



The Oxford Book of
WORK

Edited by
KEITH THOMAS

Primal curse or sacred duty? Painful drudgery or the only sure route to human happiness? Work has always evoked conflicting reactions. Yet whether we view it as a tedious necessity or embrace it as a compulsive addiction, it remains an inescapable and endlessly fascinating part of the human condition.

To illuminate the changing experience of work, this anthology draws upon a huge range of writers from classical antiquity to modern times: poets, dramatists, and novelists; theologians, economists, and philosophers; social investigators and journalists; diarists, letter-writers, and autobiographers. It explores many different forms of work, from ploughing a field to writing a poem, not forgetting housework and other forms of unpaid labour.

The whole of human life is here: young people starting employment, the redundant searching for jobs, the old coping with retirement, utopians seeking to eliminate work altogether. The delights of occupation and the harshness of compulsory labour are contrasted with the pleasures of rest and idleness.

Keith Thomas's magisterial compilation and scintillating introductory essay show that work does not just provide us with the means of subsistence; it also makes possible all the pleasures and achievements of civilization.

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