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Shiftless Little Loafers

QUESTION: Why don't more babies work? Excuse me, did I say *more*? I meant, why don't *any* babies work? After all, there are millions of babies around, and most of them appear to be extremely underemployed. There are so many jobs—being commissioner of major-league baseball, say, or running the snack concession at the Olympic synchronized-swimming venue—and yet it seems that babies never fill them. So why aren't babies working? I'll tell you. Walk down any street, and within a minute or so you will undoubtedly come across a baby. The baby will be lounging in a stroller, maybe snoozing, maybe tipping a bottle, maybe futzing around with a stuffed Teddy—whatever. After one good look, it doesn't take a genius to realize that babies are *lazy*. Or worse. Think of that same baby, same languid posture, same indolent attitude, but now wearing dark sunglasses. You see it all the time. Supposedly, it has to do with UV rays, but the result is that a baby with sunglasses looks not just lazy but lazy

and *snobby*. Sort of like an Italian film producer. You know: “Oh, I’m so sorry, Mr. Baby isn’t available at the moment. No, Mr. Baby hasn’t had a chance to look at your screenplay yet. Why don’t you just send coverage, and Mr. Baby will get back to you when he can.”

This is right about when you are going to bring up statistics about show-business babies. Granted, there are some show-biz babies, but their numbers are tiny. For one thing, there isn’t that much work, and anyway most of it is completely visual-driven, not talent-driven. And everyone knows that babies lose their looks practically overnight, which means that even if Baby So-and-So lands a role in a major-studio feature she’ll do the work and go to the big premiere, and maybe even make a few dollars on her back-end points, but by the next day she’s lucky if she’s an answer on “Jeopardy.” Modelling superbabies? Same. Remember those babies zooming around in the Michelin tire ads? Where are they now?

The one job that babies seem willing and eager to do is stroller-pushing. Well, big deal, since (a) they’re actually very bad at it, and (b) am I the only one who didn’t get the memo saying that there was a lot of extra stroller-pushing that desperately needed to be done? Besides, it’s not a job, it’s a *responsibility*. For a baby to claim that pushing his or her own stroller counts as gainful employment is about as convincing as for me to declare that my full-time job is to floss regularly. Elevator-button pushing? Not a job: a *prank*.

Unless you really need to stop on every floor. And have you ever watched babies trying to walk? Is it possible that they don't work but still go out for a three-Martini lunch? Of course, babies do a lot of pro-bono projects, like stand-up (and fall-down) comedy, and preverbal psycholinguistic research, but we all know that pro bono is just Latin for Someone Else Buys My Pampers.

One recent summery morning, I walked across Central Park on my way to my own place of employment—where, by the way, I have to be every day whether I want to or not. The Park was filled with babies, all loafing around and looking happy as clams. They love summer. And what's not to like? While the rest of us, weary cogs of industry, are worrying about an annual report and sweating stains into our suits, the babies in the park are relaxed and carefree and mostly nude—not for them the nightmare of tan marks, let alone the misery of summer work clothes. And what were they doing on this warm afternoon? Oh, a lot of really taxing stuff: napping, snacking on Cheerios, demanding a visit with various dogs, hanging out with their friends—everything you might do on a gorgeous July day if you were in a great mood, which you would be if you didn't have to work for a living. That morning, I was tempted to suggest a little career counselling to one of these blithe creatures, but, as I approached, the baby turned his attention ferociously and uninterruptibly to one of his toes and then, suddenly, to the blade of grass in his fist. I know that look: I do it on buses when I don't want

anyone to sit next to me. It always works for me, and it worked like a charm for this I-seem-to-remember-telling-you-I'm-in-a-meeting baby. I was out-foxed and I knew it, so I headed for my office. As I crossed the playground, weaving among the new leisure class, I realized something. The reason babies don't work? They're too *smart*.

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