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Scholē as a Way of Learning to Be Human in the Age of the Internet

Abstract: The article offers a brief philosophical reflection on scholē and human being in the context of the Internet. The first part of the article shortly explains the urgency of the problems that arise from the extensive use of the Internet, such as addiction to digital devices, being constantly connected to the Internet and receiving unreliable information. The second part of the article offers a reflection of scholē (leisure) as a space for transcendence which is a very important attribute of the human being and which is the foundation of our culture. Scholē is an organic component of culture and education, and leisure presents not the cessation of work, but a work of a rather different kind, the work restored to its human meaning, as a celebration and a festival. The article concludes that scholē provides us with precise and true information about what the human person essentially needs.

Keywords: Internet, scholē, leisure, paideia, transcendence

Introduction

Today we are facing a rather dramatic process of civilizational structuring. An advanced decomposition of industrial civilization is progressing. Some claim that a new different civilization is emerging, that is, an information one, or, according to others, a postmodern, post-industrial one; the multitude of names proves, I suppose, the large degree of confusion in this matter. A civilizational crisis is often related to scientific and technological discoveries which entail such revolutionary technological change. As a result, not only do unprecedented

changes to the production technology take place, but all dimensions of human and social life undergo a deep transformation.¹

In the first part of the article, I will briefly explain the urgency of the problems that arise from the extensive use of the Internet. In the second part, I intend to present a reflection of *scholē* (leisure) as a space for transcendence which is a very important attribute of human being and which is at the very foundation of our culture. I also claim that *scholē* is an organic component of culture and education and that leisure is not the cessation of work, but it is a work of a rather different kind, the one restored to its human meaning, as a celebration and a festival.

Respecting the fundamental attributes of human being naturally creates a space for the harmonious symbiosis of “human and technological.” Such an approach should save humanity from a swift and risky action in the era of “digital barbarism” and contribute to the spread of a culture that cultivates both the individual and society.²

We believe that philosophers can identify different dimensions of thinking about humans in response to this theme. Nowadays, the advance of modern science and technology not merely improves human life but also causes unprecedented challenges and crises. Conflicts between civilizations and between nations, tensions between individual and community and between different individuals as well as disquiet in each of us are all in need of philosophical wisdom. It is simply impossible to find out any ready-made solutions. However, rational reflection and dialogue may help to create a better world and to gain an individual life more adapted to our times.³

In the Age of the Internet

The contemporary era is characterized by the extensive use of the Internet. Humankind has no experience with this tool, though. People of the 21st century focus on efficiency, profit, and speed. And still, the question: What are efficiency, profit, and speed? remains unanswered. Above all, there is a human being that is left out from the larger picture. A human being becomes an object. And yet

¹ Krzysztof Wielecki, “The Contemporary Civilizational Crisis from the Perspective of Critical Realism,” *Journal of Critical Realism* 19 (2020): 269–284.

² Maryna Liashenko and Oksana Subina, “Learning to Be Human: From Philosophical Problem to Humanity Development Metaphor,” *Philosophy and Cosmology* 24 (2020): 113–121.

³ *Learning to Be Human. 24th World Congress of Philosophy* (2018), accessed January 15, 2022, <http://wcp2018.pku.edu.cn/docs/20170921134038365819.pdf>.

it is a human being that is the most important, to reiterate Immanuel Kant or St. Irenaeus from Lyon.

Margaret S. Archer⁴ aptly exemplifies the tendencies of objectivization of a human being by quoting several notable authors who had predicted such a trend. The rise of postmodernism over the last two decades represented a virulent rejection of “modernity’s man,” which then spilt over into the dissolution of the human subject and a corresponding inflation of the importance of society. Now, in Lyotard’s words, “a self does not amount to much,”⁵ and as Rorty asserts, “socialisation [...] goes all the way down.”⁶ To give humankind this epiphenomenal status necessarily deflects all real interest on to the forces of socialisation, as in every version of social constructionism. People are indeed perfectly uninteresting if they possess no personal powers which can make a difference. Consequently, to Foucault, “man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea.”⁷ Constructionism elides the concept of self with the sense of self; we are nothing beyond what society makes us, and it makes us what we are through our joining society’s conversation. Society’s being thus impoverishes humanity by subtracting from our human powers and accrediting all of them—selfhood, reflexivity, thought, memory, emotionality, and belief—to society’s discourse.

Over the last two decades, there has been a sharp increase in the use of electronic media with the Internet access available to people all around the world. Clearly, the Internet has brought some positives, but it is much needed to take notice of the negative aspects of the virtual space of new media. The wide availability of mobile phones, smart TV tablets, game consoles with the Internet access has fundamentally changed the lives of not only young people. There is no doubt that in today’s globalized world people will not be able to escape information and communication technologies. Just the contrary, there is a growing likelihood that the digital technologies will become more and more intertwined with their lives.⁸ This trend has been confirmed when the use of online communication during the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus was given priority.

⁴ Margaret S. Archer, Andrew Collier, and Douglas Porpora, *Transcendence: Critical Realism and God* (London: Routledge, 2004), 66.

⁵ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 15.

⁶ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989), 185.

⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Random House, 1970), 387.

⁸ Marek Rembierz, “Wirtualne oblicze realnego filozofa. O uprawianiu filozofii i tożsamości filozofa w kontekście globalnej sieci komunikacji,” *Świat i Słowo* 1 (2014): 64–86.

Today, approximately 4.3 billion people worldwide use the Internet. In Slovakia, in 2018, 81% of households⁹ had access to the Internet, while in that year 78% of the users used the Internet every day. According to the report by the British communication company Ofcom, most people in the UK today are hugely dependent on digital devices and need a constant connection to the Internet. Their phones are checked every 12 minutes on average.

According to a survey by Ofcom, 78% of Britons own mobile phones and 54% of them have reported to be dependent on their phones. The same report states that seven out of ten people will never turn off their cell phones. They admit that they do not know how to learn it. Internet users have identified the need to belong somewhere, as well as the need for self-presentation, as two basic social needs associated with the use of social networks.¹⁰ According to a research report from 2014, social networks are the most attractive and most widely used application of today's generation of children. As many as 70% of children and young people have their own profile on one of the social networks. Social networks are the domain of older students—up to 82% of them have their profiles in comparison to “only” 50% of younger students. Using social networks can contribute to excessive and addictive behavior, which is referred to as the fear of missing out or the FOMO syndrome.¹¹ This syndrome has been defined as a pervasive concern that others may be having fun, while the person experiencing these anxieties and concerns is missing out because they are not. Symptoms of FOMO include irritability, nervousness, impatience, bad mood, anxiety, depression, palpitations, procrastination, indecision, inattention, nervousness, and the like.¹²

The Internet has a significant impact on what is happening in the world today: it is a symbol of globalization, networking brings unprecedented opportunities. This new structure of globalized culture has brought new forms of cultural studies combining traditions from around the world that have become globalized in recent decades through the expansion of articles, books, conferences, websites, and debates.¹³ The escalation of sensations, the explosion of scandals, the proliferation of a number of television stations causes a person to

⁹ *Households—Level of Internet Access*. Eurostat. (2021), accessed January 15, 2022, http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=isoc_ci_in_h&lang=en.

¹⁰ Elisa Wegman, Ursula Oberst, Benjamin Stodt, and Matthias Brand, “Online-specific Fear of Missing Out and Internet-use Expectancies Contribute to Symptoms of Internet-Communication Disorder,” *Addictive Behaviors reports* 5 (2017): 33–42.

¹¹ Andrew K. Przybylski, Kou Murayama, Cody R. DeHaan, and Valerie Gladwell, “Motivational, Emotional, and Behavioral Correlates of Fear of Missing Out,” *Computers in Human Behavior* 4 (2013): 1841–1848.

¹² Kamil Kopecký, “Co je syndrom FoMO,” *E-Bezpečí* 1 (2017): 14–16.

¹³ Douglas Kellner, “The Frankfurt School and British Cultural Studies: The Missed Articulation,” accessed January 15, 2022, <https://pages.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/essays/frankfurtschoolbritishculturalstudies.pdf>.

stop being attentive to “of what one must be silent” (Wittgenstein). This creates information noise. The stronger it gets, the more it robs people of being attentive. “This intense need for this noise acts as a drug and prevents a person from focusing on what is really important.”¹⁴

The noise can also take the form of redundancy, for instance, in advertisements. Eco claims that it is the great noise that sells washing powders or phones as it is difficult to discern what the ads are trying to tell us and, in fact, there is no need to understand. The main function of the publicity noise (advertising) is to remind you of the advertising sketch, not the product. The noise essentially compensates for lack of evidence for the product excellence. We got used to seeing everything reduced to sensational headlines (history, world events, entertainment, politics or culture). The media confuse their consumers with too much noise and provide maximum information and minimum communication. Eco claims that the Internet generates the greatest noise¹⁵ because of:

- (1) the uncertainty whether the information you receive is reliable,
- (2) the inability to find the relevant information within the vast amount of information.

Many people are aware of their extensive use of the Internet and they realize that it limits their relationships with their families. Clearly, people know they must rest, but they have, in fact, forgotten how to do it. The prevention of online addictions is mainly about engaging in offline activities. It is leisure time that creates a space for educational guidance to create positive personal and social relationships.¹⁶ Even in the age of the Internet, it is necessary to respect the natural ways of human existence and to purposefully cultivate the ties with friends and family.

Scholē as a Way of Learning to Be Human

The word *scholē* is a typical example of a word whose meaning has been greatly shifted. The term denoting leisure and free time has become to mean tests, exams, homework, and completing different assignments. Historical sources indicate that leisure time has always been opposite to working time which is a time for work and duties. For Thales of Milete, the home is happy when

¹⁴ Umberto Eco, *Vytváření nepřitele (a jiné příležitostné texty)* (Praha: Argo, 2013), 157.

¹⁵ Eco, *Vytváření nepřitele (a jiné příležitostné texty)*, 151–158.

¹⁶ Karl Spracklen, *Constructing Leisure* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan), 49.

the master of the house has enough leisure time. In the context of the hierarchy in a slave society, Aristotle perceives leisure time as opposite to work. Work was intended only for slaves and leisure time for free citizens so they could develop their virtues and dedicate their time to politics. Free citizens were not supposed to engage in mundane work, craft or trade, since such a life was not noble and was in conflict with virtues.¹⁷ Leisure time was a space for cultivation, prayer, education or *paideia*, which the Greek perceived as a unity of rearing and education, but also civilization, religion, culture, tradition, and literature.¹⁸

In modern times, *paideia* has become something that is difficult to comprehend if we define it as “education” and apply its modern meaning. Plato’s *paideia* is based on abilities to be in relationship¹⁹ and encompasses the idea of awe of the outside world. The idea of *paideia* can be found in a form of *pan-sophia* in Komenský,²⁰ as “education which is an introduction to the wholeness of the world” in the work of Jan Patočka,²¹ as fundamental agogics in the work of Radim Palouš, meaning a way or style of life understood as a whole in its profound organic and transcendent order.

Paideia is related to everyday provisioning towards which every person is oriented. This human condition somehow chains the person. Yet one does not rid oneself of duties associated with this provisioning. By means of education, the everyday provisioning is located in its own unique place. Applying the Plato’s parable of the cave, a person’s education is an upward and downward journey.

The mysterious authority of “an educator” shows the true face of the human situation in which a man discovers himself. *Paideia* is not an educational method but entails the extending beyond the situation in which we remain, despite all. It is breaking out of ordinary life. Man is then educated, freed from constant occupation by various activities. The space for *paideia* is *scholē*, which means leisure time, lying aside daily personal agenda and worries. *Scholē* is leisure time (a day off, holidays, a break from everyday provisioning) and a Greek nobleman dedicates this time to care for his soul.²²

It is thanks to this “Sunday school” that the real education is carried out. *Scholē* is not emptiness without shadows, but freedom from the reality of the world, releasing oneself from the numbness caused by the chains in the cave. It is the openness to the arrival of what is hidden behind the shadows; it is

¹⁷ Emília Kratochvílová, *Pedagogika voľného času. Výchova mimo vyučovania v pedagogickej teórii a v praxi* (Bratislava: Univerzita Komenského, 2004), 75.

¹⁸ Werner Jaeger, *Paideia I* (Warszawa: Pax, 1964), 17–32.

¹⁹ Zdeněk Kratochvíl, *Výchova, zřejmost, vědomí* (Praha: Herrmann & synové, 1995), 28.

²⁰ Radim Palouš, *Česká zkušenost* (Praha: Academia, 1994), 157.

²¹ Jan Patočka, *Aristoteles, jeho předchůdci a dědicové* (Praha: ČSAV, 1965), 370.

²² Kratochvíl, *Výchova, zřejmost, vědomí*, 40.

liberation so that we can live the true life.²³ The prisoner in Plato's cave strives to make sense of the matters concealed by shadows.²⁴ Yet, the worth of such knowing is very limited, because what one needs to know is on the other side of the cave. In scholē, there is no limitation by shadows because here a person "faces" the world that opens up before them.²⁵ Scholē as emptiness does not have a negative connotation but represents some positive value. It is liberation, a space for what is most typical for man. Only through scholē, through keeping our distance, can we view our everydayness as the immersion in our worries about mobility, livelihood, and survival.

Knowing one's own situation and one's way of understanding acquired through scholē in which paideia comes into existence is not in the power of an individual who excels in matters pertaining to ordinary life. In Plato's allegory, a freed individual is not active. Indeed, it is some mysterious authority that frees one and pulls the educated one onto the steep path. The freed person is defined by an array of weaknesses: blinded, not adapted for change, allured back to the comfort of the former position one is accustomed to. Paideia does not mean a relationship between the stronger, able-bodied, wiser, more educated and older man—the educator, and the weaker man—the one to be educated. What is strong here is only the anonymous, mysterious, and unnamable authority, not a concrete man. Knowing one's own situation and a way of understanding, acquired through scholē in which paideia comes to existence, no human is able to obtain some sort of certificate for paideia through their own natural talent, erudition, or experience. No human power can bring about the change; it is a hard and unusual turn, and a strenuous movement on a difficult path. The sanctity of scholē understood as free time is also accentuated by the fact that there is not even one reference in the allegory of the cave to the shroud of mystery being lifted for this mighty authority of paideia.²⁶

A substantial part of education happens within the interval of scholē.²⁷ However, there is a great danger related to this opportunity. In fact, there is a tendency to fill the space of scholē with various pseudo-activities of shadowy character, and therefore one single conversion (*periagoge*), one change, or one surfacing does not suffice. What is necessary is the constant turning to what is good (*agathon*) and see to the favorable ambience of leisure time, which does not create education but still makes it possible. Plato's thought is still relevant today. It emerged at a time of decline, when the world of the *polis* was being replaced by the passive universe of our human world of freedom and responsibility.

²³ Radim Palouš, *K filozofii výchovy* (Praha: SPN, 1991), 80–81.

²⁴ Platón, *Ústava* (Praha: Oikoymenh, 1993), 516a.

²⁵ Palouš, *K filozofii výchovy*, 80.

²⁶ Radim Palouš, *Čas výchovy* (Praha: SPN, 1991), 60–61.

²⁷ Radim Palouš, *Totalizmus a holizmus* (Praha: Karolinum, 1997), 144.

However, this freedom is not perceived as an absolute freedom and boundless independence. Freedom is not a deity but rather it is a path to something divine.²⁸

The sacred character of leisure time, which directs a man to God, is evident in the Hebrew tradition too. The Sabbath has the greatest significance out of all feast days in the Jewish calendar; it is the most important day of the week. In the Christian tradition, people are freed from work on Sundays and in this freedom, they *shall* always realize that they have been redeemed. “Like God rested on the seventh day after all previous days, human life has also its rhythm of work and rest. Setting of Lord’s Day (Sunday) helps all people to have sufficient rest and leisure time which enables them to pursue family, cultural, social and religious life.”²⁹

The ancient thought equated a notion of “spirit” with a category of “reason.” Following Scheler, a person can become a personality due to spirit. Here Scheler contradicts the materialistic viewpoint. Spirit rather than society contributes to the development of an individual ascending to the lofty place of personality. Spirit allows man to differ from animal, as the human being is a priori granted by the Divine origin, that is, reason, which is opposed to the nature per se with its lack of rationale and mind. The human being is “the sole bearer” of spirit in the Universe. Man is inherently included in the process of spiritualization of the humanity. At the level of spirit, the human being obtains the highest values—moral, religious, cultural—given to them at the definite historical period and place.³⁰

Scheler correlates anthropology with the religious understanding of man.³¹ God is embraced by the spirit and reveals the highest form of sacred being. The religious spirit is a mean of unity of spirit and sensibility, while as man is a place of their meeting. The human being is deeply aware of their likeness to God, and in this sense the relationship of God and man is originally a matter of course. The divine nature of man is a safeguard of impossibility to return to the state of savageness. Consequently, following Scheler, the meta-idea of a “religious person” is one of the fundamental types of the anthropological conception in history of Western culture.

²⁸ Jan Patočka, *Filosofie výchovy* (Praha: Univerzita Karlova, 1997), 24.

²⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, accessed January 15, 2022, https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM.

³⁰ Olga V. Chistyakova, Liu Yu-chao, and Tsai Wei-ding, “Understanding of Man in Western and Eastern Cultural Traditions,” *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research* 41 (2020): 568–573, accessed July 13, 2014, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340301162_Understanding_of_Man_in_Western_and_Eastern_Cultural_Traditions.

³¹ Max Scheler, *The Human Place in the Cosmos* (Evanston, IL: Northwest University Press, 2009).

The phenomenon of leisure can be clarified by looking at ancient and scholastic philosophy in Josef Pieper's work *Musse und Kult* [Leisure and Culture] which was published in Germany after World War II and became a disputed bestseller. Pieper famously stated that leisure is basically a condition of the human being. Leisure is not the time for idleness; it provides a space for one's integration into the world-as-a-whole. At that time, Germany was full of "reconstructing enthusiasm" while getting over the effects of the war, and Pieper warns that without time free for reflection, creativity, contemplation, and, cult, there is no sense in human effort.³² After all, man does not live for the sake of work, because work is only a means to achieving the transcendent goal of human life. Patočka reflects on scholē in a similar way: scholē is the space for looking into broader contents and not only for perceiving the current position.³³

Paraphrasing Eco, I can sum up that scholē provides us with precise and true information about what the human person essentially needs.

Conclusion

Rest and relaxation have become an increasingly challenging task in the digital world. Many people seek refuge in screens as soon as they get home, and the possibilities of doing so are ample in today's technocratic world. Sometimes it is very difficult to step out of the comfort zone, to detach oneself from the established stereotypes that we take for granted. In the comfort zone one feels good, safe, and comfortable. Once you leave that zone you feel uncomfortable. And we have gotten used to stereotypical screen activities. But as we very well know, being human means being on the road, being on the quest—and that requires tremendous effort, even in the age of the Internet.

Contemporary society with its desire to maximize economic production tries to present leisure as a senseless waste of time.³⁴ Continual work duties place a "creative break" aside, causing a lot of damage to life and production. The current consumer atmosphere, trying to eradicate Sunday as a free day may result in man losing his religious footing and being left to the mercy of economic and political powers. Historical experience with "subotniki" and "nedel'niki" (working shifts on Saturdays and Sundays established in the com-

³² Josef Pieper, *Leisure, the Basis of Culture* (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 1998).

³³ Patočka, *Filosofie výchovy*, 5.

³⁴ Johan Bouwer and Marco van Leeuwen, *Philosophy of Leisure* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017).

munist regimes), but also our current experience with burnouts clearly indicate the counter-productivity of such endeavors. When reflecting upon the phenomenon of leisure it is advised to draw from experience but it is also necessary to reject the temptation of the totalitarian approach to the sophist reduction in its many forms and to accept philosophical openness towards reality and reflect on the true meaning of free time which lies in the personal responsibility towards the transcendent.

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Scholē comme moyen d'apprendre à être humain à l'heure de l'Internet

Résumé

L'article propose une brève réflexion philosophique sur la scholē et l'être humain dans le contexte d'Internet. La première partie de l'article explique brièvement l'urgence des problèmes qui découlent de l'utilisation extensive d'Internet, tels que la dépendance aux appareils numériques, le fait d'être constamment connecté à Internet et de recevoir des informations peu fiables. La deuxième partie de l'article propose une réflexion sur scholē (le temps libre) en tant qu'espace de transcendance, qui est un attribut humain très important et qui constitue le fondement de notre culture. Scholē est une composante organique de la culture et de l'éducation, et le loisir n'est pas la cessation du travail, mais un travail d'une autre nature, un travail restauré dans sa signification humaine, comme une célébration et une fête. En conclusion, l'article scholē nous fournit des informations précises et véridiques sur ce dont la personne humaine a fondamentalement besoin.

Mots-clés: internet, scholē, repos, paideia, transcendance

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Scholē come modo per imparare a diventare esseri umani nell'era di Internet

Sommario

L'articolo propone una breve riflessione filosofica sulla scholē e sull'uomo nel contesto di Internet. Nella prima parte dell'articolo si spiega brevemente l'urgenza dei problemi che nascono dall'uso estensivo di Internet, come la dipendenza dai dispositivi digitali, l'essere costantemente connessi a Internet e la ricezione di informazioni inaffidabili. La seconda parte dell'articolo propone una riflessione sulla scholē (tempo libero) come spazio di trascendenza, che è un attributo molto importante dell'uomo e che costituisce il fondamento della nostra cultura. Scholē è una componente organica della cultura e dell'educazione, e il tempo libero non è cessazione del lavoro, ma un tipo diverso di lavoro, un lavoro restituito al suo significato umano, come festa e festival. Nella conclusione dell'articolo, scholē ci fornisce informazioni precise e veritiere su ciò di cui ha fundamentalmente bisogno l'uomo.

Parole chiave: Internet, scholē, tempo libero, paideia, trascendenza