



Johan Bouwer, Marco van Leeuwen,
*Philosophy of Leisure—
Foundations of the Good Life*
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Western culture has undergone dramatic changes due to both technological development and economic pressures. As a result of social changes, there has also been a shift in the perception of leisure time. In the contemporary era, in addition to the workload, we are also facing a massive attack of consumerism, which is shifting the work–relaxation contrast to a modern form of devaluation of the “I work in order to be able to relax.”

Leisure time as an integral part of human life plays a significant role in its many aspects. For a person of every age, leisure time is important for regeneration, spirituality, relaxation, entertainment, social contacts, and self-realization of interests. Leisure time thus serves a number of functions as elaborated by experts in the field. However, their opinions differ to some extent. Leisure time is most commonly associated with concepts such as freedom, choice, life satisfaction, and independence.

Such interpretation of leisure time and the attempt to provide a precise definition is likened to a utopia, since the various concepts mentioned here are associated with place, time, and, above all, the activities of others. Philosophers have suggested that a distinction should be made between free time and leisure time. Free time is more typical for ancient and medieval societies, whereastory. In ancient and medieval times, for the majority of population, free time was the time off work, when people mostly relaxed and recharged before they returned to work. They also participated in varied events and festivals,

mostly of a religious, cultic, and communal nature, rather than in leisure activities that could mean self-realization and self-development. In contrast, the free time of the privileged ruling class of population was not complementary to or compensatory of work, but a substitute for work. In fact, it was inactivity and idleness.

Oftentimes, one can encounter an opinion that we can only speak of leisure time as a separate and full-fledged category in industrial and post-industrial societies, when activities in society are no longer regulated as a whole by ritual obligations prescribed by the community. Individuals are supposedly free to decide how to use their leisure time, although their choice is socially determined. Paid work is separated from other activities. Its specific organization clearly separates it from free time, or at least allows this separation to take place. Verdon speaks of the emergence of a civilization of leisure to replace the civilization of work. However, the contemporary world is immensely fascinated by activities classified under the category of leisure time, which is no longer understood as a mere antithesis to work. Today, leisure time is also viewed as a form of social and cultural practice in which work and leisure overlap and influence one another. The discrepancies pointed out with new urgency raise fundamental questions: What is leisure time? How is leisure time related to the quality of life? Who is in charge of leisure time? The book *Philosophy of Leisure—Foundations of the Good Life* critically examines the basic principles of leisure time and shows that these questions are still relevant for today's society. Not only does it examine the traditional philosophical concepts that underpin the study of leisure time, but it also follows new ways of its reconceptualization that have emerged from the recent developments in society, technology, and a broader philosophical discipline.

The authors of the reviewed book, Bouwer and Van Leeuwen, approach the concept of leisure time from a philosophically inquiring perspective, arguing that leisure time is closely linked to the pursuit of happiness, human flourishing, and well-being, making it a state of mind and a state of being. Leisure time is explored through key issues such as identity, ethics, spirituality, human experience, freedom, technology, embodiment, well-being, fundamental properties of leisure time and the challenge of offering a meaningful definition.

The book consists of three parts and two insertions that thematically link the authors' explorations in a very concise way. The first part of the book offers a clear philosophical and historical reflection on the transformations in the understanding of leisure time. The analysis begins with a description of leisure time as understood by ancient Greek philosophers, with an emphasis on the centrality of human happiness and the good life. A brief survey of conceptualizations and interpretations of leisure time throughout history reveals a rather wide range of different complementary but also contradictory dimensions of leisure time. In this vast historical interval, leisure time is identified with entertainment, pleasure, self-development, fitness, health, luxury, contemplation,

idleness, recreation, leisure, consumption, play, prosperity, welfare, spirituality, inner meaning, worship, and celebration. There are three basic characteristics of leisure time: time, activity, and state of mind/being.

The authors assert that leisure time is significantly linked to a life in freedom. The first insertion provides a brief outline of several contemporary typologies. It serves as a bridge between an evaluation of the idea/ideal of leisure time reception in different historical epochs and reflections on fundamental themes in philosophy such as freedom, meaning, identity, and ethics. To describe the modern spirit, the authors use the terms such as modernity and postmodernity. In the second part, concepts such as freedom, meaning, and experience, identity and ethics are analyzed in the context of contemporary applications of leisure time. Freedom and free will are introduced as constitutive elements of leisure. The meaning of leisure and its contribution to the development of personal identity as well as the relations between leisure and ethics are presented, too.

The second insertion bridges the analysis of the foundations of leisure time with possible future directions in leisure time research. The third part explores virtual space and the use of the Internet and social media in leisure time and the link between leisure time and spirituality. The authors draw on the current position of spirituality in the public discourse and address the potential role of leisure time in enhancing well-being. They then analyze leisure time as a means for self-actualization, for self-improvement, that is, the utilization of leisure time in order to become who one wants to be. Thus, leisure time is not meant to be a balancing act between activity, exertion or work as a social function, and we can touch on its positive manifestations. Leisure time is about quieting down and silence. If I retreat “to myself,” I am able to perceive things, listen, contemplate, rest, for example, by sleeping. Knowing how to fall asleep and sleep soundly are not mere physiological necessities.

Time off and rest refer to the Latin *otium* and the Greek *scholion*, meaning idleness, holidays that are linked neither to passivity nor to any other kind of non-working activity. The definition of time off/leisure is first offered in contrast with its basic antithesis, which is work. Work takes up a considerable amount of our time; it absorbs us or even controls us. It makes a person into a worker. It totalizes reality and leaves no room for an alternative. Work transforms activity into purposefulness and instrumentalizes it. Moreover, work must be useful, beneficial, and hard. At the same time, one becomes more and more internally fused with the work process, which is manifested in the way work encroaches on his/her living space, corporeality, and social sphere. On the one hand, the work initiative in search of constant activity and, on the other hand, the strenuousness that is often associated with work do not allow one to experience leisure or to fathom what it actually means. Bouwer and Van Leeuwen emphasize that adequate leisure time improves personal well-being, mental health and facilitates community well-being and the search for solutions to common

problems. They favor the view that the concept of leisure time will be better grasped if it is emphasized that leisure time is fundamentally concerned with psychological well-being.

Leisure time is of immense value, but it is not a value in and of itself, but as an unlimited opportunity for humans to return to themselves, to their authentic full life, to reflect on values, to be conscious of what threatens them and to safeguard them. Choosing the right use of this time is of the utmost importance, especially for children and young people, as it contributes greatly to the formation of their personality and education. Its improper use can lead to socio-pathological phenomena in children and, consequently, in society. With its original approach, the book *Philosophy of Leisure* deepens the knowledge in the field of leisure time research. It is a fascinating reading for students and scholars in the fields of philosophy, theology, sociology, psychology, ethics, pedagogy, as well as for those interested in the research of leisure time.

Pavol Dancák

University of Prešov, Slovak Republik

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8067-5651>