arise as much from their "dyslipophobia" as from the disturbed eating pattern.¹¹ But gluttony need not apply only to food, there are also gluttons for work. Satiation also can be overdone. We should all be capable of satiation, but not too easily and not all the time.

- 1 *Holy Bible* (New International Version). Proverbs xxiii,2.
- 2 *Holy Bible* (New International Version). Proverbs xxviii,7.
- 3 *Holy Bible* (New International Version). Proverbs xxiii,21.
- 4 *Holy Bible* (New International Version). The epistle of St Paul to Titus, i,12.
- 5 Hamilton BS, Paglia D, Kwan AY, Deitel M. Increased obese mRNA expression in omental fat cells from massively obese humans. *Nature Medicine* 1995;1:953-6.
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- 7 Garrow JS. *Obesity and related diseases*. London: Churchill Livingstone, 1988.
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Sloth

James McCormick

Sloth is an ugly word, one of the ugliest in the language. It has the great virtue of being underused. How many times have you said it, read it, or heard it in the past year?

Sloth is a sin because it does not take a fair share of the washing up. "Find yourself something to do dear, find yourself something to do." Those of us old enough to have had adolescents at home have little difficulty in remembering the rage induced by their extraordinary ability to lie abed until lunch time.

Sloth does not have many entries in the *Oxford Book of Quotations*. Among them are George Herbert:

O England, full of sin but most of sloth;
Spit out thy phlegm, and fill thy breast with glory

or Bishop Thomas Ken:

Awake my soul and with the sun
Thy daily stage of duty run;

Shake off dull sloth, and joyful rise
To pay thy morning sacrifice.¹

Ugh! "What is this world, if full of care we have no time to stand and stare?" Time to stand and stare, time to think, is seen by others as sloth. It is told that Petr Skrabanek, while working in the laboratory, was party to a discussion about the importance of obtaining new equipment. His response: "We do not need more equipment, we need to think, we need a chaise longue."

More recently sloth has literally become a deadly sin. The "couch potato" not only gives offence but shortens his life. As somebody who looks after several people who are living to die the slow death of senescence, there seems to me to be a strong case for relatively early and speedy death. In a world where all women are taking hormone replacement therapy and all men are taking statins, the possibility of peaceful myocardial infarction will diminish, and many more can look forward to life "sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything."

I wonder how great thinkers, who were obliged to do their thinking at home, managed to escape the accusation of sloth. I suspect that Darwin used the "sick role" to create the necessary escape from obligatory trivia. Montaigne had the luxury of sufficient money to employ others to complete "the daily round, the common task." For many others—by no means all great thinkers—the university and academia provide the opportunity to be slothful to good purpose.²

Walking is certainly compatible with thinking. I know of one family which responds to problems with "let's go climb a hill." Digging is also compatible with thinking but I have doubts about jogging. Certainly my own shortlived and puny efforts were about pain, and observing others there seems to be evidence of masochism rather than thought.

I suppose that the Protestant work ethic is largely responsible for the notion of laziness as sin. It seems to be very distant from those countries where the siesta is seen as essential. There are aspects of the siesta which have little to do with the heat of the midday sun. We all need time out of life. Perhaps it would be good if this were a daily occurrence rather than something achieved occasionally by "going on a retreat." A little justified sloth might reduce consumption of benzodiazepines as well as of alcohol.

Sloth, I would argue, is not a synonym for idleness. It is a sin in the eye of the beholder but the slothful make a positive decision to opt out of the demands of lovers and friends to be busy to little purpose. We need the luxury and benefits of occasional sloth.

1 *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*. 2nd edition. London: Oxford University Press, 1966.

2 McCormick JS. The academic task. *Lancet* 1988;ii:26.

Greed

Ralph Crawshaw

Greed, now there is a subject to turn off a medical audience, to send patients packing. I know, having been laughed off the podium for broaching the subject at a medical meeting, this despite the "Me" generation's glorification of greed in films such as *Wall Street*.¹ Granted that the exchange of money, albeit tax money, information, medications, and information between doctor and patient is generally respected as an ethical enterprise yet with the doctor and patient relationship it is never out of place to cock a clinical eye at any nidus of greed.

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