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Environmental Roots of Labor-Leisure Preference

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Abstract

This research explores the origins of labour-leisure preference and the variation in its prevalence across regions and nations. It advances the hypothesis and establishes empirically that the evolution of predisposition towards labour and leisure in the course of human history can be traced to the adaptation of humans to the modes of production, characterized by the different return to effort in the long-run. Exploiting regional variations in the potential suitability for hunting and agriculture and their exogenous changes in the course of the Columbian Exchange, the research establishes that consistent with the predictions of the theory, individuals that are originated in regions marked by greater suitability for hunting have higher predisposition towards leisure, while descendants of regions in which agriculture was more productive are characterized by greater predisposition towards labour.

Keywords: preference for labour, preference for leisure, cultural evolution, evolution of preferences, natural selection, group selection, Malthusian epoch, growth, development

JEL Classification: D81, D91, Z10, O10, O40