debt of Adam. Socially, they rebelled against the prescribed order of society. With these uses for *vagraunt*, the word carries largely negative resonances. It was used in relation to those who were viewed as idle and disreputable. In Anglo Norman the verb '*vaguer*' was also used to mean 'to fall vacant'.[88] This emptiness is seen in the uses of idleness. The verb 'wandren,' to wander, stems from Old English and shares many of the same meanings as 'vagrer' particularly the lack

[85] *In Original Latin and Modern English Translation in Records of the Borough of Nottingham, Being a Series of Extracts from the Archives of the Corporation of Nottingham 1155-1625*, ed. W. H. Stevenson (London: Quaritch, 1882), 1: 167.
[86] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "vagrant, n. and adj."
[87] *Richard Rolle of Hampole's Mending of Life from the Fifteenth Century Worcester Cathedral Manuscript F. 172*, ed. William Henry Hulme (Cleveland: Western Reserve Uni. Press, 1916), 43.
[88] *Anglo-Norman Dictionary. Digital Edition at < http://www.anglo-norman.net/>* s.v. "vaguer."

of fixed abode and migratory nature but it also carries resonances of freedom and independence. How this freedom is contextualised and interpreted then determines how the wanderer is viewed. The movement of wandering is related to distraction, disorientation, erratic behaviour and confusion. Inherent in this use is a sense that those who wander are not in complete control of their faculties. *The Parliament of the Three Ages* (*c*. 1450) highlights how the disturbed mind will wake 'with wandrynge and woo'.[89]

It is this multiplicity and malleability of the concept of vagrancy that made it so useful to legislators. The way in which vagrancy was appropriated and articulated by lawmakers developed over the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. There have been a number of studies of the concept of vagrancy in the early-modern period with the introduction of the Elizabethan poor laws.[90] However, the issue of vagrancy significantly predates the labour legislation. Vagrancy first appears in the parliament rolls in 1285 as part of the *Statuta Civitatis* for London alongside the Statute of Winchester, relating to the preservation of law and order within the city. London, as the largest urban centre in the country drew a significant number of migrants. This was especially true in times when employment was scarce in rural areas. This Statute is concerned with armed robberies and in particular lower status people carrying weapons:

> It is enjoined that none be so hardy to be found going or wandering about the streets of the City, after curfew tolled at St. Martins le Grand, with sword or buckler, or other arms for doing mischief, or whereof evil suspicion might arise; not any in any other manner, unless he be a great man or other lawful person of good repute, or their certain messenger, having their warrants to go from one to another with lantern in hand.[91]

[89] *The Parlement of the Thre Ages,* ed. M. Y. Offord, EETS OS 246 (London: Oxford Uni. Press, 1959), 257.
[90] See Pound, *Poverty and Vagrancy* and Beier, *Masterless Men.*
[91] Translation modernised from 13 Edward I, "Statuta Civitatis London," in *Statutes of the Realm*, 1: 102.

> *Defendu est que nul seit si hardi estre trove alaunt ne wacraunt par my les ruwes de la citee, apres coeverfu parsone a Seint Martyn le Grant, a espeye ne a bokuyler ne a autre arme pro mal fere, ne dount mal supecion poet avenit; ne en autre mannere nule, sil ne seit grant Seignur ou altre prodome de bone conysaunce, ou lour certeyn message que de els serra garaunty que vount li un a lautre par conduyte de Lumere.*

The Statute is quite clearly concerned with the maintenance of law and order within the city. The wanderers who are 'wacraunt par my les ruwes' are deemed a threat to safety as they could carry weapons and as they break the curfew are unlikely to be of 'bone conysaunce' or good repute. Curfew was rung in all parish churches at the same time. From 1282 it was law in London that at the hour of curfew 'all gates are to be shut, as well as all taverns for wine and for ale; and no one is then to go about the streets or ways'.[92] Here wandering is associated with the illegal activities which take place after curfew. These wanderers of the night time are described later on in the Statute as holding 'their evil talk in taverns more than elsewhere, and there do seek for shelter, lying in wait, and watching their time to do myshief'.[93] Those willing to break curfew were seen as untrustworthy as they did not respect the law and therefore their intentions were deemed suspicious.

The Letter Books of London contain frequent examples of those who were viewed as of bad character or who moved about the city after curfew. Nightwalking was associated with a plethora of other offences. Those arrested for nightwalking were usually also indicted as 'common fighters' or misdoers 'against the peace'.[94] Walking at night was seen as a suspicious activity and those willing to break curfew were thought likely to undertake other offences also. For example, in 1311, Peter le Taverener was indicted for multiple offences:

> being held suspected of evil, and as beating men against the peace; and also, for being a misdoer and a nightwalker, against the peace, going with sword and buckler, and other arms; and

[92] *Memorials of London*, 21.
[93] '*…e font lour mauveyses purparlances en taverne plus que aillours, e illoekes querent umbrage attendanz e geitant lor tens de mal fere*.' Translation modernised from 13 Edward I, "Statuta Civitatis London," in *Statutes of the Realm*, 1: 102.
[94] Letter Book D, London Metropolitan Archive, London, fol. cxxxj.r.

> also, for that he is elsewhere indicted in the Wardmote of Douegate as being a nightwalker, and one who beats men, and as causing much mischief to be done in the said city, against the peace of our Lord the King.[95]

Peter was presented as a habitual offender whose activities extended across numerous wards of the city.

In July 1340, one Andrew le Brewere was brought before the mayor's court as '*homo male fame noctivagus tota nocte vigilans et tota die dormiens*'.[96] Andrew was seen to pose a threat to society not just because he was a man of bad reputation (*male fame*) but also because he does not conform to what was seen as the correct and prescribed social roles or activities. He had reversed the standard cycle and spent his days sleeping when his fellow Londoners were diligently working. His wakefulness or watch during the night was seen as suspicious as his activities or intentions were not known but were implicitly understood to be nefarious. Marjorie McIntosh argues that those who did not partake in the prescribed life of work would not and could not be controlled by employers, local officials and priests.[97] Their indifference to man's requirement to labour would have translated into an indifference to other moral and social prescriptions. Andrew was prosecuted alongside nightwalkers and taverners who harboured men of bad character. Not all nightwalkers were unemployed vagrants. For example in 1353, John Messamis, employed as a potter in London, was described as a 'continuous nightwalker and malefactor'.[98] The offence of nightwalking seems to have been employed as a type of medieval anti-social behaviour order to allow known trouble makers to be apprehended. Karen Jones has found nightwalking used in this way in her study of the local courts of Kent in the century after 1460.[99] When there are no other offences presented alongside nightwalking the offender is commonly described as having

[95] *Memorials of London*, 87.
[96] Roll A3, Mayors Court, City of London, London Metropolitan Archive, London, Membr. 14.
[97] Marjorie K. McIntosh, "Local Change and Community Control in England, 1465-1500," in *Huntington Library Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (1986), 228.
[98] *Sessions of the Peace in the City of Lincoln, 1351-1354 and the Borough of Stamford 1351*, ed. Elisabeth G. Kimball (Lincoln: Lincoln Record Society, 1971), 40.
[99] Karen Jones, *Gender and Petty Crime in Late Medieval England: The Local Courts in Kent, 1460-1560* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006), 191.

been found 'wandering' the streets after curfew.[100] The use of 'wandering' suggests an aimless and purposelessness during a time which should have been used to recuperate from a day of diligent labour. This brings the activity into the realm of idleness.

The next appearance of vagrancy within legislation is in the 1331 Statute of Winchester, which legislated against vagrancy on a national level. Again those whose activities were viewed as evil or suspicious remain at the fore:

> That if any stranger pass by the country in the night, of whom any have suspicion, he shall presently be arrested and delivered to the sheriff, and remain in ward till he be duly delivered: And because there have been divers manslaughters, felonies, and robberies done in times past, by people that be called Robersmen, Wastors, and Draw-latches…
>
> *Que si nul estraunge passe par pais de nuyt, de qi homme eit suspecion, soit meintenant arestu & livere au visconte, & demoerge en gard tant qil soit duement delivers; et diverses roberies, homicides, & felonies, ont este faitz einz ces heures par genz qi sont appellez Roberdesmen, Wastours & Draghlacche…*[101]

The inclusion of 'wastour' between robbers and drawlatches (a person who enters a house of another) suggests that in terms of criminality and immorality a waster was viewed as similar to robbers and burglars. In 1327, the king decreed that those in the city of London who were lax at their craft or trade, such as bakers, cooks and millers etc. and armed malefactors who threatened and attacked residents of the city ('… *minus bene frequenter se habent in officiis et misteriis suis et quod malefactores nocte dieque apud gladiis magnellis bukelariis et aliis armis…*') were to be punished by corporal punishment. [102]

[100] *Memorials of London*, 140.
[101] 5 Edward III, c. 14, in *Statutes of the Realm*, 1: 268.
[102] Roll A1b, Mayors Court, City of London, London Metropolitan Archive, London, Membr. 14.

Before the Black Death and the subsequent labour legislation, vagrancy was associated with criminal behaviour and threats to the law and order of urban environments. However, after the Black Death we see a separation of vagrancy into two branches, viz. vagrancy associated with idle labourers, beggars and petty theft, and vagrancy associated with violent criminals and social disruption. The Statute of Westminster (1383) reinforced both the 1285 and 1331 legislation, but separated them into two different chapters. Chapter five of the Statute of Westminster bolstered the 1331 Statute, introducing the chapter by highlighting the issue of 'roberdsmen and drawelacches' but no longer including the 'wastours' of 1331. However, the chapter departs from the previous discussion of armed miscreants. Instead the 1383 legislation reinterpretted the 1331 inclusion of 'wastours' as the idleness articulated in the labour legislation in the intervening years. The issue was now with 'faitours', meaning fake beggars, and 'vagerantz'. In the fourteenth century, 'faitour' referred to a beggar or vagrant who deceived mainly by feigning a disability in order to justify their inability to work or deservedness of charity. For example, the *Promptorium Parvulorum* defines '*vagius*' (used as an adjective to mean wandering) as 'faytowre, þat feynythe sekenesse for trowantyse [truancy]'.[103] The Statute of Cambridge, 1388, ordered that false beggars be treated as vagrants or unlawful migrant workers who travel the country without permission: 'Also that with every person that goes begging, being able to serve or labour, it shall be done as with him who departs from his town without letters, as is abovesaid, people of religion excepted'.[104]

Chapter six of the Statute of Westminster (1383) reinforced the 1285 Statute. This chapter concentrates on the robberies and thefts but no longer refers to those wandering the streets. Vagrancy no longer encompassed the dangers of violence and theft in the city that it had held in the Statute of Winchester. There is a distinction made between wandering and disorder. This may be due to the Statute of Westminster's proximity to the 1381 Peasants' Revolt.[105] The confirmation of the

[103] *The Promptorium Parvulorum: The First English-Latin Dictionary c. 1440 A.D.* ed. A. L. Mayhew, EETS ES 102 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1908), 147. See *MED*, s.v. "truaunten (v.)" and "truandrie (n.)".
[104] Westminster Chronicle, translated in "Appendix September 1388," in *PROME*.
[105] In April 1382, less than a year after the Peasants' Revolt three servants were imprisoned for

Winchester Statute was necessary due to 'the grievous mischiefs and complaints that do daily happen of robberies, thefts, manslaughters, burning of houses, and riding in routs and great companies in every part of the realm'.[106]

While the issue of vagrancy only re-entered legislation as such in 1495, the commons petitioned for the earlier Statutes to be reinforced in 1402 and 1445. The petition to the commons in 1445 is of particular note as it makes a clear connection between the labour legislation and vagrancy: where husbandry 'suffices for a man's continual occupation, no man shall be excused to serve by the year on the penalty of being considered a vagrant'.[107] Here, vagrancy is connected not with physical movement or wandering but with unfixed labour practices. A person who was known to or was born in the community could be considered a vagrant due to their refusal to conform to conservative patterns of work, such as demanding higher wages and refusing annual contracts in favour of short term employment. The petition was not included in the Statute of that parliament but it highlights the Common's continually developing view of vagrancy.

The final development to the concept of vagrancy that requires our attention is the increasing focus on migration. Before the labour legislation migration was not formally related to vagrancy. However, this is not to say that migration did not take place in pre-plague England. Due to the surplus of labour at the end of the thirteenth and first half of the fourteenth century, there was a significant movement from rural to urban areas in search of work.[108] However, due to the quantity of labour available to lords, migration was an issue of control and authority rather than hindering productivity. For example, on the manors of Spalding Priory in Lincolnshire, it was common for villeins to leave the land of their lord for periods of months or years.[109] To do so they paid fines or chevage to the lord before their departure. Such fines

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wandering the streets at night. The men were released the following day under mainprise of £20 each to not wander either by night or by day and importantly not to engage in any meetings or gatherings. This fear of assemblies of people led to the concern over the intentions and purposes of gilds and the subsequently inquisition, which resulted in the gild returns of 1389. See *Calendar of the Plea and Memoranda Rolls of the City of London: Volume 3, 1381-1412*, ed. A. H. Thomas (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office 1932), 1 and *English Gilds*, 1.

[106] 5 Edward III, in *Statutes of the Realm*, 1: 268.

[107] "Henry VI: Parliament of February 1445, Text and Translation," in *PROME*, item 44.

[108] See chapter 3.

[109] E. D. Jones, "Villein Mobility in the Later Middle Ages: The Case of Spalding Priory," in *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 36 (1992), 152.

served as a disincentive or created a financial barrier for those who may have considered migrating. Furthermore, lords would have used these amercements as well as asserting power over villein tenancies to reinforce their jurisdiction or authority over the villein.[110] The lack of substantial affect of migration on securing tenants or labour meant that lords did not find it necessary to legislate further against movement until after the Black Death. Where we do see concern for migration before the Black Death, however, is in the towns, specifically London, where many of these rural workers migrated. The 1285 Statute for the City of London and the 1331 Statute of Westminster are particularly concerned with the effect the influx of people had on the order of the city.

There were of course certain times of the year when migration was necessary, in particular the movement of workers to where they were needed in harvest time. Migrant labour was a necessity even before the Black Death. Different regional economies attracted migrant labour.[111] The Statute of Labourers includes an exception to the clause on migration that 'people of Staffordshire, Lancashire, Derbyshire, Craven and the Marches of Wales and Scotland, and other places, may come and work in other counties in August, and return safely as they were accustomed to do before this time'.[112] The 1388 Statute of Cambridge introduced a clause that required all labourers, pilgrims, and soldiers moving outside of their hundred through the country to carry testimonial letters, thus highlighting that it was acceptable for the labouring classes to move about if they did so for an approved purpose.[113] According to Marjorie McIntosh it was the constables of the manor who would have been given the task of judging which migrants were welcomed and which posed a potential threat to the order of the community.[114] Christopher Dyer argues that this 'constantly moving population can only have had an adverse effect on the social cohesion of the village'.[115] This was not new as it can be seen in the aversion to strangers in the bylaws of the village of Great Horwood in

[110] Ibid, 153 and Phillipp R. Schofield, *Peasant and Community in Medieval England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 162.
[111] Schofield, "Approaching Poverty in the Medieval Countryside," 109
[112] Horrox, *The Black Death*, 313-4.
[113] 12 Richard II, c. 3, in *Statutes of the Realm*, 2: 56.
[114] McIntosh, "Local Change," 229.
[115] Christopher Dyer, *Lords and Peasants in a Changing Society: The Estates of the Bishopric of Worchester, 680-1540* (Cambridge: Cambridge Uni. Press, 1980), 368.

Buckinghamshire in 1316: 'It is granted by all the lord's tenants as well free as native that no one of them shall harbour any unknown outsider henceforth under pain of paying 6d. to the lord.'[116]

In the period immediately after the Black Death, the movement of labour began to have a noticeable effect on landholdings. As we have seen in the previous chapter, there was a concern regarding the movement of workers and the issues that this caused for employers who were in desperate need of labour. Phillipp Schofield argues that 'unlicensed departure of villeins from their lords' manors appears to have increased in the second half of the fourteenth century' due to the improved opportunities presented by the population decline.[117] To counter this movement, the Statute of Labourers included a clause that all workers must serve in the summertime in the same place they resided in the winter, ensuring that workers stayed in their vill if there was work available there.[118] This aimed to prevent the movement of labour in the busy agricultural period, where desperate landholders would have been willing to pay much higher wages to ensure their land was cultivated.

Ten years after the implementation of the Statute of Labourers, a Statute from the Parliament of Winchester (1361) reinforced the 1351 Statute. Migrant labourers began to be described as 'utlaie' or outlaw, who were to be arrested and returned to the authorities of their homeland.[119] Illicit migrant labour gained a greater sense of criminality. The punishment for 'fugitive labourers' or those who travelled to another county was severe. These fugitives were to be branded with an 'F' on the forehead so that their falsity would be known to all.[120] The threat of such a severe punishment was tempered by a clause that allowed the Justices themselves to decide whether the branding would take place. However, such a significant punishment must have come from a deep fear of those viewed as shirking their responsibilities in their home vills. Christopher Given-Wilson suggests that this version of the legislation may have reflected the 'problem of demobilised soldiers' as they returned from campaign in France in 1360. Brian Tierney agrees that thousands of soldiers

[116] Ault, *Open-Field Farming*, 88.
[117] Schofield, *Peasant and Community*, 162.
[118] 25 Edward III, Stat. 2, c. 2, in in *Statutes of the Realm*, 1: 312.
[119] 34 Edward III, c. 10, in *Statutes of the Realm*, 1: 367.
[120] Ibid.

would have been discharged after every campaign and it is likely that many would have found it difficult to return to village life.[121] Many of these soldiers would have been convicted criminals pardoned in return for military service. The Statute required Justices of the Peace to 'inquire of all those that have been pillors and robbers in the parts beyond the sea, and be now come again, and go wandering (vagantz), and will not labour as they were wont in times past'.[122] It seems that the inclusion of vagrants in legislation that coincides with the end of campaigns in France is particularly noteworthy. The link between wanderers and violent criminals becomes clearer when these wanderers have just returned from war and are trained in arms and familiar with fighting.

The issue of migrant labour continued to carry similar descriptions to vagrancy in a petition to parliament in 1376. The commons complained that workers were moving to avoid adhering to the labour legislation's contract stipulations and were shifting 'de mestre en mestre' or from master to master. This suggests that the commons perceived labourers as constantly moving, in much the same way as the vagrant.[123] The 1388 Cambridge parliament reissued the labour legislation and amended it, using the word 'vagerant' to further discredit those who moved about the country without the newly required testimonial letters. The legislators of 1388 created a legitimate form of movement. The new stipulations related particularly to the mobility of workers across the country:

> That no Servant nor Labourer, be he man or woman, shall depart at the end of his term out of the Hundred, Rape, or Wapentake where he is dwelling, to serve or dwell elsewhere, or by colour to go from thence on Pilgrimage, unless he bring a letter patent containing the cause of his going, and the time of his return, if he ought to return, under the King's seal.[124]

This restriction would have prevented mobility since labourers would not have had the resources to obtain such a letter. The commons asked that the letters include the name of the worker, the name of his master, the destination where the worker was

[121] Tierney, *Medieval Poor Law*, 112.
[122] 34 Edward III, c. 1, in *Statutes of the Realm*, 1: 364-5.
[123] "Edward III: Parliament of April 1376, Text and Translation," in *PROME*, item 117.
[124] 12 Richard II, c. 3, in *Statutes of the Realm*, 2: 56.

travelling and the cause of his travel.[125] This specificity would have reduced the likelihood of aimless wandering. A person who travelled should have purpose and a set direction. Anyone found 'wandering' or 'vagerant' without a letter patent was to be put in the stocks until surety were found that he would return to whence he came. Travel should be done with purpose, even when travelling legitimately for work. The 1388 legislation made it illegal for anyone to receive a labourer who did not have a testimonial letter or even to shelter a labourer who did have a letter for more than one night. Even if a person had permission to travel for work, they should move efficiently towards their destination and not be found 'wandering'.

While the discussion so far has focused on adults, and to a large extent the experiences of adult males, it is also important to examine how other points in the lifecycle reacted to this constructed image of a diligent worker. Occupation was heavily delineated by a person's position in the life cycle, and those who have not yet entered or have left the world of work were exempt from the expectations of productivity and activity. Work was not a cultural expectation of at least younger children. Children are regularly portrayed at play rather than engaged in work. However, the play of children still has moral parameters within which it should take place. In John Capgrave's *Life of Saint Gilbert of Sempringham*, Gilbert is shown teaching children to be godly and moral through their play: 'Tho childyrn … he tawt for to pley in dew tyme, and here playes taute he þat þei schuld be honest and mery with-outen clamour'. [126] Many literary descriptions of children at play are hagiographical or represent the early stages of Christ's life, such as *Cursor Mundi*, which describes how 'Ihesu sat doun on his play'.[127]

In the morality drama *Mundus et Infans*, Infans introduces himself to Mundus by saying that his mother sometimes calls him 'Dalliance'.[128] Mundus questions the

[125] The court roll for the 1388 Parliament at Cambridge no longer survives but the petitions were transcribed by the Westminster Chronicler. *The Westminster Chronicle 1381-1394*, ed. L. C. Hector and Barbara F. Harvey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 361.
[126] *John Capgrave's Lives of St. Augustine and St. Gilbert of Sempringham: and a Sermon,* ed. J. J. Munro, EETS OS 140 (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., 1987), 64.
[127] *Cursor Mundi (The Cursur o the World). A Northumbrian Poem of the XIVth Century in Four Versions*, ed. Richard Morris, EETS 62, 66, 68. (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1876-7-8), 686.
[128] "Mundus et Infans", in *Three Late Medieval Morality Plays: Mankind, Everyman and Mundus et Infans*, edited by G. A. Lester (London: A&C Black, 1990), 113.

propriety of such a name: 'Dalliance, my sweet child! It is a name that is right wild, For when thou waxest old, It is a name of no substance'. Emily Steiner has gone some way to exploring the legal and rhetorical uses of names in late Medieval England. Steiner's persuasive argument is that as medieval English names tend to be descriptive in nature, whether geographic, of occupation or of family relationships, the use of figurative names, be they delineating social position or vices or virtues for the purpose of satire, continues this descriptive scheme.[129] The descriptions and roles of a child are different from that of an adult. Mundus clothes Infans and renames him 'Wanton in every game' bidding him adieu saying 'Farewell, fair child … / All recklessness is kind for thee'. In doing so Mundus highlights that recklessness is the appropriate behaviour for children. Infans plays boisterous games with his friends, fights aggressively with his siblings and is rude to his parents. He steals fruit from good men's gardens.[130] Boys between the age of seven and fourteen are described in *On the Property of Things* as 'hote and moist of complexioun'.[131] Young boys were notoriously boisterous and difficult to control. The rules of conduct in Westminster Abbey School highlight the constant need to control the boys from their childish activities. The record shows that the boys were forbidden to run, skip, chatter, row (with either a person or an animal) or having anything that could be used to injure another pupil such as a bow or stone.[132] The description of the rules of conduct present young boys as an unruly band of noisy and tempestuous troublemakers.

For Bartholomew the Englishman childhood is a time of free-spiritedness. He describes the characteristics of boys:

> Þan soche children ben neisch [delicate or soft] of fleisch, lethy and pliant of body, abel and liȝt to meuynge, witty to lerne caroles, and wiþoute care and busines and tellen pris onliche of merþe and likynge, and dreden no perile more þan betinge wiþ a ȝerde.[133]

[129] Emily Steiner, "Naming and Allegory in Late Medieval England," in *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 106, no. 2 (Apr., 2007), 260.
[130] "Mundus et Infans," 115-6.
[131] *On the Properties of Things*, 1: 300.
[132] *Chaucer's World*, ed. Edith Rickert, Clair C. Olson and Martin M. Crow (London: Oxford Uni. Press, 1948), 116-7.
[133] *On the Properties of Things*, 1: 301.

The boys are young and able. Their life revolves around frivolity and the learning of songs rather than preparing for occupation in later life. Young boys do not have any responsibilities and therefore have nothing to fear other than being beaten for bad behaviour. They have also not yet reached physical maturity. Their bodies are not yet prepared for adult work or 'not wel endure harde trauaile'.[134] They are described as 'neisch of fleisch' highlighting the soft or delicate nature of their bodies. This means that they are easily injured and their injuries can cause them to be 'ihurt and igreued'. Boys also have difficulty thinking objectively or planning for the future. Their focus is on the present day. These tendencies highlight that boys are not yet ready for the responsibilities of adult life as they do not have the concentration to be successful. While they may not have the capacity and characteristics necessary to be successful in business or in occupation, they are also untainted by the world. They do not crave gold, but instead covet the sweetness of the apple. They have no shame in being naked. These characteristics carry resonances of Adam before the expulsion from the garden of Eden. Like the first man, the child is not needed to work. Instead he is allowed to be joyful and engage with his nature.

Bartholomew's description of the boys relies heavily on their physical condition. Their voices and faces differ from those of men. However, young girls are described differently to boys. The description of girls does not highlight their lack of ability in the working world but instead concentrates on their purity and cleanness. Maidens are described as 'tendre, smal, pliaunt, and faire of disposicioun of body; schamefast, fereful, and mury, touchinge þe affeccioun; delicat in clothinge'.[135] This contrasts sharply with the description of boys, with their lack of tact and of business acumen. Young women are prepared for their future; with their virtuous characteristics they already appeal to men as good wives. They are physically fair and appealing. Women are more delicate with softer hair than men. Their necks and fingers and thinner and longer, their skin whiter than that of men. Their faces are described by Trevisa as 'glad, softe, briȝt, and plesinge'. Girls are similarly engaged in play but their transition into responsibility appears to naturally come earlier than their male counterparts.[136]

[134] Ibid, 1: 301.
[135] *On the Properties of Things*, 1: 301-2.
[136] P. J. P. Goldberg, "Childhood and Gender in Later Medieval England," in *Viator* 39, no. 1 (2008),

This playfulness serves a purpose. Children's play was a formative process. Young children tended to imitate but not participate in their parents' occupations. Danièle Alexandre-Bidon and Didier Lett suggest that children were gradually introduced to the occupations of their parents, first with basic toys to engage in 'playful imitation'.[137] Children would also have accompanied their parents to work so that they could be supervised and later introduced to the family trade.[138] A young boy, aged seven, was killed while playing in 1322. John son of Robert de St. Botulph was playing on a pile of timber when a piece fell on John and broke his leg.[139] The children were playing alone without adult supervision. However, it was John's mother who eventually came to his aid and removed him from the pile of wood. His mother, while not directly supervising him was close enough that the other children chose to go to her rather than another adult in the proximity. Barbara Hanawalt's examination of the coroner's rolls suggests that children were given certain roles which increased in responsibility as they child grew and matured.[140] From the age of four to seven the coroner's rolls suggest that children were not engaging in work, rather they suffered fatal accidents were injured in play.[141] It is between the ages of eight and twelve that children began to perform tasks that were separate from their parents such as herding cattle or sheep. Their responsibility increased and Hanawalt notes that their 'accident pattern' became closer to that of men at work or leisure rather than young boys at play.[142] The same can be said of girls as they became servants or were involved increasingly in the tasks inside and outside of the home such as gathering wood and taking part in the harvest.[143] As children grew older they

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[137] Danièle Alexandre-Bidon and Didier Lett, *Children in the Middle Ages: Fifth-Fifteenth Centuries* (Notre Dame: Uni. of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 75.

[138] Alexandre-Bidon and Lett, *Children in the Middle Ages*, 76.

[139] *Calendar of Coroners Rolls of the City of London A.D. 1300-1378*, ed. Reginald R. Sharpe (London: Clay, 1913), 63.

[140] P. J. P Goldberg has offered a critique of Hanawalt's methodology in Goldberg, "Childhood and Gender," 249-62 and P. J. P. Goldberg, "The Public and The Private: Women in the Pre-Plague Economy," in *Thirteenth Century England III: Proceedings of the Newcastle Upon Tyne Conference 1989*, eds. P. R. Cross and S. D. Loyd (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1991), 75-90.

[141] Barbara A. Hanawalt, "Childrearing Among the Lower Classes of Late Medieval England," in *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 8, no. 1 (Summer, 1977), 16.

[142] Hanawalt, "Childrearing Among the Lower Classes," 19.

[143] Barbara A. Hanawalt, *The Ties That Bound: Peasant Families in Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford Uni. Press, 1986), 183 and Hanawalt, "Childrearing Among the Lower Classes," 19. Chapter

began to develop roles that could define their work and leisure. Before this, however, children are presented as having universal qualities of playfulness.

While childhood can be spent experimenting with play, experiences and action in youth were seen to augment and mould the adolescent into the adult they would one day be. The new balance of work and leisure that these young people employed was based on the rhythms of the working day and week. These rhythms were different from what they had experienced in their childhood. When children entered the working world previously acceptable childish games and play were no longer appropriate. Youth was an important time of occupational development. It was in their youth that boys and girls became apprentices or entered service. However, the many distractions which youth culture placed on the young person can also be seen to have damaged their future prospects in the world of work. Paul Griffiths argues of early-modern 'youth culture' that 'in the world of structured work, youthful conviviality and play was in theory reduced as spare time was limited by the adult timetable and calendar'.[144] The same is likely true of the later Middle Ages. For example, in 1389, William de Tongue of London stipulated in his will that his eldest son should be funded to enter the law when he reached the age of twenty. However, if the son had not prepared himself for this career and 'if he should waste his time aforesaid, or if he should marry foolishly and unsuitably' he was to receive no financial support for his career.[145]

In *Mundus et Infans*, when Wanton reaches the age of fourteen, he returns to Mundus who renames him 'Love-Lust-Liking' for the next seven years of his life. Love-Lust-Liking is a proud character, commenting on his beautiful appearance and 'garments gay'.[146] Love-Lust-Liking lives a life of 'mirth', 'game', and 'revel'. He describes himself as 'fresh as flowers in May'.[147] May is a time particularly associated with youthful love and leisure. Literature of the period attempted to

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11 of *The Ties That Bound* discusses the medieval experiences of childhood in detail and supersedes Hanawalt's 1977 article on a similar subject.

[144] Paul Griffiths, "Youth Culture in Tudor and Stuart England," in *Il Tempo Libero, Economia e Società (Loisirs, Tiempo Libre, Freizeit), Secc. XIII-XVIII: Atti Della 'Ventiseiesima Settimana di Studi' 18-23 Aprile 1994*, ed. Simonetta Cavaciocchi (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1995), 831.

[145] *Chaucer's World*, 111-2.

[146] "Mundus et Infans," 117.

[147] Ibid, 117.

engage youth in active labour and to steer them clear of wasteful idleness. Peter Idley's *Instructions to his Son* warns the eponymous son to 'therfore in youthe leeve thy necligence and thynke on thy daies oolde: after warme youthe cometh age colde'.[148] Avoiding negligence (a branch of sloth) was important not just for the soul but also to prepare for the future. When Love-Lust-Liking reaches twenty-one years old, he returns to Mundus and is renamed Manhood. Mundus implores Manhood to be 'prest (eager) in every game'. At this point Mundus introduces his seven kings, who are named after the seven deadly sins.[149] While up to this point in the poem Mundus' guidance to Infans, Wanton and Love-Lust-Liking has been applicable to their stage in life, once man reaches adulthood, the world's true motives and corrupting influence are unveiled. Manhood, now fully aware of the spiritual danger Mundus poses, accepts his position and welcomes the seven vicious kings into his everyday life. Manhood's understanding of the vicious nature of his activities is clear, and his explicit acceptance of this immorality highlights the ignorance of Infans, Wanton and Love-Lust-Liking. Manhood has reached an age when he should know right from wrong. While the younger characters are merely living life, although sometimes contrary to virtue, they lack the understanding that Manhood has and are therefore less culpable. By the time a man or woman reaches adulthood their roles have, at least in theory, been defined.

While childhood represents a time before roles have been defined, old age is the period when occupation has for the most part been completed. There was no retirement age in late medieval society and voluntary retirement would only have been available to the wealthy.[150] As a person entered what was considered old age they were excused from certain types of work. The Ordinance of Labourers specifies that men and women over sixty years old were not required to work to the terms of the legislation.[151] We have seen in chapter one, how immobility of the elderly was used to symbolise the inactivity of the slothful.[152] Not being able to cultivate land

[148] *Peter Idley's Instructions to his Son*, ed. Charlotte D'Evelyn (London: Oxford Uni. Press, 1935), 81.
[149] "Mundus et Infans," 119.
[150] Joel T. Rosenthal, *Old Age in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: Uni. of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 94.
[151] 23 Edward III, c. 1, in *Statutes of the Realm*, 1: 307.
[152] See pages 61-2

and support oneself through labour in old age was a common problem in late-medieval society. Rather than attempting to struggle against the pressures of age, many tenants set up retirement contracts that allowed a relative or other peasant to use their land in return for support in their old age.[153] For example, two generations of the 'Attetouneshends' of Oakington in Cambridgeshire, passed on their landholding to the next son due to being unable to cultivate the land due to infirmity and old age.[154] To stop working entirely was unlikely to have been an option for the majority of the labouring population. Instead the type of occupation they engaged in likely changed. Their economic role was no longer to support a family, but rather to support and sustain themselves and possibly a spouse.[155] By the time a person reached old age, their former dependants such as children or parents would no longer have depended on them and therefore their necessary productivity would have been reduced.

The early-fourteenth-century poem "An Old Man's Prayer" found in Harley MS2253 is narrated by an old man who laments his current physical, social and spiritual position.[156] The Old Man presents his late years as a time of low social value. He complains that those around him call him 'fulle-flet' [floor filler] and 'waynoun-wayteglede' [good-for-nothing-fire-gazer].[157] This description represents a man who lacks any value to the society of which he is a member. Now he simply sits, as a silent and passive viewer of the society he once participated in. The Old Man describes the sadness of losing his youth: 'Myn herte gyneth to helde; / þat er wes wildest inwiþ walle / nou is under fote yfalle'.[158] The old man who was once determined and free now falls and trips over his own feet. The depression that has settled on him in his old age is evident. The difficulties of age are such that the man actually hopes that death will come sooner rather than later:

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[153] See Elaine Clark, "Some Aspects of Social Security in Medieval England," in *Journal of Family History* 7, no. 4 (1982), 307-20.
[154] M. M. Postan, *Essays on Medieval Agriculture and General Problems of the Medieval Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge Uni. Press, 1973), 115.
[155] Margaret Pelling and Richard M. Smith, "Introduction," in *Life, Death, and the Elderly: Historical Perspectives*, eds. Margaret Pelling and Richard M. Smith (London: Routledge, 1991), 21.
[156] "An Old Man's Prayer," in *The Harley Lyrics: The Middle English Lyrics of M.S. Harley 2253*, ed. G. L. Brook (Manchester: Manchester Uni. Press, 1956), 46-8.
[157] "An Old Man's Prayer," 46. Translated to Modern English in "An Old Man's Prayer," in *The Complete Harley 2253 Manuscript*, ed. Susanna Greer Fein (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2004), line 17.
[158] "An Old Man's Prayer," 46.

Evel ant elde ant other wo
Foleweth me so faste,
Me thunketh myn herte breketh atuo!
Suete God, whi shal hit who?
Hou mai hit lengore laste?[159]

With the physical infirmity of old age both labour and leisure are absent. The Old Man's life lacks purpose, social value or joy. In *Mundus et Infans*, when Manhood transforms into Age, gone is the frivolity and leisure loving nature of manhood. Instead Age is forlorn as he has wasted his life in sinful pursuits. He is ashamed of his younger self's actions: 'For I have falsely me forsworn. / Alas, that I was born! / Body and soul, I am but lorn, / Me liketh neither glee nor game'.[160] Age portrays wanhope, a branch of the sin of sloth. Wanhope and the depression and anxiety that come with it are symptoms of old age. Sadness and woe are the antithesis of merry play and game which is so often coupled with glee: 'ȝe mai mak gamyn & gle'.[161] Leisure and non-work will be discussed in the following chapter.

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This chapter set out to examine how those who did not fit within the model of productive, diligent occupation were perceived by society in late medieval England. It has looked at three groups, the poor, the vagrant and those considered too young or too old to be expected to work. At the centre of this chapter is the distinction between those deserving and undeserving of aid. What articulates deservedness is a person's capability to work. The young, the old and the sick are all deserving of community support because they are physically or mentally incapable of supporting themselves through their own labour. In the case of William Bridsall we saw how his childlike characteristics enhanced his level of deservedness. While I do not think there is evidence to suggest that poverty itself was viewed differently after the plague, it does seem that commentators and legislators on a national and local level

[159] Ibid, 47.
[160] "Mundus et Infans," 151.
[161] We will explore the importance of non-work and leisure in the next chapter. *The Middle English Harrowing of Hell and Gospel of Nicodemus,* ed. W. H. Hulme, EETS ES 100 (London: Oxford Uni. Press, 1908), 99.

felt that there was a need to articulate who should and who should not be in receipt of help from the community. This is particularly evident in the decades immediately following the Black Death, when the shock of socio-economic changes, particularly in the city of London, led to reactive attitudes by both legislators and commentators. Charity was a fundamental article of the Christian faith and there is clear evidence that communities were willing to support their members if they fell on hard times. The critique of idle beggars that comes from the Ordinance and moral commentators is concentrated on the actions of the undeserving poor, not the poor in general.

The understanding of vagrancy also underwent significant changes over the course of the fourteenth century. It began as a loose term, used in reference to those who posed a risk to society through their unfixed position, in terms of both geographical and occupation, in society. After the introduction of the labour legislation, the concept of vagrancy developed to encompass both its original use in respect of urban social disorder and the new dynamic of vagrancy as a specific rebellion against the Statute of Labourers. The lack of fixed definition of vagrancy meant that by the end of the fifteenth century it had become a catch all term for social disruption. The commons petitioned parliament in 1383 asking that the Justices of the Peace diligently ensure that all 'vagarants et faytours … be compelled to find surety for their good behaviour'.[162] Obtaining surety removed the questions of who a person was and what they stood for: were they a good and hardworking person or were they undeserving of the community's hospitality? Those on the margins of society lacked the means to control their own reputation, as it was constructed through the prism of a society that they did not fully participate in. Perhaps the issue of vagrancy was not the bad repute of vagabonds but rather their lack of any reputation. When we see a critique of those without a defined occupation the issue was not necessarily their lack of occupation but how they filled their time. The sin of idleness presented a void that could be filled with either good works or with bad. For example, much of the criticism of William Bridsall revolved not around his poverty but the drunkenness by which he filled his unoccupied time. Nightwalkers and vagrants were dangerous because their nonconformity to social roles was associated with the threat of criminality and violence. Their activities did

[162] "Richard II: Parliament of October 1383: Text and Translation," in *PROME*, item 28.

not fit with the normative goals of society and therefore they could not be viewed as productive. In the eyes of their contemporaries, their activities were idle.

Chapter 5

'When þe game ys best, yt ys tyme to rest': Non-work in Theory and Practice

> And God fulfillide in the seuenthe day his werk that he made; and he restide the seueneth day fro al werk that he hadde fulfillid and he blisside to the seuenthe day, and he halwide it; for in it he had sesyd fro al his werk that God shapide that he shulde make.[1] (Genesis 2:1-3)

According to the Old Testament, after God had spent six days carefully crafting the earth, he stopped and rested from his work. So far the discussion of inactivity in this thesis has centred on the negative perceptions of the concept: it was presented as sinful, lacking in social value, rebellious and dangerous. However, even God designated a day of inactivity, a day distinguished from the other six as not centred on work. This non-work time is the focus of the present chapter. I specifically use the term non-work as leisure or rest are only facets of this concept. By looking more broadly at the concept of non-work in theory and practice, I hope to identify a more objective assessment of how this concept fitted into the broader ideas of activity and inactivity or work and idleness. This chapter seeks to understand how the concept of non-work was viewed in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. If both represented antithesis to work, what distinguished leisure and rest, or non-work, as different from the shunning of work, that is idleness and sloth?

Before I consider the elements that construct non-work in the late medieval period, it is important to give a brief overview of the main approaches to the study of pre-modern leisure to date. There have been a number of influential works on the topic that have concentrated on periodisation, anthropology, economic theories, the

[1] Genesis 2: 1-3 in John Wycliffe, *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments, with Apocryphal Books*, ed. Josiah Forshall and Frederic Madden (Oxford: Oxford Uni. Press, 1850), 81.

activities that characterise the pursuit of leisure, and language. Scholars, even those who have completed considerable work on the medieval period such as John Hatcher, have tended to compare the late medieval period with post-industrial constructions of leisure rather than view it within its own terms.[2] Economist Mark Koyama's discussion of pre-modern leisure and productivity darts from the Black Death to the seventeenth century without any consideration of the economic or social changes within this period.[3] Peter Burke, a historian of the early-modern period, argues that the 'idea of a history of leisure before the industrial revolution is an anachronism'.[4] However, Burke does attempt to go further than simply creating a dichotomy of pre- and post-industrial society. His argument is one of continuity but with increasing levels of 'human agency' in the process of the development of the concept of leisure.[5] He bases this on seven aspects: an increasing focus in literature on the subject of recreation; a growth of treatises that instruct on leisure activities in the early-modern period; leisure activities becoming the focus of paintings and artistic portrayals of life; increasing summer holidays in the country side among the upper orders of society; more organised pastimes in urban centres for those who had time to spare; the 'commercialization' of leisure due to the rise of 'free time among ordinary people'; and finally the growth of reformers of recreational activity.[6] While there is an increase in the speed of change in the early-modern period, many of the changes that Burke notes are already established in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. For example, Jacques Le Goff argues that the delineating of the working day and therefore leisure time began not with industrialisation as Burke argues but with the use of church bells to regulate labour from the early-fourteenth century onward.[7] Also as this chapter will show, there were significant movements to reform leisure pursuits in the medieval England. By concentrating on one period as the most

[2] John Hatcher, "Labour, Leisure and Economic Thought Before the Nineteenth Century," in *Past & Present* 160 (1998), 64-115.
[3] Mark Koyama, "The Price of Time and Labour Supply: From the Black Death to the Industrious Revolution," in *Discussion Papers in Economic and Social History* 78 (2009), 1-45.
[4] Peter Burke, "The Invention of Leisure in Early Modern Europe," in *Past & Present*, No. 146 (Feb., 1995), 137.
[5] Ibid, 144.
[6] Ibid, 144-9.
[7] Jacques Le Goff, *Time, Work and Culture in the Middle Ages*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (London: Uni. of Chicago Press, 1980), 45-6.

formative, scholars have ignored the significance of the concept within the later Middle Ages.

Another approach to the study of leisure in pre-industrial societies has been to utilise anthropology. Keith Thomas has used this method in his discussion of work and leisure, examining these concepts in the Dogon tribes of Sudan.[8] However, it is the anthropological approach of George Foster that has been most influential to the wider view of late medieval leisure.[9] The 'limited good' theory is based on the idea that peasant societies understand concepts (such as love, manliness, and status) and resources (such as land and wealth) to exist in finite amounts. For example, a rise in status of one individual would directly lower the status of another, or a rise in the wealth of one person would be countered by the loss of property of someone else. Social mobility is therefore a valid and direct threat to the rest of society. Foster uses this model to suggest that peasant societies cannot be viewed as productive, as hard work had no benefit to the community nor to the individual, because hard work would reduce the impact of others and disrupts the status quo. They therefore have an intrinsic preference for leisure over labour. When viewed within the findings of the present thesis, Foster's argument is problematic. In some cases there is a finite amount of a certain resource, such as the land within a village; however, this theory relies on the peasant viewing society as self-contained, without any external influences whatsoever. Migration was a characteristic of medieval society even before the Black Death. Thus, this argument is deeply flawed and unrealistic in practice. Foster's model of peasant society is a product of the early 1960s American view of Mexico, where his study was based. His argument is deeply paternalistic and at times condescending.

The third approach used by scholars in their examination of leisure is economic or quantitative. Christopher Dyer has made some 'rough and ready' estimates of how much leisure different levels of peasant society would have been able to engage in.[10] By comparing the number of days of labour needed to sustain

[8] Keith Thomas, "Work and Leisure," in *Past & Present* 29 (1964), 51.
[9] George M. Foster, "Peasant Society and the Image of Limited Good," in *American Anthropologist*, 67, no. 2 (1965), 293-315.
[10] Christopher Dyer, "Leisure Among the Peasantry in the Later Middle Ages," in *Il Tempo Libero, Economia e Società (Loisirs, Tiempo Libre, Freizeit), Secc. XIII-XVIII: Atti Della 'Ventiseiesima*

landholdings of different sizes, Dyer concludes that smallholders, those holding less than five acres, had the greatest level of choice after 1348 as to whether to spend their time working or partaking in leisure. Smallholders would have made up approximately forty percent of the population of England at the time. In fact it was the yardlanders, those who held larger pockets of land – Dyer suggests over ten acres – who were the worst off in terms of free time both before and after the Black Death. After 1348, this group may have been able to buy up cheap land and scale down labour requirements of their cultivation by switching to pastoral rather than arable production. While this would reduce the workdays needed, higher wages meant that hiring external labour was likely kept to a minimum to reduce costs.[11] Therefore, while larger landholders may have noticed little difference in their available leisure time, the majority of agricultural workers would have noticed either increased time or increased wealth to spend on leisure. As we have seen in chapter three, this did not go unnoticed by their social superiors.

Dyer's findings support the theory of a backward bending labour curve, which was briefly discussed in chapter three. Gunnar Persson argues that preference is an essential component in any examination of work and leisure. For Persson, 'a prolonged rise in real wages will therefore ultimately make the marginal dissatisfaction of labour greater than the marginal satisfaction derived from income of labour and demands for a decrease in hours of work will consequently be raised by workers.'[12] If real wages rise faster than the cost of living, labourers can purchase their 'basket of consumables' for a reduced amount of labour.[13] This economic approach to leisure and work states that as wages rise, employees reduce their working hours, preferring an unchanged income and increased leisure over higher income and unchanged leisure time. This creates a backward bending curve and

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Settimana di Studi' 18-23 Aprile 1994, ed. Simonetta Cavaciocchi (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1995), 295. See also Barbara Harvey, "Work and Festa Ferianda in Medieval Europe," in *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 23, no. 4 (1972), 289-308.

[11] Pastoralism also led to some employment of dependable, but inexpensive female servants. See P. J. P. Goldberg, *Women, Work, and Life Cycle in a Medieval Economy: Women in York and Yorkshire* c. *1300-1520* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 140-1.

[12] G. Persson, "Consumption, Labour and Leisure in the Late Middle Ages," in *Manger et Boire au Moyen Age*, ed. Denis Menjot (Nice: Les Belles Lettres, 1984), 213.

[13] The 'basket of consumables' is a framework put forward by E. H. Phelps Brown and Sheila V. Hopkins in "Seven Centuries of Prices of Consumables, Compared with Builders' Wage-Rates," in *Economica* 23, no. 92 (1956), 296-314 .

productivity levels fall. Persson's theory relies heavily on medieval labourers ignoring the constructed values and benefits of occupation constructed in chapter two. However, as discussed in chapter three, there is evidence to support this thesis through the change to shorter-term contracts during the period. Hatcher and Koyama have also found this economic model applicable to the economic and labour changes of the fourteenth century.[14]

Persson states that preference and the satisfaction obtained through consumption 'vary due to differing historical conditions'.[15] Maurice Keen rightly points out a key issue of any consideration of leisure. 'The use of leisure', he argues, is 'substantially affected by individual choice and preference, and that complicates its study'.[16] It would be impossible to assess the leisure preferences of all of medieval society, including all variation and this is not the aim of the present chapter or the thesis as a whole. As preferences are only exercised within a range that is culturally accepted or expected, so personal preference may have little importance as long as we look at collective rather than specifically individual activities. Keen, himself has attempted to assess the nobility's leisure pursuits, highlighting their use as conspicuous leisure. This is another way that historians commonly approach leisure, through an examination of what are considered leisure 'pursuits'. Compton Reeves has put together an informative overview of activities that medieval society may have found pleasurable.[17] His monograph covers literature, music, games and even religious festivals. While the information held within this monograph is useful to the historian and there has been a considerable amount of work put into compiling this thorough collection of medieval 'pastimes', the monograph does little to engage with the concept of leisure in the medieval period. This of course may not be the intention of the author but it does help to highlight the issue that exists with much of the historiography of leisure and non-work activities.

[14] Hatcher, "Labour, Leisure and Economic Thought," 64-115 and Koyama, "The Price of Time and Labour Supply," 1-45.
[15] Persson, "Consumption, Labour and Leisure in the Late Middle Ages," 212.
[16] Maurice Keen, "Nobles' Leisure: Jousting, Hunting and Hawking," in *Il Tempo Libero, Economia e Società (Loisirs, Tiempo Libre, Freizeit), Secc. XIII-XVIII: Atti Della 'Ventiseiesima Settimana di Studi' 18-23 Aprile 1994*, ed. Simonetta Cavaciocchi (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1995), 307.
[17] Compton Reeves, *Pleasures and Pastimes in Medieval England* (Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd, 1995).

As we can see from the summary historiography above, there is a tendency to view leisure or non-work in the form of activities that take place in this time rather than the meanings and values of the concept itself. While economic approaches to non-work are useful and help form an idea of the practicalities of non-work time, I think there is more to be done on examining what non-work meant to contemporaries. Should we understand non-work simply as the absence of work or activity or is there more to this concept? I shall begin this consideration of non-work through an examination of the lexicography of non-work, in line with the methodology outlined in chapter two. Peter Burke attempts to define the concept of leisure by summarising the vocabulary of leisure in major European languages. However, within this approach Burke does not fully grasp what we identified in chapter two as the complexities of language use and the multiplicity of meanings and resonances of words. He writes:

> In medieval and early modern Europe, the concept of "leisure" in its modern sense did not exist. The English word "leisure" like the French *loisir*, often meant "opportunity" or "occasion". Again, the term "sport" did not exist in its precise modern sense.[18]

This simply does not go far enough to interrogate the language of leisure in pre-modern society. Burke chooses words such as recreation and pastime for his consideration and his examples of words that are in use prior to industrialisation tend to be taken from the late seventeenth century. For example, Burke argues that the English word 'pastime' first appears in 1490.[19] To base an argument on the introduction of a modern word at the beginning of the early-modern period does not highlight that the *concept* was only introduced at that time, but rather that our conceptualisation of the topic becomes familiar at that point. To simply look at how a modern vocabulary of leisure was used in the past does not tell us anything of how that period understood the concept. Without an idea of Burke's methodology for how he chose which words to consider it is difficult to put much credence in his hypothesis.

[18] Burke, "The Invention of Leisure in Early Modern Europe," 139.
[19] Ibid, 142.

Joan-Lluís Marfany has written a clear response to Burke highlighting the main issues with his hypothesis:

> That the concept of 'leisure' in its modern sense was lacking is neither here nor there. The objects and actions thus conceptualized may have manifested themselves in a different way, or ways, as 'ease', 'solace', 'pleasure', 'play' and 'sport', singly or severally.[20]

This chapter will go some way to support Marfany's appraisal of the issues of Burke's approach to the concept of leisure, for at least late medieval society. Just as for sloth, idleness and work, leisure or non-work must be examined within the context of the period. For my own examination of the vocabulary of non-work, I have chosen four root words whose use revolves around this concept: *leiser*, *reste*, *ese* and *slep*.[21] *Leiser*, derived from Old French, was not a commonly used word in Middle English writing. The *OED*'s first entry is from Robert Mannyng's *Handlyng Synne* in 1303.[22] While *leiser* only comes into use in the fourteenth century, *reste*, *slep* (both Germanic in origin) and *ese* (also deriving from Old French) are documented in the *MED* as dating from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries onwards.[23] These four words regularly appear together and carry shared meanings: opportunity, consideration, recovery, ceasing activity, reward and slowness.

The main usage of *leiser* in this period relates to time. The word generally denotes allowance of time such as in 'leiser longe' or 'no leyser moore to seye'.[24] However, usages are further nuanced around this central idea. *Leiser* is repeatedly used in reference to free time away from other duties and an opportune time or chance. *Mandeville's Travels* (*c*. 1360) uses *leiser* in this way: 'I … saw all þis …

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[20] Joan-Lluís Marfany, "The Invention of Leisure in Early Modern Europe," in *Past & Present* 156 (1997), 174.

[21] The root word *leiser* includes leiser (n.) and leiserful (adj.). The root word *reste* includes reste (n.), resteien (v.), resteinen (v.), resten (v.), restere (n.), restful (adj.), restfulli (adv.), restfulnesse (n.), resti (adj.), restif (adj.), resting(e) (ger.), restingli (adv.). The root word *slep* includes slep (n.), slepeli (adv.), slepen (v.), slepere (n.), slepful (adj.), slepi (adj.), slepinge (ger), slepingenes (n.), slepingli (adv.), sleples (adj.), and sleppen (v.).

[22] *Oxford English Dictionary*. Digital Edition at < http://www.oed.com/>, s.v. "leisure (n.)" and *Middle English Dictionary*. 24 vols. (Ann Arbor: Uni. of Michigan Press, 1952-2001) Digital Edition at <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/>, s.v. "leiser (n.)".

[23] *OED*, s.v. "leisure (n.)".

[24] *Lydgate's Troy Book: A.D. 1412-80*, ed. Henry Bergen, EETS ES 103 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1908), 480 and Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Franklin's Tale," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 181.

and mykill mare þan I hafe layser for to tell'.[25] Peter Idley, in his *Instruction to his Son* (*c*. 1445-50) advises his son to 'not tabide thyn enemys leisoure' and to strike when he has his own opportunity.[26] It is used in relation to a chance of acting in a moment. John Lydgate in the *Fall of Princes* (*c*. 1435) recalls how the Greeks 'a leiseer did espie' to attack their enemies.[27] Many of the examples of this usage relate to the opportunity to attack or evade attack. Another similar meaning that is quite common is allowing time for consideration and deliberation. Alain Chartier in a *c*. 1475 Middle English translation of *Le Traite de l'Esperance* suggests the reader: 'take thi leiser to reede Seneck and the tragedyes that benne in the booke of Iohn Bocasse'. [28] Chartier may be inviting the listener to read these books with consideration or to do so when they next have an opportunity. Indeed John Lydgate's *The Moralite of the Hors, the Goose and the Sheepe* (*c*. 1475) argues that matters need leisure in order to come to an intelligent end.[29] *Leiser* allows for knowledge and strength, both resoundingly positive attributes. It is 'good leiser'.[30] Time may pass but it enables productivity and righteousness in future pursuits.

In chapter three we saw the importance of the exertion of energy as a meaning for the vocabulary of activity and occupation. This exertion allowed tasks to be performed but it also left the body tired and drained, contributing to the punishing and post-lapsarian resonance of the lexicon. The vocabulary of non-work provides the counter to this exertion by offering recovery and rejuvenation. *Leiser* is used to represent the slow passing of time in which one may heal, prepare or recoup in some way. In the devotional lyric *ABC Hymn to the Virgin* (*c*. 1450) the speaker asks for 'a daye, laysur and respyte or þat y goo, / So me to arme ayens my mortall foo'.[31] *Leiser* is needed to 'recure'.[32] *Reste* is employed similarly. According to

[25] cited in *MED*, s.v. "leiser (n.)".
[26] *Peter Idley's Instructions to His Son*, ed. Charlotte D'Evelyn (London: Oxford Uni. Press, 1935), 82.
[27] *Lydgate's Fall of Princes*, ed. Henry Bergen, EETS ES 123 (London: Oxford Uni. Press, 1924), 992.
[28] *Fifteenth-Century English Translations of Alain Chartier's Le Traité de l'Esperance and Le Quadrilogue Invectif*, ed. Margaret S. Blayney, EETS OS 270 (London: Oxford Uni. Press, 1974), 106.
[29] *Lydgate's Horse, Goose and Sheep*, ed. M. Degenhart (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1900), 76.
[30] *Lydgate's Fall of Princes*, ed. Henry Bergen, EETS ES 121 (London: Oxford Uni. Press, 1924), 7.
[31] *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen 131*, ed. Alois Brandl and Heinrich Morf (Berlin: Druck und Verlag von George Westermann, 1913), 54.

John Trevisa's translation of *On the Property of Things*, 'reste is cesinge of businesse and of trauaille'. It is necessary for the human body as without ceasing work 'noþing duriþ fynaliche, for what lackeþ rest amongwhiles is nouȝt durable'.[33] *Reste* can refer to the provision of physical support for even an inanimate object such as a piece of timber for a roof: 'That William Selby hafe rowme and space abouen on the walle of stane to hys tenement ward to ryste hys tymbre apon'.[34] *Reste* is supportive; it sustains and nourishes the body.

Ese carries a slightly different meaning than *slep*, *rest* and *leisir*. In particular, it lacks the resonance of support present in the rest of the lexicon. Instead it is used to refer to the accommodation or fulfilment of needs of a person or animal. For example, the romance *Ywain and Gawain* (*c*. 1425) uses *ese* in this way: 'Ful gladly wil i ese þe / Until þat þou amended be'.[35] Rather than directly repairing the body, *ese* is a facilitation for that rest and recuperation to take place. In Mandeville's Travels stables are described as an 'esement': 'Þer er no stablez ne esement for horsez, of mete ne of drynk'.[36] However, the noun 'esement' also had a very specific legal meaning in Middle English. The *MED* defines it as 'the right or privilege of using something not ones own'.[37] For example, an indenture of 1429 between the Prior of Durham and Thomas Atkynson and his wife states that 'Yt es accordit that the sayd Thomas and his wyfe … sall have resonable esement of fewell of fallyn and dede wod'.[38] This stipulation is clear that the resource does not belong to the subject and that they merely have use of it with permission from the rightful owner. This legal agreement allowed Thomas and his household the right to make use of the resources of woods in which they were living. The terms of this agreement specified such uses as gathering wood for fuel or using the timber to build and repair

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[32] *Lydgate's Troy Book*, 500.
[33] *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus De Proprietatibus Rerum: A Critical Text*, eds. M. C. Seymour et al. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 1:340.
[34] *A Volume of English Miscellanies Illustrating the History and Language of the Northern Counties of England*, ed. J. Raine, Surtees Society 85 (Edinburgh: Blackwood & Sons, 1890), 17.
[35] *Ywain and Gawain mit Einleitung und Anmerkungen*, ed. Gustav Schleich (Oppeln: E. Franck, 1887), 47.
[36] *The Buke of John Mandeuill, Being the Travels of Sir John Mandeville, Knight, 1322-1356: A Hitherto Unpublished English Version from the Unique Copy (Egerton MS 1982) in the British Museum*, ed. George Warner (Westminster: Nichols & Sons, 1889), 30.
[37] *MED*, s.v. "esement (n.)".
[38] *The Correspondence, Inventories, Account Rolls, and Law Proceedings of the Priory of Coldingham*, ed. James Raine (London: J. B. Nichols and Son, 1841), 104.

houses on the land. These specificities were important as it was the Prior who owned the resources that Thomas had permission to use within certain constraints. His 'esement' was controlled.

Slep is also associated with physical nourishment. It is natural and essential for living. Adjectival and adverbial forms of *slep*, viz. slepi, slepful, slepingli and slepeli, tend to refer to a person lacking this nourishment of their body. *Slep* occurs when the body is drained of resources and therefore needed to recuperate. John Trevisa describes sleep as 'profitable' as it 'restoreþ hem to here myȝt and vertues'.[39] It is part of the essential processes of man's survival.[40] In the prologue to *The Master of Game*, a treatise on hunting written at the beginning of the fifteenth century, sleep is highlighted as important part of the hunt. After the hunt has been completed and the post-hunt activities finished, the hunter is so tired that he is unable to think of temptations or sinful activities: 'and when he has come home, should he less think to do evil, for he hath enough to do to think of his supper, and to ease himself and his horse, and to sleep, and to take his rest, for he is weary'.[41] He requires ease, rest and sleep after the activity of the day.

Another common meaning that is shared across the lexicon is to cease activity or to step back from occupation. *Leiser* is used to represent time free from other activities or unoccupied time. This usage is usually phrased 'at leyser'.[42] It has greater associations with complete inactivity than the usages above. It is regularly used as a warning for the dangers of inactivity such as in *Destruction of Troy* where 'þai hade laisure at lust'.[43] As we saw in chapter one, inactivity was portrayed as a space for lust and sinful behaviour. A stepping back from occupation is also a prominent meaning of *reste*. This is used to refer to all types of activity and for all levels of society. Furthermore *reste* denotes the action of stopping something or an agent in the process of stopping or being stopped. Therefore for something to be

[39] *On the Properties of Things*, 333.
[40] Ibid, 320.
[41] *The Master of Game by Edward, Second Duke of York: The Oldest English Book on Hunting*, ed. W. M. A. and F. Baille-Grohman (London: Chatto and Windus, 1909), 7-8.
[42] "The Clerks Tale," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 141.
[43] *The 'Gest Hystoriale' of the Destruction of Troy: An Alliterative Romance Translated from Guido de Colonna's 'Hystoria Troiana'*, eds. Geo A. Panton and David Donaldson, EETS OS 39, 56 (London: N. Trübner & Co., 1869 and 1874), 102.

considered *reste* there must have been some level of prior movement. We also see *reste* coupled with moving as an opposing state, for example, 'in moevinges or in restis'.[44] Similarly, *slep* is a passive activity and is regularly used to represent inactivity. The most common of these usages refer to the physical unconscious state of the sleeper. This unconscious state can refer to an absence of feeling, rest, and even death but they all relate to the sleeper being inactive or still. However, unlike in respect of idleness, this passivity is not inherently negative. In Trevisa's *On the Property of Things*, sleep is defined as 'a kyndeliche vnfelingenesse comyn to þe body and to þe soule'.[45] Trevisa, early in his discussion of *slep* specifically highlights that *slep* relieves rather than deprives: 'For priuacioun destroieþ vertues and þinges of kynde, but slepe helpiþ and comfortiþ kinde, and is kyndeliche as wakinge is kindeliche also'.[46] This is further substantiated by the meaning 'to lack feeling'.

The dominant meaning of ease is not passivity but rather gentleness or pacification. *Ese* is used as an adjective to highlight a person's gentle nature. For example, in *The Book of Margery Kempe,* Margery's husband is described as 'evyr a good man and an esy man to hir'.[47] The *Promptorium Parvulorum* connects *ese* with a sense of calm or 'tranquillus'.[48] Similarly, *ese* denotes slowness rather than stopping, in particular in relation to movement such as an easy pace. The *Catholicon Anglicum* refers to *ese* within this context: 'Esy of gate: gracilis'.[49] *Ese* also denotes a similar sense of comfort. The will of John Falstaff written in 1459 requests that 'a competent and an esy dwellynge place' be provided as part of a college which was to be endowed in his name.[50] A Middle English translation of Lanfranc's *Art of Surgery* advises that those with a head wound 'reste & dwelle in stillenes & haue an esy bed & a soft'.[51] This comfort can also be internal with the verb *esen* meaning to soothe.

[44] *Secretum Secretorum: Nine English Versions*, ed. M. A. Manzalaoui, EETS OS 276 (Oxford: Oxford Uni. Press, 1977), 223.
[45] *On the Properties of Things*, 331.
[46] Ibid, 331.
[47] *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Barry Windeatt (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), 103.
[48] *The Promptorium Parvulorum: The First English-Latin Dictionary c. 1440 A.D.*, ed. A. L. Mayhew, EETS ES 102 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1908), 143.
[49] *Catholicon Anglicum: An English-Latin Wordbook, Dated 1483*, ed. Sidney J. H. Herrtage, EETS OS 75 (London: N. Trübner & Co., 1881), 117.
[50] *The Paston Letters 1422-1509*, ed. James Gairdner (London: Catto & Windus, 1904), 3: 148
[51] *Lanfrank's "Science of Cirurgie",* ed. Robert V. Fleischhacker, *EETS* OS 102 (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1894), 16.

For example, Chaucer writes in *Troilus and Criseyde* that 'they that han ben aldermost in wo, / With love han ben comforted moost and esed'.[52] Ese is placed as the counter to 'wo' or 'destresse'.[53]

As we have seen above there is a biblical precedent for *reste*. In Genesis, after creating the world, God used the seventh day as a celebration of his creation: 'Þe seueþe day he hadde reste of al þat he hadde er ydo'.[54] *Reste* is presented in Middle English as a reward for hard work completed. It was also used to represent freedom from danger, release from burden or ease, comfort and tranquillity. *Reste* is coupled with peace: 'pees and reste in erthe'.[55] Cities 'reste wyþoute werre'.[56] Souls in heaven are regularly described as 'at reste'.[57] According to John Trevisa, the prestige and value of *reste* is greater than the act of working: 'Therefore al þat is ordeyned to reste by kynde is acountid more nobil and more worthi whanne it is fynalliche in reste þan it is whanne it is in meuynge, as þe ende is more worthi þan þinges þat beeþ oredeyned for þe ende'.[58] *Reste* in this context is the exact opposite of the unproductive idleness. It holds value and purpose.

Even with all these positive associations, non-work can be dangerous if not engaged with correctly. We have seen in chapter one the associations with *slep* and with sluggishness, a branch of sloth. While sleep is an essential part of life, there are dangers to sleeping for longer than a person needs. Trevisa suggests that 'leiþ him doun to slepe his purpos is to rise sone'.[59] Overindulgence in *slep* is a sin. We also see a similar negative use of rest in the fifteenth-century Middle English interlude, *Mundus et Infans*. When the character Manhood meets the personified Conscience he becomes fully aware of the damage his frivolous and idle actions have caused: 'Say, Conscience, of the king of Sloth; He hath behight [promised] me mickle

[52] "Troilus and Criseyde," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 479.
[53] Ibid, 537.
[54] *The Southern Passion: From Pepsian MS. 2344* in the Library of Magdalene College, Cambridge, ed. Beatrice Daw Brown, EETS OS 169 (London: Oxford Uni. Press, 1927), 64.
[55] "The Parson's Tale," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 314.
[56] *Arthur: A Short Sketch of his Life and History in English Verse of the First Half of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall, EETS OS 2 (London: N. Trübner &Co., 1864), 3.
[57] "The Merchant's Tale," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 157.
[58] *On the Properties of Things*, 340.
[59] Ibid, 334.

[much] troth; And I may not forsake him for ruth, For with him I think to rest'.[60] Sloth is personified as a person who aids in 'rest'. Rest has the potential to be slothful and dangerous. The fifteenth-century poem *How the Wise Man Taught his Son* comments specifically of the need to avoid idleness and rest:

> Be waar of reste and ydilnesse,
> Whiche þingis norischen slouþe,
> And euere be bisi more or lesse,
> It is a ful good signe of trouþe.[61]

The son is warned to beware of rest and idleness as they will nourish sinful behaviour. The father in the poem advises the son always to be busy 'more or lesse'. The father does not implore the son to work constantly or to ensure he is always engaged with his occupation. There is an allowance made for non-busyness or leisure. Rest and leisure walk a fine line in a world that demands productivity but values the importance of balance.

Moderation is key in the concept of non-work. Non-work nourishes and replenishes the body, similarly to food. However, over-eating or drinking is not helpful to the body and leads to humoral imbalance. By engaging in this superfluity of good, the character of Idleness in the fifteenth-century interlude *Occupation and Idleness*, highlights the dangers of superfluous leisure as it leaves time to further engage in eating and drinking, which will worsen a person's condition. Idleness spends his time not at work but excessively eating at the cook's and drinking in the alehouse.[62] This image of eating and drinking is repeated throughout the play as Idleness introduces himself to the audience with a description of his character: 'For Y have good mete and drynke; Whan Y am ful Y wyl wynke'.[63] Idleness is in a cycle of eating and drinking and sleeping. These are all integral parts of life, however, Idleness does not balance these with labour. There is nothing to be refreshed from. In order to reap the benefits of non-work, a person must engage in labour or activity. *Reste*, like all essential components of life should be taken in

[60] *Three Late Medieval Morality Plays: Mankind, Everyman and Mundus et Infans*, ed. G. A. Lester (London: A&C Black, 1990), 128.
[61] "How the Wise Man Taught his Son," in *The Babees Book*, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall, EETS OS 32 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), 49.
[62] Brian S. Lee, "Occupation and Idleness," in *Medieval Literature for Children*, ed. Daniel T. Kline (London: Routledge, 2003), 22.
[63] Ibid, 17.

moderation. It similarly denotes the rancidity that occurs when the meat has not been used. Recipes recommend curing meat to prevent it from 'restyng' or going rancid: 'For to kepe venisoun fro restyng, tak venisoun wan yt ys newe & cuuer it hastely wyþ fern'.[64] Too much *reste* without a balance of productivity and exertion causes degeneration rather than recuperation.

By an examination of these four concepts – *leiser*, *reste*, *ese* and *slep* – a conceptual picture of the medieval view of non-work begins to emerge. All of these concepts are used to refer to activities carried out when a person has set aside their occupation. The body requires periods of non-work. *Reste* and *slep* are both linked with nourishment and repair. It is integral to survival and as such non-work holds a socio-economic and spiritual value. From these examples, we can see that non-work could signify many things in late medieval society. While idleness means emptiness and a lack of productivity, non-work is for the most part productive, whether performed actively or passively such as *leiser* spent reading or contemplating. It is time spent on something that is deliberate, thoughtful and serves a purpose such as a rest or rejuvenation after activity or slow and careful mental contemplation. True non-work involves moderation and self-control in order to avoid indulgence. This conceptual and theoretical view of non-work is centred on the requirements of the physical body. It applies universally to all social groups and genders. However, if we introduce pursuits to our discussion of non-work, this universality quickly dissipates. In order to grasp how leisure pursuits differ from the concept of non-work, I will begin by examining the uses of *game* and *pleie*, the Middle English root word of play. These two words regularly appear in Middle English discussions of non-work activities.

Performance and entertainment are also very common uses of *pleie* in Middle English. The performance of musical instruments, dancing and theatre all feature regularly within the examples of the root word in the *MED*. *Pleie* was also used to represent actions, deeds or behaviours but without the resonance of entertainment. The *c*. 1325 poem *'Ne mai no lewed…'*, represents *pleie* as acting in a certain way or

[64] *Curye on Inglysch*, eds. Constance B. Hieatt and Sharon Butler, EETS SS 8 (London: Oxford Uni. Press, 1985), 73.

performing a role, whether that be in earnest or in jest: 'y pleide at bisshopes plee'.[65] By playing a part in society a person acts out the socially defined roles, duties and activities of that position. *Piers Plowman* similarly uses *pleie* to denote work: 'Eche man to pleye with a plow, pykoise, or spade'.[66] *Pleie* like work, leisure and rest is suited to a person's position and role in society. It is performed within set social parameters.

Game is used more generally as a situation or activity. In the *Assembly of Gods*, *game* is used to represent the way in which actions happen: 'I see well howe the game gooth'.[67] *Game* is also used to describe a story to be told: 'I wol yow of a somnour telle a game'.[68] Perhaps it is the association of *game* with the unstructured and endless possibilities that is represented here. In games of chance and competitions the winner cannot be foretold for certain and within the revelry and joy there is an inevitable disorder and lack of control. A person may attempt predictions and by doing so participates in the *game* itself. Chaucer raises this idea in *Troilus and Criseyde*: 'For the have I bigonne a gamen pleye / Which that I nevere do shal eft for other'.[69] The *game* now begun cannot be predicted: it involves external influences out of the speakers control and is therefore dangerous. In the *Romance of the Rose* the situation is deemed so desperate that it would lead to the narrator's demise: 'This game wole brynge me to my deeth'.[70] *Game* becomes a euphemism for precarious activities and situations.

The most prominent sense of these two words is merriment as opposed to denoting particular activities. They both have connections with 'joye' and 'solas'.[71] It is seen as a heavenly state with the A-text of *Piers Plowman* placing *pleie* within

[65] "Satire on the Consistory Courts, 1307," in *Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, ed. Rossell Hope Robbins (New York: Columbia Uni. Press, 1959), 27.
[66] William Langland, *Piers Plowman: A Parallel-Text Edition of the A, B, C and Z Versions*, ed. A. V. C. Schmidt (London: Longman, 1995), 1: B: 136.
[67] *The Assembly of Gods: Or The Accord of Reason and Sensuality in the Fear of Death,* ed. Oscar Lovell Triggs (Chicago: Chicago Uni. Press, 1895), 13.
[68] "The Friar's Prologue," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 122.
[69] "Troilus and Criseyde," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 517.
[70] Ibid, 733.
[71] *The Early South-English Legendary or Lives of Saints*, ed. Carl Horstmann, EETS OS 87 (London: N. Trübner & Co., 1887), 89 and "Sir Launfal," in *The Middle English Breton Lays*, eds. Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), line 612.

the joy and ecstasy of heaven: 'Þat þi play be plentevous in paradys with aungelys'.[72] This is repeated in *The Seven Sages of Rome* where a lady is described as destined either to pain or to *pleie* after death: 'of hir no more I tell, / Whether scho past to pyne or play'.[73] *Game* and *pleie* are often paired together such as in the Middle English legend *Barlaam and Josaphat* (*c*. 1330): 'He made good chere & pleyid & gamyd'.[74] The most common use of *game* in Middle English refers to a joke, jest or words or actions that are considered lighthearted. In the biblical poem *Jacob and Joseph* (*c*. 1300) there is a direct link with the concept of a humorous joke: 'his breþren lawȝeþ loude; þat gamen hem þinkeþ god'.[75] A *game* is appreciated and enjoyed away from serious matters. It is commonly used as 'spake in game' where the words are not to be taken seriously or are said somewhat in jest.[76] In the romance *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer makes a contrast 'bitwixen game and ernest'.[77] *Game* is also used to describe the playing of games by both children and adults. These are more structured than the usages of *game* above and tend to deal with particular pursuits and activities. *The Destruction of Troy* lists some of these as 'the chekker … the draghtes, the dyse, and oþer dregh gaumes'.[78]

As we have seen in the discussions of *pleie* and *game*, non-work can be both light-hearted and enjoyable. This is the exact opposite to the depictions of labour as difficult and painful that we have examined in chapter two. *Pleie* and *game* are the opposite to work. Both can refer to structured pursuits but they also carry a sense of uncontrollable merriment, which poses a risk of rebelliousness and disruption. *Game* is associated with idleness in *Ayenbite of Inwyt*: 'Al þane time þet þou bezest in fole gemenes, in ydelnesse ... þou his lyest'.[79] Specific *games* are not mentioned and therefore it is likely the author refers more generally to the festivity and revelry

[72] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 1: A: 449.
[73] *The Seven Sages of Rome,* ed. K. Campbell (London: Ginn & Co., 1907), 1.
[74] *Altenglische Legenden*, ed. Carl Horstmann (Paderborn: Druck und Verlag von Ferdinand Schöningh, 1875), 120.
[75] *Iacob and Iosep: A Middle English Poem of the Thirteenth Century,* ed. A. S. Napier (Oxford: Clarendom Press, 1916), 4.
[76] "Sultan of Babylon," in *Three Middle English Charlemagne Romances*, ed. Alan Lupack (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1990), 57.
[77] "Troilus and Criseyde," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 517.
[78] *The 'Gest Hystoriale,'* 54.
[79] *Dan Michel's Ayenbite of Inwyt or Remorse of Conscience in the Kentish Dialect, 1340 A.D.*, ed. Richard Morris, EETS OS 23 (London: Trübner, 1866), 36.

outside one's social role, which we have seen in the usage of idleness. This merriment is more likely to result in a lack of restraint and self-control that I noted above as being essential to permissible non-work. A popular proverb goes 'When þe game ys best, yt ys tyme to rest'.[80] Like the theoretical conception of non-work, self-control and moderation are paramount to prevent the negative associations of *game*.

The major difference in these two vocabulary groups – theory and pursuits – is the emotive nature of non-work activities. The theoretical meanings of non-work are universal but also somewhat sterile. *Leiser*, *ese*, *reste*, and *slep* nurture the physical body but do not care for the mind. *Game* and *pleie* on the other hand, are steeped in a resonance of merriment and positive energy. A Middle English translation of Christine de Pisan's *Livre du Corps de Policie* highlights the need to allow one's spirit to recover from work and difficulty: 'The remedie of that trauaylle is for to reioyse his spryte with som goodly pley and disporte'.[81] While this is written for an audience in the higher echelons of society, it speaks to the souls of all men. The significant caveat of this sentence is that the *pleie* and disport must be 'goodly'. How this good or godly *pleie* is constituted will be explored below.

The importance of moderation that is prevalent in the constructed ideas associated with non-work can be examined within society. The contemporary determinations of appropriate non-work pursuits revolve around two main areas: delineated non-work time and social position. While we have seen above how the concept of non-work functions as a balance to the exertion of labour, in practice it was difficult to establish this equilibrium between leisure and work. Mavis Mate argues that the differentiation between work and leisure in the Middle Ages was 'extremely fluid', an argument shared by Keith Thomas.[82] For instance, hunting was an integral symbolic part of the nobility's role in society but it was also an enjoyable activity. Mate highlights women talking at their market stalls as they waited for customers as an activity that is not easily delineated as work or leisure.[83] Scholars

[80] Sanford B. Meech, "A Collection of Proverbs in Rawlinson MS D 328," in *Modern Philology* 38, no. 2 (1940), 120.
[81] *The Middle English Translation of Christine De Pisan's Livre Du Corps De Policie*, ed. Diane Bornstein (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1977), 176.
[82] Mavis Mate, "Work and Leisure," in *A Social History of England, 1200-1500*, eds. Rosemary Horrox and W. M. Ormrod (Cambridge: Cambridge Uni. Press, 2006), 227.
[83] Ibid, 277.

and clerics were supposed to use their leisure time in order to produce something useful and of value, such as copying or writing.[84] Where does work end and leisure begin? There are no hard and fast rules relating to two such malleable concepts. We have seen this in how work could be defined and constructed in chapter two.

A phrase that reoccurs regularly in the historiography of medieval work and leisure is 'enforced idleness'.[85] This phrase is used to refer to the time periods where medieval workers were unable to carry out their work due to quiet points in the agricultural calendar, bad weather or most commonly, the prohibition of certain types of labour on holy days and festivals. From the time of the conversion of Rome to Christianity, Sundays have been regarded as a day free from work.[86] Over time the number of days that people were required to lay down their tools and concentrate on their piety was expanded to include Christmas, Easter and a range of saints' days and holy festivals. Barbara Harvey has found that the number of feasts that required labour to cease differed from bishopric to bishopric. This could be anywhere between approximately thirty-five and fifty.[87] The number of prescribed non-work days based on devotional observance is the central part of Peter Burke's argument that leisure did not exist before the early-modern period. Instead Burke sees this as 'festival culture' based on ritual rather than true 'leisure'.[88]

Holidays or holy days were times when it was permissible to relax and take advantage of extended non-work opportunities. As it was forbidden to engage in secular work on feast days, once the day's devotional obligations had been completed many used the day to partake in social non-work pursuits. For example, in the University of Oxford, students were permitted to linger after meals on feast days, while normally they were required to return immediately to their studies.[89] In *Sir*

[84] Gregory M. Sadlek, "Otium, Negotium, and the Fear of Acedia in the Writings of England's Late Medieval Ricardian Poets," in *Idleness, Indolence and Leisure in English Literature*, eds. Monika Fludernik and Miriam Nandi (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 18.
[85] Dyer, "Leisure Among the Peasantry," 292.
[86] Harvey, "Work and Festa Ferianda in Medieval Europe," 289.
[87] Christopher Dyer in his calculations of peasant leisure and labour averages the number of feast days which would have been adhered to as approximately forty. Dyer, "Leisure Among the Peasantry," 295. See also Harvey, "Work and Festa Ferianda in Medieval Europe," 289-308.
[88] Burke, "The Invention of Leisure," 138.
[89] *Chaucer's World*, eds. Edith Rickert, Clair C. Olson and Martin M. Crow (London: Oxford Uni. Press, 1948), 129.

Gawain and the Green Knight, after interrupting Arthur's feast the Green Knight says he does not want a battle but instead asks for a Christmas amusement: 'I craue in þis court a crystemas gomen'.[90] On the Feast of St Lawrence in 1337, the entire family of Walter de Mordone went out after dinner to play in the fields.[91] The exact nature of their activities is not given but it is clear that all members of the house took part. The two boys who remained behind to guard the house were injured when their game of wrestling took a nasty turn and one of them was left with a stab wound. It was common for the fields around urban areas to be used for communal games or archery practice. In 1339, a man was found dead near the field where archery practice was held after being hit by a stray arrow the day after the feast of St. Edward the Martyr.[92]

Musical and dramatic performances would also have been a popular form of entertainment on holy days. The *Promptorium Parvulorum* (mid-fifteenth century) sums up some of the types of a dramatic performance at this time: 'Pley, or somyr game: Spectaculum. Pley þat begynnythe wythe myrthe and endythe wythe sorowe: Tragedia. Pley þat begynnythe wythe sorow and endythe wythe myrthe: Comedia'.[93] Performances could be devotional and biblical in content or based on folk traditions. The majority of the performances had some moral instruction even if they also entertained the audience with ribaldry. *The Castle of Perseverance* concludes its dramatisation against the sinful life with 'Þus endyth oure gamys'.[94] While the subject is not joyful, the medium in which it is presented is entertaining and therefore it can be considered game. The *Ludus Coventriae* highlights that plays were put on in order to entertain: 'We purpose us pertly stylle in þis prese / þe pepyl to plese with pleys ful glad'.[95]

[90] *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, Cleanness, Patience*, ed. J. J. Anderson (London: J. M. Dent, 1996), 179.
[91] *Calendar of Coroners Rolls of the City of London A.D. 1300-1378*, ed. Reginald R. Sharpe, (London: Clay, 1913), 196.
[92] *Calendar of Coroners Rolls*, 213.
[93] *The Promptorium Parvulorum*, 404.
[94] *The Macro Plays: The Castle of Perseverance, Wisdom and Mankind,* ed. Mark Eccles, EETS OS 262 (London: Oxford Uni. Press, 1969), 111.
[95] *Ludus Coventriae or the Plaie Called Corpus Christi*, ed. Katherine S. Block, EETS ES 120 (London: Oxford Uni. Press, 1961), 1.

Holy days and feasts are examples of prescribed and structured non-work time. However, how society used these periods of non-work and whether they exercised moderation and balance was a serious topic for moral commentators of the period. The majority of sources that mention non-work pursuits are inherently concentrating on the negative aspects of these activities. While festivals provided a delineated time for non-work frivolity, the inclusion of devotional activities was required also, in much the same way as labour was necessary for rest as discussed above. In *Piers Plowman*, the personified vice Gluttony lists all the people he meets in the alehouse. There are a variety of individuals present from prostitutes, to craftspeople, to agricultural workers and servants from all across the social spectrum.[96] Gluttony spends his day in the alehouse. He hears church bells call parishioners to evensong but he remains drinking and gaming with his fellow revellers. While his actions directly disregard the church and its call to prayer, his idea of time passing is framed in religious imagery: He 'pissed a potel in a Paternoster while'.[97] He is aware of his religious duties but he disregards them for leisure and frivolity. This overindulgence in ale brings on slothfulness as he is put to bed by his wife: 'And after al þis excesse he had an accidie, / That he sleep Saterday and Sonday, till sonne yede to reste'.[98] Gluttony loses two days of productivity to both the secular and spiritual worlds due to his unruly leisure. Overindulging in what could be nourishment for the body mirrors the images we have seen in connection with rest and sleep. The tavern is a place where the boundaries of leisure and idleness are difficult not just to establish but also to control. While festivities and non-work pursuits seem to be an inherent characteristic of medieval life, there is an increasing attempt to structure and restrain these pursuits within moral and legal discourse, similar to the structures put in place in the second half of the fourteenth century to control labour practices.

As discussed above, holy days were to be spent in devotion to God and many medieval moral writers entreated the lay population to spend holy days, including Sundays, at prayer and devotion rather than temporal activities. In *Mundus et Infans*,

[96] Langland, *Piers Plowman*, 1: B: 220-4.
[97] Ibid, 1: B: 226.
[98] Ibid, 1: B: 228.

Conscience implores Manhood to keep his holy days sacred: 'Manhood, ye must love God above all thing; His name in idleness ye may not ming [mention]; Keep your holy day from worldly doing'.[99] The Dominican John Bromyard (d. 1352) wrote in his sermon that during festivals people are more interested in the entertainment and their appearance than they are in church and in devotion to God:

> he who starts the love-ditty takes the place of the priest. The place of the clerks is occupied by those who take up the songs and carry them on; and that of the parishioners by those standing or sitting around, who look on and listen with more delight and for a longer time than they would have heard mass or preaching before luncheon.[100]

Peter Idley shared this didactic concern that the lay community did not take the purpose of holy days seriously. He instructs his son to take care to spend his holy days at mass rather than playing games and other leisure activities:

> And wast not youre tyme so synfullie in veyn.
> Ffor if ye list devoutlie the prechoure to hire,
> Somme good worde, parde, of hym might ye leere.
> But it is more plesaunt at tables and chesse
> Than on the holy day to hire matens or messe.
> Suche games they vse till matens be don -
> To see the churche they thynke it woll suffise;
> And ayen to the same werke at afternone-
> Scantelie to pisse they woll arise.[101]

Idley attempts to ensure that his son will attend mass even though it may not be as pleasurable as playing 'tables and chesse' as he will obtain something profitable instead of slothfully residing in bed only getting up to relieve himself. This mirrors the image of the sin of sluggishness that we examined in chapter one, where we see the image of the young overindulging in sleep. Idley is attempting to ensure that his son exercises self-restraint in non-work so that he may be physically and spiritually rejuvenated rather than degenerated by his leisure pursuits.

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[99] *Three Late Medieval Morality Plays*, 131.
[100] cited in G. R. Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England: A Neglected Chapter in the History of English Letters and of the English People* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1961), 394.
[101] *Peter Idley's Instructions to his Son*, ed. Charlotte D'Evelyn (London: Oxford Uni. Press, 1935), 174.

The late spring and early summer festivals were disapproved of by some clerics who found that they undid the good work and contrition of Lent. For instance, John Bromyard wrote in his sermon that these pageants were tools of the devil to lead the recently confessed back to sin: 'To the contrite sinner he displays the pageants, games, dances and the like, which, by the Devil's own instigation, begin everywhere about Eastertime, to annul the contrition which they had in Lent'.[102] Bromyard later suggests that women dress provocatively to gain attention on feast days.[103] He goes as far as to compare them to beasts well presented in preparation to be sold at the marketplace. In doing so women lead men into wantonness and lust. The dangers of holidays, in particular the temptation to lust are exposed in many fifteenth-century lyrics. For example, a dance between a young servant girl and a clerk on Midsummer's Day results in a pregnancy in the lyric *A Midsummer Day's Dance*.[104] This image also appears in the lyric *The Serving Maid's Holiday* where the female narrator highlights the fashion of wearing a kerchief under her chin, the imagery quickly mirrored to present the sexual relations explored by young couples on holidays: 'Yc moste feschun worton In; / þredele my kerchef vndur my khyn; / Leue iakke, lend me a pyn / To þredele me þis holiday.'[105] Holidays are presented as time of sexual misconduct for young women as they are led astray by young men. Bromyard also found women to be at fault for at least some of the sinful behaviour of festivals:

> For, if all the knights of Christ and his whole army, namely, the apostles, martyrs and all holy men in the state in which they were in the Church were to march through the city of God, ready to fight for Him by teaching or preaching His Commandments, and in another procession were to march the women in their wanton array, frolicking, dancing, or stepping out with their signs of levity, I do believe for certain that these

[102] cited in Owst, *Literature and Pulpit*, 393.
[103] cited in Owst, *Literature and Pulpit*, 394.
[104] "A Midsummer Day's Dance," in *Secular Lyrics of XIVth and XVth Centuries*, ed. R. H. Robbins (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), 22-4.
[105] "The Serving Maid's Holiday," in *Secular Lyrics of XIVth and XVth Centuries*, ed. R. H. Robbins (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), 24.

> latter would attract after them far more hearts and ears and eyes
> more readily and more intently than the former.[106]

Women, since the first woman, Eve, have the power to lead men astray from the path of God by weakening their self-control through their provocative behaviour.

There were a number of factors that influenced views of leisure practices, including gender and social status. Social status and the specific role a person had in life was repeatedly highlighted in relation to appropriate leisure activities in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Bartholomew the Englishman, translated by John Trevisa, is clear that there are as many different types of leisure as there are types of occupation: 'In so moche as reste is contrarye to trauaile men schal take hede of reste, touchinge þe effect, in as many maner wise as of trauaile'.[107] Rest is essential, however, like occupation it must be appropriate for and balanced with a person's station in society. For example, for the members of King's College, Cambridge leisure activities were specified for feast days in the college Statutes in 1443.[108] Each day after dinner the scholars were supposed to return to their studies. However, on 'principal festival days and on solemn double festival days' the students were allowed to remain. Here they were 'allowed to enjoy themselves in the hall with songs and other honourable pastimes, and to make serious use of poetry, chronicles of nations, the wonders of the world, and anything else which is appropriate for clerk'. Even on feast days clerks were expected to act in moderation and in accordance with their role and situation in society. There was a set idea of what their leisure pursuits should consist.

Chaucer's 'Pardoner's Tale' comments on activities to pass the time: 'Lordes may fynden oother manere pley / Honeste ynough to dryue the day awey.'[109] The use of 'lordes' suggests that there is scope for members of the greater aristocracy to enjoy their time during the day as long as these activities are 'honeste'. The leisure of the nobility must not be frivolous or rough but should be appropriately righteous and dignified to befit their status in society. Gambling at games of chance usually

[106] cited in Owst, *Literature and Pulpit*, 393-4.
[107] *On the Properties of Things*, 340.
[108] *The Ancient Laws of the Fifteenth Century for King's College, Cambridge and for the Public School of Eton College*, eds. James Heywood and Thomas Wright (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1850), 73 and modern English translation from *Chaucer's World*, 129.
[109] "The Pardoner's Tale,"in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 198.

arise in a negative light no matter who is playing. They are associated with the sin of covetousness. *The Book of Vices and Virtues* describe 'þe tables and þe quek and hasard' as 'euele pleyes'.[110] While the reason given for this is obviously that greed and gambling are against God's laws, other games are also seen as negative for different reasons. In *King Alexander*, it is 'Þe ribaude' that 'playeþ at þe deys'.[111] However, in John Trevisa's translation of Higden's *Polychronicon* the king is described as playing dice: 'He … sigh þere a kynges hous of gold and knyȝtes of golde, pleyenge wiþ dees of gold.'[112] The regal and opulent colour of gold even penetrates the King's dice, balancing the game with his position in society. It is this place in society that allows the King and his court to play dice without judgement while the involvement of the lower levels in this activity is viewed as inappropriate and 'euele' leisure.

While the upper orders may acceptably appropriate the leisure practices of the 'ribaude', the cultural transfer of leisure pursuits did not work both ways. As we have seen in relation to labour, the second half of the fourteenth century is a time of considerable socio-economic change and the upper orders of society were attempting to quell the speed of this change. The labour legislation itself described the labouring in society as having a preference for 'ease'.[113] As discussed in chapter three, this was likely a result of the labourers choosing higher-paid, short term contracts rather than committing to longer term agreements that were more beneficial to the employer.

For much of the fourteenth and the first half of the fifteenth century, England was intermittently at war with France. This meant that there was a constant awareness that able-bodied men might be required to be well trained in combat. Longbowmen were the foundation of the English campaigns.[114] Therefore, it was recommended that archery be practised in the spare time of all levels of society. English longbowmen had significant success in the Battles of Crécy (1346), Poitiers

[110] *The Book of Vices and Virtues: A Fourteenth Century English Translation of the Somme le Roi of Lorens d'Orléans*, ed. W. Nelson Francis, EETS OS 217 (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), 41.
[111] *Kyng Alisaunder*, ed. G. V. Smithers, EETS OS 227 (London: Oxford Uni. Press, 1952), 184.
[112] *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden Maonachi Cestrensis; Together with the English Translations of John Trevisa and of an Unknown Writer of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Joseph Rawson Lumby (London: Longman and Co., 1879), 7: 75.
[113] See page 125.
[114] Robert Hardy, *Longbow: A Social and Military History* (Sparkford: Haynes, 2012), 76.

(1356) and Agincourt (1415). Figures 8 and 9 are late-fifteenth century depictions of the Battles of Crécy and Poitiers. Both show English longbowmen successfully overpowering both the French crossbowmen and the armed cavalry.

Figure 8: Battle of Crecy from Froissart's Chronicle (c. 1470-5)[115]

[115] Bibliothèque Nationale Francais, Français 2643, fol. 165v.

Figure 9: Battle of Poitiers from Froissart's Chronicle (c. 1470-5)[116]

Archers were of different ranks, some on foot while others were mounted and some wearing armour or even in possession of heraldry.[117] In 1363, King Edward III sent a letter to his sheriffs throughout England to encourage the pursuit of archery among all members of society 'nobles as well as commoners':

> Whereas the people of our realm, nobles as well as commoners, usually practised in their games the art of archery, whereby honour and profit [*honorem et commodum*] accrued to the whole realm and we gained not a little help in our ward, with God's favour; and now the art is almost totally neglected and the people amuse themselves with throwing stones, wood, or iron, or playing handball, football, or stick-ball or hockey or cock-fighting; and some indulge in other dishonest games, which are less useful or worthwhile [*ludos inhonestos, et minus*

[116] Bibliothèque Nationale Francais, Français 2643, fol. 207.
[117] Hardy, *Longbow*, 77.

> *utiles*], so that the kingdom, in short, becomes truly destitute of archers.[118]

The king had returned from a campaign in France in 1360-1 and may have been aware that his supply of archers had been depleted. The letter contains no social delineation of who should particularly partake in this pursuit. The issue that is specifically raised by the King is that the other games do not serve a purpose but represent an indulgence and lack the honour that archery provides. The letter goes on to require the sheriffs to ensure that 'everyone in the shire, on festival days when he has holiday [*cum vacaverit*], shall learn and exercise himself in the art of archery and use for his games bows and arrows, or crossbolts or bolts, forbidding' all other supposedly worthless games.[119]

Rather than an indulgence like the supposedly worthless games mentioned, archery was seen as a skilful activity requiring considerable discipline and control. While there was social variation within the ranks of the longbowmen, the majority of archers came from the upper or middling peasantry. Longbowmen's skill ensured that they were paid more than the rest of the infantry. According to Jim Bradbury, the essentiality of military archers increased the social status of the activity as well as the archers themselves.[120] Bradbury argues that the term 'selected men' regularly found in Muster Rolls highlights that archers would have gone through some variety of recruitment procedure to select the most capable.[121] The development of skill in archery therefore could have been seen to lead to some level of social advancement. This may have created a cultural narrative of archery as a legitimate honourable activity, one that did not just serve a purpose to the realm but could be both economically and socially rewarding to the archer himself.

The value of archery is honourable and of other games as unproductive was given legal authority in 1388 when for the first time non-work pursuits entered the

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[118] Translated in *English Historical Documents 1327-1485*, ed. A. R. Myers, vol. 4 (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1969), 1182. Original Latin from *Feodera, Conventiones, Literae et Cujuscunque Generis Acta Puplica, inter Reges Anglia*, ed. Thomas Ryme, vol. 3 (Hague: Neaulme, 1740), 79.
[119] the quotation continues '…forbidding all and single, on our orders, to meddle or toy in any way with these games of throwing stones, wood, or iron, playing handball, football, stickball, or hockey, or cockfighting, or any other games of this kind, which are worthless, under pain of imprisonment'. Translated in *English Historical Documents*, 1182. Original Latin from *Feodera*, 79.
[120] Jim Bradbury, *The Medieval Archer* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1985), 171.
[121] Ibid, 172.

legislative agenda. The Statute of Cambridge – discussed in detail in chapters three and four – was the most comprehensive labour legislation since the Statute of Labourers in 1351. It forbade all members of the third estate, such as servants, artificers, victuallers and servants of husbandry, from carrying daggers or swords under any condition. This was a response to the fear of violence, especially in the aftermath of the Peasant's Revolt earlier in the decade. The legislation reinforced social distinctions in the bearing of arms. Swords and daggers were not considered appropriate attire or arms for the lower levels of society. They were supposed to be emblems of the upper orders, and knightly valour. Instead the third estate was required to practice the bow and arrow as a form of military training: 'but such servants shall have bows and arrows, and use the same Sundays and Holydays, and leave all playing at tennis or football, and other games called coits, dice, casting of the stone, kailes and other such importune games [*jeues importunes*]'.[122] These games were directly associated with the lower levels of society. The Statute built on Edward III's proclamation but in the context of increased regulation of labour, introduced a social dimension not present prior to this point.[123]

While the Statute of Cambridge stated that those found playing these games or carrying swords were to be arrested, I have found no evidence that this clause was enforced. The legislation was re-enacted in 1410 during the reign of Henry IV. The punishment for breach of the Statute was increased to six days in jail and, unlike the 1388 Statute, the 1410 Statute included a punishment for any constable, sheriff, bailiff or mayor who failed to enforce the legislation. However, even with this further reinforcement of the legislation, prosecution for illegal leisure practices does not appear in the Sessions of the Peace.

Another piece of legislation relating to leisure practices was the 1390 Statute of Westminster. Again, the legislators, who were made up of the upper levels of

[122] 12 Richard II, c. 6, in *Statutes of the Realm*, 2: 57.
[123] This is not to say that the upper orders no longer participated in archery as a non-work pursuit or form of entertainment. George Ashby's *Active Policy of a Prince* of *c. 1*470 still carries the same message as Edward III's 1363 proclamation perscribing archery as applicable to all members of society: 'By lawe euery man shold be compellede / To vse the bowe and shetyng for disport, / And al insolent pleies Repellede'. *George Ashby's Poems,* ed. M. Bateson, EETS ES 76 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., 1899), 31.

society, aimed to define the social position of those beneath them by excluding them from the leisure pursuits of the upper orders, in this case hunting. The Statute states that:

> whereas artificers and labourers, namely butchers, shoemakers, tailors, and other hands keep greyhounds and other dogs, and at times when good Christians on feast days are at church hearing divine service, they go hunting in parks, conygries and warrens of the lords and others, and destroy them entirely: and so they hold their assemblies at such times to discuss amongst themselves plots and conspiracies of rebellion and disobedience against your majesty and laws, under colour of such hunts. May it please you to ordain in this present parliament that no manner of artificer nor labourer, nor any other who does not have lands and tenements to the value of forty shillings a year, nor any priest nor cleric if he have no more than ten pounds, keep any greyhound or other dog unless it is tied or led or hambled, on pain of imprisonment for a year.[124]

Parliament discredited the lower levels pursuit of hunting on a variety of levels. Firstly, the labourers and artisans who partake in hunting are not good Christians, as they should spend their time in devotion to God. They are therefore sinful. Secondly, the men involved in hunting are trespassing and stealing from the lord or other noble men who have sole rights to hunt in their parks or the parks of the king and to own warrens. The destruction that is mentioned in the Statute may be over-hunting. However, this destruction could easily have pointed towards basic vandalism of hedges, trees and fences. Thirdly, their sinful and illegal actions make them more likely to be involved in other rebellious behaviour such as 'plots and conspiracies of rebellion and disobedience against your majesty and laws, under colour of such hunts'. These hunts, which in some cases would have involved groups of able-bodied men, were viewed as a threat to social order and peace. This was less than a

[124] 'To hamble' is to remove the pads of a dog's paw to intentionally make them lame. It was usually carried out to prevent an animal being used in a hunt. "Richard II: Parliament of November 1390, Text and Translation," in *The Parliament Rolls of Medieval England*, eds. C. Given-Wilson et al., (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005), Scholarly Digital Edition, item 13.

decade after the Peasants' Revolt and fears among the upper orders were still very much alive. Throughout all of the dangers presented by these labourers and artisans, their challenge to the social order is what seems to be the most threatening. Pursuing non-work outside of their social rank undermined social order just as previously we saw how a superfluity of rest caused rancidity. This was the focal point of the enforcement of the legislation. Social position or possibly wealth – which could influence social position – was the only permissible way to partake in hunting as a leisure pursuit.

While the leisure legislation contained in the Statute of Cambridge sought to regulate the leisure practices of the labouring classes in society as part of the greater labour legislation, the leisure of the upper orders of society also required balancing with their own occupational activities. As we have seen in chapter one, there is a considerable amount of moral and devotional writing that presents the upper orders as particularly slothful. The lives of the nobility are presented as long days of leisure, feasting and drunkenness. They spend their time passively engaging in the sin of tenderness rather than in the activity required to ensure that the body and soul are justly engaged to prevent attacks from the devil and his vices. The vicious character of Folly, who represents idle and frivolous leisure in the poem *Mundus et Infans* presents himself alongside those who make their living through the law and the royal court rather than true labour: 'Sir, in Holborn I was forth brought, and with the courtiers I am betaught. To Westminster I used to wend'.[125] While Folly is clear that his family comes from all over England and as such suggests the country is riddled with idleness, he himself mingles with the courtiers in Westminster where the king and his court reside. Overindulgence rather than moderation forces their non-work activities into the domain of idleness rather than rest or leisure.

Hunting in particular was an activity that commentators went to great pains to legitimise as a proper and moral form of non-work pursuit for the upper levels of society. Princes were introduced to the sport at a young age: Henry VI hunted foxes

[125] *Three Late Medieval Morality Plays*, 139.

and hares at the age of thirteen.[126] Hawking and hunting were described as 'honest gamen' for a prince. It is even thought that Edward Plantagenet, Duke of York, translated *Master of Game*, a treatise on the 'myrthes of huntyng'.[127] Another text, the *Treatise on Fishing* which dates from the mid-fifteenth century describes 'Þe disporte and game of fyschyng with an angul-rode' as well as the 'disporte and game of hawkyng' and 'the disporte and game of fowlyng'.[128] The use of 'game' suggests that these activities carried pleasure for the participants. While Burke has argued that an emergence of educational literature on leisure is evidence of leisure's conception in the early-modern period, there were already in the fifteenth century a variety of texts available to the aristocracy and to the growing literate bourgeoisie who no doubt found the activities aspirational.

Hunting served important social purposes for the upper levels of society. It was a group activity, which highlighted the king or noble's position to lead and to create bonds with his liegemen.[129] To hunt with the king was a privilege, as was to be licenced to hunt on the king's lands. During the fourteenth century, some members of society with social aspirations, including merchants, were allowed to enclose land for their own hunting purposes. This has been used as evidence by Nicholas Orme to argue for the rising social position of merchants in the period.[130] *Piers Plowman* highlights a more pragmatic purpose for hunting and how hunting fits the role of the knight or the lord of a manor. Piers directs the knight to 'go hunte hardily to haris and to foxis, / To boris and to bukkes that breken myn heggis', and go 'fecche þe hom fauconis þe foulis to kille, / For þise comiþ to my croft and croppiþ my whete'.[131] In this very conservative imagining of society, hunting is presented as part of the aristocracy's role of protecting the realm. The knight was to hunt hares, foxes and boars so that they did not break down hedges and fences and to hunt wild birds so that they did not compromise crops. It is significant, however, that Langland does

[126] Nicholas Orme, "Medieval Hunting: Fact and Fancy," in *Chaucer's England: Literature in Historical Context*, ed. Barbara Hanawalt (Minneapolis: Uni. of Minnesota Press, 1992), 133.
[127] *The Master of Game* is an English version of Gaston Phoebus' *Le Livre de la Chasse*.
[128] "Treatise of Fishing," in John McDonald and Juliana Berners, *The Origins of Angling* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1963), 4.
[129] Orme, "Medieval Hunting," 133.
[130] Orme, "Medieval Hunting," 135.
[131] Langland, *Piers Plowman*: 1: A: 273.

not include female deer in this description of the hunt. Hunting for deer did not as easily fit into Langland's justification of this noble pursuit.

The use of *plei* in descriptions of hunting also suggests that hunting and particularly the hunting of deer were considered a pleasurable pursuit in contrast to Langland's picture of a duty to the realm. In the *Gesta Romanorum* a message is sent to the Emperor while he is in the forest to 'leve his playe and come home'.[132] Even emperors hunt but it is a sport and amusement, rather than a means to support society through providing food. I have not found any clear criticism of the upper orders for their involvement in this non-work pursuit. Indeed, many writers of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were at pains to highlight the moral nature of this pleasurable activity. John Lydgate portrays hunting as the opposite to idleness and indeed as a way of avoiding idleness: 'This prynce / … wolde for disport … / Hawke and hunte, tauoiden ydilnesse, / vse honest gamen in many sondry wise'.[133] The 'sondry wise' in which hunting avoids idleness is highlighted in the prologue to *Master of Game*.[134] Here also the discussion of the hunt is framed against a concern to prevent idleness. Each part of the hunt is shown to engage both body and soul. According to *Master of Game* hunting eschews 'the seven deadly sins'.[135] It does this by engaging mind and body before, during and after the hunt so that the hunter's thoughts do not linger on sins such as gluttony, lust, wrath or pride. The connection with idleness is repeated so often in the passage and so early on in the text that it raises the question as to why the author of *Master of Game* felt this discussion and thorough explanation was necessary. Perhaps it was that hunting, as a pleasurable activity with no obvious virtue, needed a significant moral gloss.

While we have seen the attempts to exclude the labouring in society from hunting and to justify hunting as a honourable pursuit, there are times when others were permitted to take part in the hunt. Hunting expeditions required men to look after the hounds and horses. The hunting grounds themselves were maintained by

[132] *Early English Versions of the Gesta Romanorum*, ed. Sidney J. H. Herrtage, EETS ES 33 (London: Oxford Uni. Press, 1879), 259.
[133] *Altenglische Legenden Neue Folge*, ed. C. Horstmann (Heilbronn: Verlag Von Gebr. Henninger, 1881), 395.
[134] *The Master of Game*, 4-8.
[135] *The Master of Game*, 4.

foresters and there would be a selection of servants alongside the nobles partaking in this leisurely pursuit.[136] The difference with these men, however, were that they were partaking in the hunt not as a leisure activity but as part of their occupation. It was not a break from labour but part of it.

There was significant criticism of non-nobles taking part in hunting as a leisure pursuit. Many urban centres had ancient hunting rights bestowed on the burgesses who were given particular areas of the hinterland.[137] For example, citizens of London were provided with lands in Middlesex, Surrey and the Chilterns for hunting.[138] In 1443, members of King's College, Cambridge, were forbidden from keeping hunting animals or apparatus. Many of the members of the college may have come from households where hunting was an appropriate or perhaps aspirational leisure pursuit, as they have reached the educational position to enter university. However, once they entered the institution of the college their position and role in society changed. They were no longer members of the bourgeoisie but rather clerks or students. The Statutes of the college explicitly forbid 'scholars, fellows, chaplains, clerks, or servants of the college' from bringing 'an ape, bear, fox, stag, hind, doe, badger, or any other wild animals or strange birds, whether they be useful or harmful'.[139] Hunting symbolised social status and the removal of this symbol was likely difficult for the members of the College, so much so that ordinances were needed to prevent them from continuing the sport. While many aspired to hunt for social reasons, those within the upper orders understood that the growth in social mobility in the late-fourteenth century could dilute the prestige of their leisure pursuits.

* * *

Scholarship on non-work or leisure has concentrated thus far on the pursuits that take place in non-work time rather than the concept of leisure or non-work itself. This chapter has sought to understand how the concept of non-work was perceived in

[136] Orme, "Medieval Hunting," 136.
[137] Ibid, 135.
[138] Sylvia L. Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London, 1300-1500* (Ann Arbor: Uni. of Michigan Press, 1948), 145.
[139] *Ancient Laws*, 83 and trans. from *Chaucer's World*, 130.

relation to occupation in late medieval English society. Through a lexicographical examination of some of the key words used in discussions of non-work (*leiser*, *reste*, *ese*, *slep*, *game*, and *plei*) an understanding of the medieval concept of non-work begins to emerge. Conceptually non-work was universal, focused on the physical requirements of recovery rather than having any social ties. The difference between the idea of non-work and non-work pursuits lay in the focus on preference and enjoyment in leisure pursuits. While the theory of non-work resided around the body, pursuits were seen as rejuvenating the mind.

Non-work not preceded by activity is deemed dangerous and corrupting, both morally and physically. The driving theme that emerges from our analysis is that while social position informs the understanding of leisure practice, moderation in game, play, rest or sleep was necessary to ensure leisure remained profitable. As Trevisa's translation of Bartholomew Anglicus explains:

> Also somtyme reste is to myche, and þanne it brediþ, norischiþ, and multiplieþ euel humoures, and bringiþ in corrupcioun. For watir rooteþ if it reste to longe, and al yren and euery metalle rustiþ if it is to longe vnvsid oþir to litel I-vsid. And som reste is to lite and is vicious, for it refreisschiþ nouȝt kynde þat is wery, noþir releueth feblenes noþir restorith what þat is iwastid. Mene bitwene þise tweine is good, for it comfortiþ kynde hete and þe wittes, and helpiþ digestioun, and clensiþ somdel þe body.[140]

Rest, sleep and leisure, like most aspects of living are best participated in moderation. Trevisa's translation likens too much rest to rust, which erodes the body's ability to work. The text argues that to avoid the corrosive effect of rest, there must be balance in life.

In order to be productive, non-work must follow from a period of exertion from which one may recover. Therefore leisure can also be seen to carry the post-lapsarian ideas so prominent in the resonance of exhaustion found in the vocabulary of work. In order for non-work pursuits to be deemed suitable, they therefore must

[140] *On the Properties of Things*, 341.

balance with the work that the person undertakes. This equilibrium is essential. However, as we have seen, the constitution of labour in the post Black Death period was not a structured entity but rather underwent a period of significant change. This meant that delineating appropriate levels of non-work proved a secondary tool of legislators and moral commentators in the fight to regain control over the socio-economic changes taking place. Just as we saw in the previous chapter, the worry was not necessarily on inactivity but the unacceptable and possibly dangerous activities that idle time is filled with. Overindulgence in any one activity, or not restricting oneself to socially appropriate activities, was a form of idleness. Like occupation and activity, non-work pursuits must balance a person's role within society. The legislation of leisure served to create social distinctions. Labourers of all occupations were required to partake in archery while only the nobility might partake in hunting as a form of *plei* or *game*. These activities were culturally constructed and framed by contemporaries as honourable pursuits for the lower and upper levels of society respectively.

Literature, especially conduct literature tends to err on the side of conservatism in regards to leisure activities. Finding the balance of leisure and work was not simple. In *Mundus et Infans*, Manhood laments that while he aims to follow the Church's teaching by hard work and abstaining from revelry, this does not fulfil his need for leisure and game: 'The World and Folly counselleth me to all gladness: Yea, and Conscience counselleth me to all sadness; Yea, too much sadness might bring me to madness!'[141] This logical preference for leisure over the mundane boredom of work leads Manhood to choose secular leisure over the devout life of work and prayer. Manhood struggles to make the necessary changes to his life. He refuses to put aside Mundus and his worldly pursuits because 'For mankind he doth merry make'.[142] This indulgence of worldly activities prevents Mankind enacting Conscience's advice. Having made this decision, Mankind decides to rest: 'Now here full prest I think to rest; Now mirth is best'.[143] The discussion with Conscience has tired him out and only further fortified his love of merriment. This could be seen either as a warning of the temptations of idle worldly leisure or a satire of the

[141] *Three Late Medieval Morality Plays*, 145.
[142] Ibid, 134.
[143] Ibid, 135.

ineffectiveness of the Church in regulating the need for game in human lives. This piece of didactic literature was likely meant to promote debate and encourage its audience to consider the issue of moderation and balance in more detail.

Mundus et Infans also introduces the personified Folly, who attempts to legitimise his frivolous activities by linking them with masculinity: 'Sir, all this is manhood, well thou knowest'.[144] What is expected by God and what is expected by society are shown to differ. In order to take part and progress in society one must engage in society's non-work pursuits. Leisure influences the whole of society; it is integral to identity throughout the lives of the medieval men and women. While it could be seen as the antithesis of work, the two concepts share very similar frameworks and, most importantly for this thesis, they both act as the opposing forces to the vain and unproductive concept of idleness.

[144] Ibid, 144.

Conclusion

This thesis aimed to answer what constituted idleness in late-medieval English society and culture. To accomplish this I examined idleness in relation to the sin of sloth, work and leisure. My first research question was 'how are sloth and idleness presented by moralists in the fourteenth century?' At its root idleness is a spiritual concept: a branch of sloth and a fundamental element to the Christian faith in late medieval England. Chapter one introduced us to the sin of sloth and its many branches. Along with examining the temporal and spiritual nature of the vice, the chapter also highlighted how sloth manifested itself in society. Sloth is presented as being aligned with the young, the old, and the upper levels of society. These are groups whose work-lives are not clearly delineated. However, pastoral material can only give us one facet of this multi-dimensional concept. This thesis has attempted to build a more varied understanding of idleness, looking beyond its position as a sin to see how it was constructed and used as a social, cultural and economic concept. This led to my second research question: how was occupation presented and differentiated in the fourteenth century? Chapter two examined the culturally constructed concepts of activity and inactivity in Middle English writing. By examining how the words relating to activity were used the chapter identified different value systems placed on types of work. Values are more than positive or negative. The chapter explored the value of activity and subsequently inactivity in terms of social position, economics and gender. Activity is steeped in postlapsarian resonances, a punishment required by mankind to cleanse the sins of Adam and Eve. Therefore idleness was viewed as contradictory to this endeavour. Chapter three attempted to apply these constructed ideas of idleness and work found in the first two chapters and use them to explore how idleness fitted into the varying perspectives on the post Black Death labour crisis. It explored how idleness is articulated by contemporary commentators and legislators and compared these perceptions to what can be ascertained as the actual work practices of those who laboured in society. The chapter found how varying perspectives on idleness created tensions between social groups.

My fourth research question sought to build on the importance placed on labour in the previous chapters: how are those who do not fit the ideal image of the labourer, outlined in chapter 2, viewed? In light of the importance placed on diligent labour, the last two chapters examined perceptions of non-work in late medieval English society. Chapter four looked at another aspect of the fourteenth-century labour legislation, viz. those who are not contributing to society either due to their poverty, unemployment, or place in the lifecycle. The chapter found that the perception of poverty did not change in the fourteenth century but there was a greater differentiation of who deserved aid. It also found that after the Black Death the use of the concept of vagrancy developed from being entirely concerned with social order to one that was tied to migration and the movement of labour. However, unemployment is only one type of non-work. Life does not solely revolve around occupation and therefore my final research question sought to ascertain how periods of non-work fitted into the culturally constructed dichotomy of work and idleness. Chapter five examined the concept and practice of leisure or non-work. While idleness is defined as having no purpose, conceptual ideas of non-work such as leisure, sleep, and rest are viewed as useful. Chapter five also highlighted the importance of social status in defining appropriate non-work pursuits.

This thesis is organised along the lines of work and non-work. However, there is more that can be gleaned when we examine the content of the thesis as a whole. When I began, I aimed to ascertain how idleness was defined or understood in late medieval English society. As shown above, each chapter has contributed to forming an image of idleness that may have been recognisable to late medieval readers. However, from my research as a whole, there are also a number of continuities and changes in the understanding and use of idleness in English society over the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Continuity

In every chapter of the thesis we have seen the link between a person's role in life, and idleness. In chapter one, we saw how the sin of sloth was connected to different groups of people, particularly the upper levels of society and those at the beginning and the end of the life cycle. The young were presented as sluggish, lying long in

bed as well as lacking the focus needed to enter the world of work. The upper levels of society were presented as tender, incapable of suffering penance due to their passive and indulgent lifestyles. These groups were viewed as most at risk of sin because their role and position in life was furthest away from arduous but penitential labour. In chapter two, we saw the importance of this postlapsarian discourse in the cultural construction of work but also how this discourse was used to reinforce social distinctions. For example, the energy involved in activity, which chapter two highlighted as being related to the punishing nature of physical labour, also carried resonances of strength, denoting to strive or put forth great effort, when applied to the higher levels of society. Therefore a lieutenant is described as being a 'miȝty, couragews, and laborows man'.[1] 'Miȝty, couragews, and laborows' denotes a person with both physical and mental strength and an ability to overcome a struggle. 'Laborows' carried the same resonances of strength and perseverance over difficulty that it held when applied to the labouring classes, but is kept in line with aristocratic behaviour by 'miȝty' and 'couragews'. In chapter three, this conceptual view of idleness was seen within the context of the post Black Death labour crisis. The classification of labourers as idle by both contemporary commentators and legislators highlights the distinction of the social role that the third estate was required to perform. From this we can see that a person's role or occupation is integral to our understanding of what constituted both their activity and their inactivity in the later Middle Ages. The narrator in "How the Wise Man Taught his Son" advises that no matter 'what maner man þou be / Ȝeeue' þee not to ydilnesse, / But take good hede of þi degree, / And þeron do þi bisynesse'.[2] While idleness is universal it is also very specific and particular to each person and their situation and position in society. In order to avoid idleness a person must 'take good hede of' their degree or level in society.[3] In order to avoid idleness a person must first understand what their role in society is and then ensure their work and non-work adhere to that role.

Further to this importance of roles, what constituted idle behaviour was also a

[1] "Documents relating to charges against James, Earl of Ormonde, 1442-45," in *A Roll of the Proceedings of the King's Council in Ireland*, ed. J. Graves, (London: Longman, 1877), 281.
[2] "How the Wise Man Taught his Son" in *The Babees Book*, edited by Frederick J. Furnivall, EETS OS 32 (London: Trübner & Co., 1868), 49.
[3] Ibid, 49.

matter of perspective. Chapter three highlighted how this theoretical link between idleness and a person's role can cause tensions in society. During the post Black Death labour crisis, the demographic changes increased the demand for labour and pushed wages up. Labourers were now able to successfully demand higher wages and more favourable working conditions such as shorter-term contracts. The labourers actively sought to change the terms of their labour and were successful in doing so. Urban workers formed confederations to resist attempts to constrain their roles. The labourers saw their role as evolving beyond what it had been prior to the Black Death. The conservative legislators and commentators, however, viewed the labourers occupying a fixed place in society. These varying perspectives of roles created varying perspectives of what was considered idle. For the labourers, they were adhering to their new roles but for the legislators they were indeed being idle.

In chapter two, I carried out a lexicographical examination of the Middle English vocabulary relating to work, labour, leisure and idleness. This enabled me to garner the varied meanings and resonances that idleness held in Middle English. For instance, idleness is used to refer to uselessness or unproductivity twice as often as it is used to refer to basic inactivity. For example, in chapter four, we saw how 'wandering' was used throughout the late medieval period to reinforce the purposelessness in the movements of nightwalkers and vagrants, thus bringing unproductive activity within the realm of idleness. This concentration on productivity is a common theme in the presentations of idleness, particularly in visual imagery. While the discussion of idleness within the *Somme le Roi* texts is limited and concentrates on the danger to the soul, the accompanying manuscript images gives us some idea of how a priest or friar may have preached about the sin.

Figure 10: British Library, Add. 54180, f.121v

In this 1294 manuscript of the *Somme le Roi*, the above image appears opposite a discussion of the virtue prowess.[4] The page is separated into four compartments. The top right section is labelled prowess and contains a woman standing atop a bull and holding a medallion emblazoned with a lion. Below her we have an image of David armed with his slingshot against Goliath. However, what makes this image important to the current discussion are the compartments on the right-hand side. On the bottom right section, which is labelled '*labeur*', a worker spreads seeds on a golden rinceau, a pattern of intertwined foliate branches. The same pattern also adorns the other images of the folio. However, the top right compartment, labelled '*peresce*' or idleness, is dominated by the brown and comparatively unproductive earth. Here, a peasant has abandoned his plough, his

[4] British Library, Add. 54180, f.121v.

work uncompleted. He is lying with sloth's characteristic chin resting on hand position. The two horses continue to require the resources of the land by nibbling on the few sprigs of growth available. While I have not undertaken substantial research on prowess, it is likely that this links with productivity or overcoming adversity, which is also one of the resonances of labour. While it is true that this image of '*peresce*' could be seen to represent inactivity, it also carries heavy resonances of unproductivity and waste.

This meaning of unproductiveness is employed by the writers of the 1351 Statute of Labourers: the preamble begins 'against the malice of servants, who were idle' or, in the original Anglo-Norman, '*perceouse*'.[5] This is used to refer directly to idleness or slothfulness and thus carries strong resonances of sin.[6] The writers of the Statute placed considerable effort in the construction of a narrative that served to legitimise their legislation as serving the productive needs of the realm. The labourers' demands for excessive wages and their refusal to work the lands of their lords has damaged 'the great men' and impoverished all of the 'Commons'. The blame for any lack of productivity within the realm is placed clearly and solely on the labourers and servants. In the eyes of the legislators, the labourers through their idleness have infected the country with their unproductivity causing it to spread not just to other employees but to the employers themselves as forced idleness and unemployment.

Changes

Unproductivity appears to be a consistent meaning of idleness in the period. However, the appropriation of idleness in the labour legislation led to a number of developments in how the concept was used in this period. The first pieces of labour legislation and continually increasing regulation of labour in the century following created a more pronounced dichotomy between work and non-work. Chapter four discussed the differentiation between those who did and did not partake in work, particularly as a consequence of the introduction of begging into the rhetoric of

[5] 25 Edward III, Stat. 2, *Statutes of the Realm, ed. Alexander Luders (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1810),* 1: 311.
[6] *Anglo-Norman Dictionary.* Digital Edition at < http://www.anglo-norman.net/> s.v. "peresçous (adj.)".

idleness. The increased concentration on this dichotomy is highlighted in chapter five with the introduction of sections regarding leisure within labour legislation.

The interaction between leisure and idleness developed considerably across the late medieval period. From the beginning of the fourteenth century, the *Somme le Roi* texts mention loss of time as associated with idleness:

> Vor huanne þe dyeuel / uynt þane man ydel: he hine deþ / to worke. And deþ him uerst / þenche kuead. and efterward / to wylni vileynies / ribaudyes / lecheries / and his time lyese / and manye guodes / þet he miȝte do. Huerof he miȝte wynne paradis.[7]

This is the entirety of the discussion of idleness in *Somme le Roi*'s and its early Middle English translations'. The text highlights loss of time through fruitless and unproductive activities, which are also sinful in their own right. This is significant when seen within the context of the labour legislation's use of 'ease' relating to idle behaviour. Ease suggests that other, more comfortable activities were being undertaken rather than physical labour. Labourers were in fact reducing their working contracts. Whether the incentives for this were financial or leisure related is a discussion for elsewhere. However, in 1388 and 1410, amendments to the labour legislation included clauses on the type of leisure pursuits that servants and labourers should and should not take part in:

> Servants and labourers should have bows and arrows, and should use them on Sundays and feast days, and should completely abandon ball games played either with the hand or with the foot, as well as other games called quoits, dice, stone throwing, skittles, and other such useless games.[8]

In fact the petitions to parliament that initiated this legislation state that labourers did not just play these 'useless' games on holy days but everyday of the week.

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[7] In modern English: 'For when the devil finds a man idle, he himself goes to work. And first he makes the man think bad, and afterward he is inclined to villainies, ribaldries, lecheries, and waste his time and many good works that he might do, wherefore he might win paradise.' *Dan Michel's Ayenbite of Inwyt or Remorse of Conscience in the Kentish Dialect, 1340 A.D.*, ed. Richard Morris, EETS OS 23 (London: Trübner & Co., 1866), 31.

[8] "Henry IV: Parliament of January 1410, Text and Translation," in *The Parliament Rolls of Medieval England*, ed. C. Given-Wilson et al., (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005), Scholarly Digital Edition, item 65.

This growth in prescribed leisure pursuits is reflected in the pastoral materials of the fifteenth century, especially in relation to descriptions of idleness. *Jacob's Well*, dated c. 1440, while also belonging to the *Somme le Roi* tradition, presents us with an expanded discussion of idleness not seen in *Ayenbite of Inwyt* or *The Book of Vices and Virtues*. It begins with the same basic premise as the other *Somme le Roi* texts but then gives a far more detailed list of what activities are considered idle. It mentions games and sports such as checkers and wrestling and even the pursuits of hunting and hawking which are so emblematic of noble and aristocratic culture. While the early in the fourteenth century *Handlyng Synne* makes an indirect connection between sloth and certain non-work pursuits such as 'pleyyng at þe alehous or any ouþer ianglyng', the chronologically later discussions of leisure are more explicit in articulating the socially defined activities which are appropriate and inappropriate for each section of society.[9]

Another change in the construction of idleness during this period appears in the 1349 Ordinance of Labourers. Here some labourers are described as 'begging in idleness (in ocio)' for their livelihood rather than engaging in labour. This use of 'idleness' is noteworthy. While we have seen the link between idleness and unproductiveness, there is no mention of beggars in the pastoral material. Prior to the labour legislation there is no representation of begging in relation to idleness or sloth in general. However, after the Black Death and the labour legislation's provision for idle beggars, the two concepts become linked. By the middle of the fifteenth century we can see that begging and idleness have become clearly connected. The character of Idleness in the mid-fifteenth-century morality play *Occupation and Idleness* represents all varieties of Sloth in a personified form. He does not get out of bed for either mass or labour, he is sluggish, tender and unproductive. As well as not earning a living, Idleness is also presented as financially incompetent: 'While Y have aught Y wyl spende; Whan Y have non God wyl sende'.[10] Idleness does not rely on his own labour for his livelihood. Instead he spends what money he has and then

[9] Robert Mannyng of Brunne, *Handlyng Synne*. ed. Idelle Sullens (Binghamton: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1983), 114-5.
[10] Richard Beadle, "Occupation and Idleness," in *Leeds Studies in English* 32 (2001), 17.

depends on God and his friends to support him. He personifies the 'idle beggar' that the legislation has painted as such as threat, leaning on society rather than on his own productivity. This is reinforced later in the play when Occupation decides to train Idleness to be a clerk so that he can better himself. He calls upon the personified Doctrine to teach Idleness and implore him to learn something in his youth so that he may support himself in the future and avoid a life of begging:

> And lerne some good in thi youthe.
> Thou wylt be like to begge thi brede
> But thou drawe the fro slouthe.[11]

This is very similar to the discussion in *Handlyng Synne* ensuring young people begin their occupational development early to prevent poverty in later life: 'Ne lerne hym crafte for to wynne / Yn hys age to leue weyl ynne'.[12] However, begging has become the specific issue in the fifteenth century. Doctrine highlights the temporal and social rather than the spiritual results of idle behaviour.

The third and probably the most marked change that takes place to the understanding of idleness across our period is a progression to a more secular view of the concept. At the beginning of the period, the word idleness appears most commonly in pastoral material. However, as we progress through the late medieval period it becomes increasingly prominent in non-devotional texts. The concern in the *Somme le Roi* tradition (cited above) is that idleness allows a man to spend his time thinking of and taking part in sinful pursuits rather than spending it in activities that will 'wynne paradis'.[13] Neither *Ayenbite of Inwyt* or *The Book of Vices and Virtues* give examples of what the type of activities that will obstruct the path to paradise are. There is no distinction made between whether secular labour or devotion is affected by this loss of time.

Handlyng Synne, due to its structure around exempla rather than branches of sin, provides a slightly more instructive description of idleness. The exempla in *Handlyng Synne* define the difference between actions that serve God and actions that do not. Here, idleness is used to refer to placing more importance on temporal

[11] "Occupation and Idleness", 27.
[12] *Handlyng Synne*, 127.
[13] *Ayenbite of Inwyt*, 31.

labour than on fulfilling devotional activities and labouring for the good of the soul rather than the body:

> Hyt ys an ydelnes yn here lyff,
> Al þat oþer man or wyff
> Traueyleþ for þe lyues fode
> And lytel for þe soules gode.[14]

This is very much a spiritual type of idleness. It represents placing other, temporal activities above devotion. Secular labour is not included in devotional work. Devotion must come before all secular activity, even the work of Adam.

While correlation does not necessarily imply causation, the labour legislation had direct and substantial effect on society. This is illustrated in the change in representations of idleness in fifteenth-century pastoralia. John Mirc's *Instructions for Parish Priests* (pre-1450) provides a list of questions for a priest to ask his parishioners during confession. The first fifteen questions under the heading '*Acedia*' refer to slowness in fulfilling devotional activities such as not teaching godchildren their prayers and not fasting properly. After this point, however, the questions relate specifically to fulfilling the role of an employee:

> Hast þow be scharpe and bysy
> To serue þy mayster trewely?
> Hast þow trewely by vche way
> Deseruet þy mete & þy pay?[15]

Parish priests should enquire about the productivity of employees as well as whether they carry out devotional activities. This link between servants and idleness has become more direct than in the pre Black Death pastoral materials. There is an increased concentration on completing occupations diligently. If we compare this to the representation of Idleness in *Occupation and Idleness*, the transformation of the concept into something far more temporal in nature is clear. Piety is not on Idleness' radar. He is repeatedly shown to shun physical and commercial activity choosing instead a life of eating, sleeping and drinking. He is productive and makes no

[14] *Handlyng Synne*, 125.
[15] John Mirc, *Instructions for Parish Priests*, ed. Edward Peacock, EETS OS 31 (London: Trübner & Co., 1868), 37.

excuses to avoid difficult work. Occupation represents what would be viewed by the writers of the labour legislation as the perfect worker, however, Doctrine, the moral, pastoral voice of the play, is not so sure. While Doctrine is pleased to meet Occupation, he reminds the audience that labour alone will not get grace:

> For al that to good occupacion long
> God is plesed and so am Y,
> But occupacion that tuchith to wronge
> Doth men no good, but vylany.[16]

Instead Doctrine says one must take part in the 'vertuous lyf' with either 'bodely workis or almasdede / In penaunce or prayeris wilfully'. He highlights that while Occupation is preferable to idleness, spiritual devotion must be the focus of life. It is this spirituality that encourages Idleness to transform into Clennes, not Occupation's attempt to provide him with vocational training.

It seems likely that secular representations of idleness were used in order to explain the sin to a lay audience. For example, while the description of idleness in the *Somme le Roi* is brief and concentrates on abstract spiritual issues, the illumination of sloth in the same manuscript presents idleness as an unproductive and sluggish agricultural worker. Images such as this served to make the sin of idleness more relatable to parishioners by detaching it from some of the more abstract spiritual ideas such as thinking evil thoughts. While idleness associated with leisure is simple for the audience to understand and relate to, this is not the true meaning of the sin. The personification of Doctrine in *Occupation and Idleness* chastises Occupation for his concentration on temporal labour, and chastises idleness and the audience for their love of plays and the alehouse. Doctrine, along with the earlier pastoral writings, concentrates on society's issue of choosing worldly activities, be they leisure or work, over proper devotional practice.

To conclude there are significant changes to the cultural understanding of idleness across the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. There is an increasing focus on the distinction between idleness and work, begging, and leisure pursuits, and also a concentration on secular rather than spiritual idleness. While it is impossible to say

[16] "Occupation and Idleness," 25.

for sure how much of this relates to the legislation implemented in the middle of the fourteenth century, the socio-legal and devotional texts seem to feed into one another. The continued pastoral movement of making the articles of the faith clear and recognisable to the laity as well as idleness' incorporation into the labour legislation work together to create a more secular or temporal understanding of the concept. Both aim to inform and educate. The pastoralia looks to the threat posed to the soul of the sinful labourers, while the legislation looks to the practicality of the need to improve productivity. Preservation of the status quo fulfils the goals of both church and state.

* * *

The contributions of this thesis to scholarship are two-fold. The first is methodological. By undertaking a broad, conceptual approach I have managed to examine a subject thus far defined by an absence or lacking rather than something material. While I have not attempted to measure inactivity, I have been able to assess what it constituted and the values that it held in late-medieval society. This methodology has subsequently allowed me to fill many of the lacunae in the present historiography of sin, work and leisure.

Siegfried Wenzel and Morton Bloomfield highlighted the possibility of a change in late medieval constructions of sloth. However, both scholars stopped short of examining this change in detail or why it occurred. This thesis has filled this gap, which has been present in the historiography of sin and sloth in particular for the over half a century. This approach of examining both social and culture representation of sin could be used to further illuminate the other six vices of the heptad and their role in medieval society. In relation to work, idleness has been viewed by scholars as a merely a rhetorical device or used as a term to simply signify contemporaries not working. There had been little examination of what the term or concept meant for contemporaries. However, this examination of idleness has highlighted a new perspective on the labour crisis, particularly how actions, including the introduction of labour legislation and the actions of the labourers themselves, were perceived by different sections of society. It also allowed us to

view the broad reach of the crisis and how it affected large and small employers in different ways. Chapter five discussed some of the approaches used by historians in their examination of pre-modern leisure. However, this thesis has highlighted the importance of looking at leisure not just as a collection of pleasurable pursuits but how the concept itself sat alongside values of work. This has allowed me to create a much fuller understanding of how non-work was perceived by society and the possible reasons for the extensive attempt at moral and governmental control of non-work pursuits.

Conceptual history, while attempting to find broad and nuanced understandings, can never engage with every facet of life in the past. While this research has covered a large body of evidence relating to idleness and helped to fill some gaps in the historiography of idleness, there are some areas that could not be covered due to the parameters of a doctoral thesis. This thesis, quite purposefully has avoided a discussion of clerical or religious idleness since religious idleness could be viewed as something quite distinct from lay experiences. Treatises on sin, which date from before the thirteenth century and the growth in pastoralia, were written particularly for religious communities. While I have chosen to concentrate on lay idleness in this research, this avenue of further study would add another dimension to the concept. For example, did the changes that this thesis has highlighted also influence how the concept of idleness was viewed within religious communities? Another further area of examination would be to push the chronological boundaries of this research to the period after the reformation and the emergence of the 'protestant work ethic'. How does this tie into catholic representations of diligent labour and sloth? Scholars such as Siegfried Wenzel and Catherine Butt have argued that the increased concentration on sloth as a sin of the flesh in the later medieval period created a rupture of the sin into the laziness and melancholy in the early-modern period.[17] While I have noted that idleness does indeed become more temporal in presentation through the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it would be beneficial to examine this further into the early-modern period. I am highly aware that the concept of idleness is so deeply entrenched in human experience it is at risk of being passed over as unimportant or unproblematic, as we

[17] Catherine Batt, "Sloth and the Penitential Self in Henry, Duke of Lancaster's *Le Livre de Seyntz Medicines* / The Book of Holy Medicines," in *Leeds Studies in English* 41 (2010), 27.

have seen happen with the historiography to date. However, there is a great deal more to be uncovered about this fascinating subject and its development. It is my great hope that I will be able to contribute to at least some of the concept's fruition into a serious subject of historical analysis.

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