The author of *Alice in Wonderland* replied as follows to a young fan who had written him about her life at boarding school: tea, lessons, bed, lessons, breakfast, lessons, and so on? It is a very neat plan of life and almost as interesting as being a sewing machine or a coffee grinder.

Boarding school in Cortland is a bit more complex: standing in the cold rain waiting for the bus, fighting the “freshman 15” for four years – or five. That is now at an end, but graduates enter a world of sewing and grinding in a different form.

For the last half-century or so, our culture’s mainstream has attempted to turn everyone into the horse described by the cab driver in Dickens’s *Pickwick Papers*, a horse which always falls down when he’s took out of the cab,... but when he’s in it, we bears him up werry tight, and takes him in werry short so as he can’t werry well fall down; and we got a pair o’ precious large wheels on, so ven he does move, they run after him, and he must go on, he can’t help it.

Our culture wants us bound up werry tight and taken in werry short, and wants us to fall down when taken out of harness. That way it can channel all our energy into the mere functions of getting money when in harness, spending it when not; sewing and grinding, sewing and grinding, getting and spending, getting and spending, pulling in harness, running in circles, always returning to where we began. Our culture entices, implores, cajoles, seduces and in other ways beckons, “For the good life come hither; get and spend, get and spend.” One does not need a college degree to tell you that traveling in circles doesn’t get you anywhere.

And one does not need a college degree to know the “Protestant work ethic” is dead, a great relief since it was mainly a ruse by which the rich kept the poor in line. We work for money, not salvation, while still hoping to make a difference. Further, two centuries invoking Smith’s “invisible hand” leaves us still without any moral justification for selfishness. Smith, a professor of moral philosophy,
would be horrified by a culture in which the invisible hand of self-interest has so strong a grip that helping others, i.e. community service, is a form of punishment.

Utilitarians agree. John Stuart Mill, said, for example: When people who are tolerably fortunate in their outward lot do not find in life sufficient enjoyment to make it valuable to them, the cause generally is caring for no one but themselves.... Next to selfishness, the principal cause which makes life unsatisfactory is want of mental cultivation. To Mill, caring for others was a product of mental cultivation. But of course Aristotle said that twenty-two centuries before Mill.

The message is the same, turn where you will: to the mathematician Bertrand Russell; to the physicist Albert Einstein, to such physicians as Schweitzer, Bethune, Caldicott; to the primatologist Jane Goodall, to the playwright G.B. Shaw; to legions of poets, novelists, historians and philosophers. Turn next to the empirical evidence. Several studies reveal that when out of harness, the happiest people do not fall down; they spend the least time watching television and shopping, and spend the most time serving their communities as volunteers. They also live longer and healthier lives. Might it be that the forces driving evolution have, themselves, evolved; fitness now includes kindness; to efficiency and sustainability we now add moral decency and actualized humanity. Lacking community, decency and humanity, how can we claim to being highly evolved?

As Thoreau observed, “It is not enough to be busy. The question is, what are we busy about?” Life will be unsatisfying to those who sew and grind and run in circles for what is merely self-interested. Life will be unsatisfying also to those who confuse their jobs done for money with their work done as a moral being in a humane world. Life will also be unsatisfying if empty of dreams. As Hans Selye wrote in his book, The Stress of Life, “Realistic people who pursue practical aims are rarely as realistic or practical, in the long run of life, as the dreamers who pursue their dreams.”

Among the wise, life is a celebration, a celebration of the realization of one’s potential as a human being. That potential peaks at the confluence of the currents which energize our lives, our work
(not jobs) and our dreams. Where these currents join we make our greatest contributions, contributions always to humanity.

As you head off in pursuit of your work and your dreams, recognize that to travel far you must travel light. Therefore, live below your means, say no often, don't just do something - sit there. Sit there until the direction is clear. As you head off in pursuit of your work and your dreams, may you be joined by good health, good books, good friends, good laughs, and good memories. In the somber times they will lift your spirit, lighten your burden and lengthen your stride, that you may travel far. So go. Head for the confluence. Keep your soul aloft. Strike a blow for humanity.