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Accompany Man in the Digital Age (I)



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# Philosophy and Canon Law

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Accompany Man in the Digital Age (I)

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Part One

# Philosophy





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## AI Robot—Companion, Friend or Competitor of Human Being?

**Abstract:** Robots are becoming part of people’s everyday surroundings. Therefore, the formation and change of people’s attitude towards objects equipped with artificial intelligence is becoming an important subject of reflection. Substantial research has already been conducted, but few predictions have been made about the future relationship between humanity and autonomous, multi-tasking and highly advanced artificial intelligence. The purpose of this article is an attempt at extrapolating the evolution of the human-robot bond so far, from alienation and a sense of threat toward tameness, affection and even—perhaps—friendship. The study of the evolution of the relationship between humans and artificial intelligence makes it also possible to deepen our understanding of who human beings are, what their needs, expectations, and hopes are, and which of them can be realized through close cooperation between humans and artificial intelligence.

**Keywords:** AI robot, mimetic evolution, superintelligence, extended subjectivity, human-machine coupling

## Human Beings in the Face of the Development of Artificial Intelligence: A New Dimension of Social Relations?

Robots are becoming a more widespread, increasingly common part of people’s daily surroundings. The authors of a review of research on human attitudes toward robots, Aleksandra Wasielewska and Paweł Łupkowski, note: “the growing

popularity of robots and robotics means that we are dealing with a kind of (ever-growing) ecosystem of robots surrounding us) (cf. Palomäki et al., 2018: 3–4). This ecosystem, of course, does not apply only to actual robots (such as industrial robots, autonomous cars, cleaning robots or robot assistants, for example), but also to robots appearing in film productions, animations, games or as virtual assistants (Google Assistant, Siri).<sup>1</sup> A special position in the “robot community” belongs to social robots, or “autonomous machines that can recognize other robots and humans and engage in social interactions (Fong, Nourbakhsh, and Dautenhahn, 2003). Robots of this kind are designed to serve humans, and as a result, they often play the role of: guides, assistants, companions, caregivers, teachers or house pets. [...] a social robot can also be a fully virtual robot. It is the ability to interact with other social agents that is the feature of greatest importance in defining the said robots.”<sup>2</sup>

Due to the existence of a distinct class of robots, specialized in interacting with humans and performing a number of functions considered until recently to be typically human, and because of the ever-increasing robotization of almost all areas of the human environment, the question of how human attitudes toward objects equipped with artificial intelligence are shaping and changing is becoming increasingly important.

A number of research teams in various countries around the world, especially in North America, Europe, and Asia, have conducted studies, the results of which show what kind of attitudes people have toward robots and what factors influence human attitudes toward AI.<sup>3</sup> The detailed results of these studies show

<sup>1</sup> Aleksandra Wasielewska and Paweł Łupkowski, “Nieoczywiste relacje z technologią. Przegląd badań na temat ludzkich postaw wobec robotów,” *Człowiek i Społeczeństwo* 51 (2021): 166; See also: Jussi Petteri Palomäki, Anton Kunnari, Maria-Anna Drosinou, Mika Koverola, Noora Lehtonen, Juho Halonen, Marko Repo, and Michael Laakasuo, “Evaluating the Replicability of the Uncanny Valley Effect,” *Hlyon* 4, no. 11 (2018), e00939. [All translations by Szymon Bukal, unless stated otherwise.]

<sup>2</sup> Wasielewska and Łupkowski, “Nieoczywiste relacje z technologią,” 166. See also: Terrence Fong, Illah Nourbakhsh, and Kerstin Dautenhahn, “A Survey of Socially Interactive Robots,” *Robotics and Autonomous Systems* 4, no. 3–4 (2003): 143–166.

<sup>3</sup> See for instance: Christoph Bartneck, Tatsuya Nomura, Takayuki Kanda, Tomohiro Suzuki, and Kennsuke Kato, “Cultural Differences in Attitudes Towards Robots,” in Proceedings of the Symposium on *Robot Companions: Hard Problems and Open Challenges in Human-Robot Interaction AISB 05* (12–15 April 2005, Hatfield, UK), 1–4. Society for the Study of Artificial Intelligence and the Simulation of Behaviour (SSAISB); Elisabeth Broadbent, Rebecca Stafford, and Bruce MacDonald, “Acceptance of Healthcare Robots for the Older Population: Review and Future Directions,” *International Journal of Social Robotics* 1, no. 4 (2009): 319–330; Jean-Christophe Giger, Daniel Moura, Nuno Almeida, and Nuno Piçarra, “Attitudes towards Social Robots: The Role of Belief in Human Nature Uniqueness, Religiousness and Taste for Science Fiction,” in *Proceedings of the II International Congress on Interdisciplinarity in Social and Human Sciences*, ed. S. N. Jesus and P. Pinto (2017): 509–514. Faro: CIEO, Research Centre for Spatial and Organizational Dynamics; Paweł Łupkowski and Filip Jański-Mały, “The More You See Me

a specific distribution of human attitudes depending on such parameters as sex, age, nationality, cultural affiliation, education, religious and worldview beliefs, physical appearance and the dynamics of the robot's movements, as well as own previous experiences of interaction with AI. The benefits that can be derived from studying the results of the research are varied; among other things, they make it possible for us to understand the sources and causes of certain prejudices against robots, more accurately predict the consequences of certain types of human-robot interactions, and understand the psychological mechanisms underlying the formation of positive or negative attitudes of people towards AI. These results can serve, on the one hand, designers and developers, helping to optimally adapt new AI designs to human needs, expectations and preferences, and, on the other hand, educators and tutors to prepare well-thought-out educational strategies aimed at overcoming psychological barriers, prejudices and stereotypes, while at the same time preparing them to consciously and responsibly enter into multifaceted interactions with AI.

It is also possible to set a more distant goal: to make some predictions about how human-robot relations will play out in the future, when technological advances will make the latter much more perfect than they are today, better suited to perform their assigned functions—either strictly specialized, as in the case of industrial or medical robots, for example, or broadly unified, as in the case of so-called strong AI—and human expectations of them will become higher and more specific.

What can we expect in the coming years and decades?

## The History of the Man-Machine Relationship as an Example of Mimetic Evolution

One of the proven methods of predicting the future is extrapolation from data on the historical development of the phenomenon of interest. An interesting example of a cultural studies reflection on the history of human-machine interaction, which includes thinking machines, is Anna Maj's work *O ewolucji robotów: mimesis w projektowaniu interakcji człowiek-maszyna od starożytnych automatów do robo creator* [On the Evolution of Robots: Mimesis in Human-Machine Interaction Design from Ancient Automatons to Robo Creators]. The text begins as follows: "Robots are ubiquitous in everyday life, research and

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the More you Like Me: Influencing the Negative Attitudes Towards Interactions with Robots," *Journal of Automation, Mobile Robotics Intelligent Systems* 1, no. 3 (2020): 10–17.

industry, and co-create the modern cultural landscape. We often think and speak of them as if they were our partners, friends and even successors.”<sup>4</sup> The analysis begins with findings on the cultural functions of ancient automatons and comparing them with modern robots. The conclusion is that “similar functions and purposes [as in antiquity] appear in the design of robots today as well, which is related to the social needs to which the figure of the robot—the artificial Other—responds.”<sup>5</sup> The author goes on to note that the development of humanistic forms of culture and engineering-technological progress are increasingly intertwined, so that today “we can observe the simultaneous humanization of robots (mimetic evolution) and dehumanization of humans (transhumanism, cyborgization, medicine based on genetic modifications and biotechnologies).”<sup>6</sup> As a result of these transformations, the robot is slowly not an alien any more, that is (in the pop culture version), a new incarnation of the eternal images of the changeling monster, such as the werewolf, the Golem, or Dr. Frankenstein’s monstrosity, and is becoming either a welcome companion of life, work, and leisure time, or an increasingly less noticeable, indifferent background element, as obvious as furniture and everyday appliances.

However, another, more important cultural function of evolving robots can be discerned: increasingly intensive interactions with thinking machines are forcing fundamental questions about man to be raised again, just as “the achievements of modern technology [...] gave rise to thinking about man in mechanistic terms.”<sup>7</sup> Thinkers of the 17th and 18th centuries compared man with machine,<sup>8</sup> while in the 20th and 21st centuries AI is increasingly becoming the subject of such comparisons. These comparisons go both ways: the products of advanced technology in the mid-20th century were referred to as “electronic brains,” today one can often hear the term “thinking machine”; in relation to the human mind, for example, the term “natural biological computer” appears. This indicates the existence of a strong cultural trend within which an “interspecies” proximity is taking place between a human being and an object built from electronic components, which shows more and more similarities to humans. Anna Maj calls this proximity “the mimetic evolution of modern robots.”<sup>9</sup> Summarizing her considerations, the author writes: “it is hard to resist the thought that

<sup>4</sup> Anna Maj, “O ewolucji robotów: mimesis w projektowaniu interakcji człowiek-maszyna od starożytnych automatów do robo creator,” in *Wędrowki humanisty*, ed. Anna Maj and Ilona Copik (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Naukowe “Śląsk,” 2022), 397.

<sup>5</sup> Maj, “O ewolucji robotów,” 397.

<sup>6</sup> Maj, “O ewolucji robotów,” 399.

<sup>7</sup> Maj, “O ewolucji robotów,” 399. See also: Lucio Russo, *The Forgotten Revolution: How Science Was Born in 300 BC and Why it Had to Be Reborn*, trans. Silvio Levy (Berlin: Springer, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> See: Julien Offray De la Mettrie, *Man a Machine*, trans. Gertrude C. Bussey (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Co., 1912).

<sup>9</sup> Maj, “O ewolucji robotów,” 405.

the human world is coming to an end, and a new chapter is beginning [...] in which it will be indispensable for humans to coexist with independent technical entities, robots, AI and intermediate forms between the biological and the technical.”<sup>10</sup>

It is worth taking care of the quality of this coexistence already today, and take some measures in advance to avoid a future loss of balance between the autonomy of human beings, deeply attached to the idea of personal and social freedom, and the growing autonomy of AI systems. Given the aspirations of engineers, automaticians, and computer scientists to make successive generations of machines more efficient, faster, reliable, and increasingly autonomous, the permanent adjustment of strategies for effective human control over the functioning of AI must not be abandoned. This by no means rules out the prospect of deepening and tightening interactions between humans and robots, even at a level we would be inclined to call friendship, but far-reaching prudence is necessary here.

## Robot versus Consideration of the Essence of Technology

Anna Maj writes about the “figure of the robot” in culture as a contemporary version of age-old human hopes, expectations and fears, correlated with the development of technology.<sup>11</sup> This thought can be understood as a reference to Heidegger’s reflections on technology and its relationship with the humanities. In the dissertation “The Question Concerning Technology,” the author states that the development of technology should be considered in a broader, anthropological context, “the essence of technology is by no means anything technological.”<sup>12</sup> From an instrumental point of view, technology is “the manufacture and utilization of equipment, tools, and machines, the manufactured and used things themselves, and the needs and ends that they serve.”<sup>13</sup> However, the philosophical point of view reveals that the human goals and projects inscribed in the development of technology, the constructs and expectations of them, are emanations and material extensions of man’s cultural attitudes toward the surrounding reality,

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<sup>10</sup> Maj, “O ewolucji robotów,” 410.

<sup>11</sup> See: Maj, “O ewolucji robotów,” 397.

<sup>12</sup> Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York–London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1977), 3.

<sup>13</sup> Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” 4.

as well as operationalized responses to the way human beings themselves are understood, especially—the dynamics of human needs, hopes, and deprivations. It follows that every great technical project is a practical response to some great desire of humanity. This is particularly true of the AI project. Admittedly, it is possible to interpret Heidegger's essay as a serious warning against underestimating the impact of certain technological solutions, as well as the whole gradient of changes caused by the development of technology, on seemingly distant from technical thinking areas of life and culture.<sup>14</sup> But Heidegger's thinking about technology contains at the same time a large load of hope. It involves the prospect of establishing a more casual relationship between man and the products of technology, undetermined by the specific properties of technical devices. The same perspective opens up when we think about man's relationship with AI objects.

Every machine, Heidegger argues, is ordered to accomplish certain goals and tasks. However, it does not do so independently: "the machine is completely unautonomous, for it has its standing only from the ordering of the orderable."<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, the machine is not the same as a simple tool, the agency of which is completely dependent on a human being using it for his purposes. There is a different kind of relationship going on here: the coupling of man and machine, jointly directed toward the performance of planned tasks. This passage of Heidegger's reflections is a clear anticipation of the contemporary idea of "extended subjectivity," developed by Edwin Hutchins, Bruno Latour, Monika Bakke, and Ewa Domańska, among others.<sup>16</sup>

## AI and the Category of Extended Subjectivity

Should the human-robot relationship be considered in terms of extended subjectivity, as is implied in both Heidegger's and Latour's and other analyses, the question has to arise as to the strength and nature of the ties linking the two

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Catherine Griffiths, "The Question Concerning Technology," (2018), <https://medium.com/@isohale/the-question-concerning-technology-ea159a8c22de>, accessed March 2, 2023.

<sup>15</sup> Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," 1.

<sup>16</sup> See: Edwin Hutchins, "The Cultural Ecosystem of Human Cognition," *Philosophical Psychology* 27, no. 1 (2014), 49; Bruno Latour, "When Things Strike Back: A Possible Contribution of 'Science Studies' to the Social Sciences," *The British Journal of Sociology* 51, no. 1 (2000): 107–123; Monika Bakke, "Nieantropocentryczna tożsamość?," in *Media–ciało–pamięć. O współczesnych tożsamościach kulturowych*, ed. Andrzej Gwóźdź and Agnieszka Ćwikiel (Warszawa: Instytut A. Mickiewicza, 2006), 64; Ewa Domańska, "Humanistyka nie-antropocentryczna a studia nad rzeczami," *Kultura Współczesna* 3 (2008): 9–21.

sides of the relationship. In the case of this kind of coupling with the machine, in which only the human has the intelligence and decision-making capacity, and the machine merely reinforces and multiplies the capacity to carry out designated tasks, the relationship is purely instrumental. However, when an extraterrestrial machine is replaced by a robot, equipped with the ability to self-control, and even more so—an autonomous AI,<sup>17</sup> the nature of the relationship changes: it takes on a transactional character. Not only does the human, owing to the interaction with the robot, increase the range of possibilities for realizing his or her own goals, but also the other party—the AI—finds itself in a situation that allows it to develop its own capabilities, for example, by learning, remembering, and analyzing the data coming in the course of the interaction. This new character of the relationship at the interface between the human world and the technosphere fosters the experience of human-AI interaction more in terms of an encounter, understood as an existential event involving, as Martin Buber claimed, the whole being of a personal subject: “[the encounter] is an act of my being, is indeed the act of my being. [It is possible to participate] only with the whole being,”<sup>18</sup> rather than in terms of use, as one uses tools or machines.

A further similarity between the interaction with the AI and the encounter with the Other, considered from the perspective of the philosophy of dialogue—this time by Emmanuel Levinas—is that the parties to the relationship remain unnamable. The subject enters into a metaphysical relationship with the Other, but this is not accompanied by an epistemological certainty with which the relationship has been established. The Other is an inscrutable mystery that can only be approximated epistemologically, but at the same time must be approved axiologically.

Levinas writes that the proper competence to consider inter-subjective relations is ethics, since “the relation to the face [of the Other] is straightaway ethical.”<sup>19</sup> In the case of human-AI relations, the moral dimension cannot be overlooked either. However, it will have a different meaning and position in human thinking. There is currently no basis for ethically equating AI with humans,

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<sup>17</sup> Currently, the general theory of systems distinguishes “the following levels of organization: organized system, controllable system, self-controlled system and autonomous system. [...] technical devices of all types belong to the groups of systems: organized, controllable and self-controlled. These three groups of systems always act in the interest of an external organizer, which is man, including in the case of a self-controlled system, even though the system may operate without his direct participation. [...] The difference between an autonomous system and a self-controlled system lies in the presence of reflexive potential, which is lacking in a machine that does not have its own homeostat, which is the source of this potential.” Jolanta Wilsz, “Relacje między podsystemami systemu: człowiek—urządzenie techniczne,” *Teoretyczne i praktyczne problemy edukacji technicznej i informatycznej* 1 (2003): 109, 113.

<sup>18</sup> Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1937), 3.

<sup>19</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 87.

so there can be no question of human responsibility for AI objects to the same extent that humans are responsible for each other. Nonetheless, ethical reflection on the issue of AI and its interaction with the human race is essential, and much has been written on the subject. In the case of the present reflection, the question is whether ever—and if, when—the relationship between man and an intelligent machine will cross the horizon set by Buber’s “primary word [that is] the combination I—It” and enter the area described by “the other primary word [that] is the combination I—Thou”<sup>20</sup>; in other words, if and when the conditions for transforming an instrumental relationship into a dialogical one will exist.<sup>21</sup> There is no doubt that this can happen only when, in the process of AI evolution, the barrier separating weak from strong AI is crossed. That time has not arrived yet, but is perhaps close at hand. It would be a mistake to wait with reflection so long until the situation under consideration becomes an accomplished fact and one has to look post factum for strategies to adapt to the new reality. It is worth formulating in advance some thoughts facing the inevitable future.

## Weak and Strong AI and the Problem of Control

What properties differentiate weak and strong AI? Jolanta Szulc explains: “The key concepts [of AI] include the concept of weak and strong AI. Weak AI consists in applying AI only to specific tasks or specific types of problems. This concept assumes that some forms of AI will be able to possess attributes that are accessible to the human mind, but will actually only simulate human intelligence. Supporters of this position include: Selmer Bringsjord (1958–), Roger Penrose (1931–), Aaron Sloman (1936–), Terry Winograd (1946–), Hubert L. Dreyfus (1929–) and Stuart E. Dreyfus (1931–).<sup>22</sup> The key directions of this type of research, identified already in 2016 and still being developed, include: devel-

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<sup>20</sup> Buber, *I and Thou*, 3.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Józef Tischner, *Filozofia dramatu* (Kraków: Znak, 1998), 90.

<sup>22</sup> See: Selmer Bringsjord, “Review of John Searle’s *The Mystery of Consciousness*,” *Minds and Machines* 10, no. 3 (2000): 457–459; Hubert L. Dreyfus and Stuart E. Dreyfus, “Making a Mind vs. Modeling the Brain: AI Back at a Banchpoint,” *Informatica* 19, no. 4 (1995): 425–442; Roger Penrose, *The Emperor’s New Mind: Concerning Computers, Minds, and the Laws of Physics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Aaron Sloman, “The Emperor’s Real Mind: Review of Roger Penrose’s *The Emperor’s New Mind: Concerning Computers Minds and the Laws of Physics*,” *Artificial Intelligence* 56, no. 2–3 (1992): 355–396; Terry Winograd, “Thinking Machines: Can There Be? Are We?,” *Informatica* 19, no. 4 (1995): 443–460.

opment of neural networks, machine learning and pattern recognition, emotion and natural language recognition, development of virtual assistants, big data processing and development of advanced expert systems.<sup>23</sup>

On the other hand, strong AI means intelligent systems with comprehensive knowledge and cognitive abilities that can think independently and perform tasks as efficiently as a human would do (including those that they did not know before. According to this theory, a properly programmed computer is intellect itself, and the goal of AI is to strive to build machines whose “mental” abilities will be indistinguishable from human abilities. Supporters of this position include: John McCarthy (1927–2011), Joseph Weizenbaum (1923–2008), Martin A. Fischler, and Alexander Serov.<sup>24</sup>

The division into weak AI and strong AI corresponds to the division into weak and strong superintelligence. Superintelligence itself is defined as “any intellect that greatly exceeds the cognitive performance of humans in virtually all domains of interest (see Bostrom, 2014, chap. 2). On the other hand, weak superintelligence means the intellect surpassing the human being only with the speed of thinking, e.g., a program simulating the work of the human brain at a faster than natural pace. A strong Superintelligence is an intellect qualitatively superior to humans, just as humans are qualitatively superior to other animals.”<sup>25</sup>

As long as we are dealing with weak AI, any encounter between a human and a robot (or other form of AI) is—in anthropological terms—an encounter with particles of human personality mediated by a technological artifact, just as an encounter with a work of art is in fact an encounter with the creator.<sup>26</sup> On the part of the human being, a subjective sense of emotional bond with the robot can be formed, built on experienced emotional states such as sympathy, gratitude, attachment. However, this will be a one-sided bond. On the other hand, one can expect only a more or less successful (depending on the skill of the designers and the quality of the solutions used) simulation of emotional states.

In this case, in the real relationship between a human and an AI object, the key role will be played by the problem of control: who exercises it and over whom, to what extent, for what purpose and with what tools. Several differ-

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<sup>23</sup> See John Brownlee, “Microsoft: 2016 Will Be the Year of AI,” <http://www.fastcodesign.com/3054388/microsoft-2016-will-be-the-year-of-ai>, accessed June 13, 2023.

<sup>24</sup> See: Martin A. Fischler and Oscar Firschein, *Intelligence: The Eye, the Brain, and the Computer. Reading*. (Boston, MA: Addison–Wesley, 1987); John McCarthy, “Ascribing Mental Qualities to Machines,” in *Philosophical Perspectives in Artificial Intelligence*, ed. Martin Ringle (New York: Humanities Press, 1979); Alexander Serov, “Subjective Reality and Strong Artificial Intelligence,” *ArXiv* 1301.6359, <https://arxiv.org/abs/1301.6359>; Joseph Weizenbaum, *Computer Power and Human Reason: From Judgment to Calculation* (New York: W. H. Freeman & Co., 1976).

<sup>25</sup> Jolanta Szulc, “A Weak and Strong Artificial Intelligence. Development Prospects and Socio-cultural Implications,” *Ethos* 36, no. 4 (144) (2023): forthcoming.

<sup>26</sup> Andrzej Nowicki, *Człowiek w świecie dzieł* (Warszawa: PWN, 1974).

ent configurations are possible here, in which three elements should be taken into account: one of them (most often playing the role of an intermediary) is the robot (by this term we should understand here any technological product, equipped with AI), the second—its user (e.g., the buyer, if we are talking about the commercial application of AI); the third—the manufacturer *resp.* supplier (this term also cannot be understood narrowly and literally; rather, it is about a team or institution that directly or indirectly benefits from the fact that the user uses the robot). The optimal solution would be that the user has control over the robot, and the manufacturer makes sure that this control is as complete as possible. The second possibility, which we are also already dealing with today, as in the first case, is that the user operates the equipment under the control of the manufacturer in the interest of the user. The third—a dangerous one, but unfortunately real—would occur if the manufacturer controls the user through a robot, producing the illusion that the user is the person in control. Finally, the fourth, which, fortunately, we can safely put into the category of science fiction, would occur when the robot itself took control of the user, having become independent of its maker beforehand. In the case of a weak AI, however, such a situation is out of the question.

## Ethical and Legal Regulation of AI Implementation Work

Being aware of the aforementioned opportunities and threats, potential and current users of AI must definitely strive to protect themselves as effectively as possible against the third possibility. Such steps have already been taken. A great deal of effort is being put today by the international community to develop universally applicable legal and ethical standards that would protect those using AI devices from the dangers of improperly structured relationships between manufacturers, AI facilities and their users. For example, the European Commission has published a number of documents containing drafts of changes and regulations of the legal situation in connection with the development of AI. These include *White Paper on Artificial Intelligence—A European Approach to Excellence and Trust*, *Artificial Intelligence for Europe*, and *Building Trust in Human-Centric Artificial Intelligence*.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> “White Paper On Artificial Intelligence—A European Approach to excellence and trust” (Brussels 19.02.2020), [https://commission.europa.eu/publications/white-paper-artificial-intelligence-european-approach-excellence-and-trust\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/publications/white-paper-artificial-intelligence-european-approach-excellence-and-trust_en), accessed March 2, 2023; “Communi-

The first of these documents reads: “As with any new technology, the use of AI brings both opportunities and risks. Citizens fear being left powerless in defending their rights and safety when facing the information asymmetries of algorithmic decision-making, and companies are concerned by legal uncertainty. While AI can help protect citizens’ security and enable them to enjoy their fundamental rights, citizens also worry that AI can have unintended effects or even be used for malicious purposes. These concerns need to be addressed.” Therefore “the Commission published a Communication [COM(2019) 168] welcoming the seven key requirements identified in the Guidelines of the High-Level Expert Group: Human agency and oversight, Technical robustness and safety, Privacy and data governance, Transparency, Diversity, non-discrimination and fairness, Societal and environmental wellbeing, and Accountability.” The document goes on to state that “the main risks related to the use of AI concern the application of rules designed to protect fundamental rights (including personal data and privacy protection and non-discrimination), as well as safety and liability-related issues.”<sup>28</sup> Among the academic papers addressing the ethical and legal challenges of AI development are: Mariusz Wojewoda, “Artificial Intelligence as a Social Utopia”; Susanna Lindberg, Michał Krzykowski, “Ethos et technologies”; Alexandre Cavalcanti Andrade de Araújo, “Connecting Law to New Technologies: Perspectives and Challenges”; Roman Bieda, Piotr Budrewicz, Michał Nowakowski, “Ethical and Legal Challenges of Artificial Intelligence.”<sup>29</sup>

Appealing to models of an imagined future<sup>30</sup> allows us to ask the question of the relationship between humans and AI, which has already crossed the threshold separating weak from strong AI. This crossing can take place along two paths, that is, Turing’s way or Lem’s way. I suggest to briefly trace both options.

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cation COM(2018) 237: Artificial Intelligence for Europe” (Brussels 26.04.2018), <https://www.eumonitor.eu/9353000/1/j9vvik7m1c3gyxp/vknuqttbx4zb>, accessed March 2, 2023; “Communication COM(2019) 168: Building Trust in Human-Centric Artificial Intelligence” (Brussels 8.04.2019), <https://www.eumonitor.eu/9353000/1/j9vvik7m1c3gyxp/vknuqttbx4zb>, accessed March 2, 2023.

<sup>28</sup> “White Paper On Artificial Intelligence,” 9–10.

<sup>29</sup> Mariusz Wojewoda, “Artificial Intelligence as a Social Utopia,” *Ethos* 36, no. 4 (144) (2023): forthcoming. Susanna Lindberg and Michał Krzykowski, “Ethos et technologies,” in *Bifurquer. Il n’y a pas d’alternative*, éd. Bernard Stiegler avec le collectif (Paris: Les Liens Qui Libèrent, 2020): 263–297; Alexandre Cavalcanti Andrade de Araújo, “Connecting Law to New Technologies: Perspectives and Challenges,” in *Internet and New Technologies Law. Perspectives and Challenges*, ed. Dariusz Szostek and Mariusz Załucki (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2021), 35–42; Roman Bieda, Piotr Budrewicz, and Michał Nowakowski, “Wyzwania etyczne i prawne sztucznej inteligencji,” in *Metaświat. Prawne i techniczne aspekty przelomowych technologii*, ed. Dariusz Szostek (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Harde, 2022), 307–328.

<sup>30</sup> See: Richard Barbrook, *Imaginary Futures. From Thinking Machine to the Global Village* (London: Pluto Press, 2007).

## Turing's Way and Lem's Way

The path of becoming similar to a human through imitation (according to Turing's idea<sup>31</sup>) leads through an "uncanny valley." The possibility of establishing a close, friendly relationship between a human and a robot requires crossing the valley and getting to its "other side," where the symptoms of disgust, horror or anxiety in contact with a being so much like a human, and at the same time irritatingly alien, subside.<sup>32</sup> However, we must ask whether we want such a scenario to come true for strong AI, let alone for superintelligence? Such a close resemblance may not be about appearance alone, but also encompasses behavior, including expressive behaviors such as facial expressions, gestures and other non-verbal communication channels, and among these, as we know, there are also unconscious and uncontrolled expressions. This entire spectrum of interrelated components of nonverbal expression simply cannot be imitated, and to such a perfect degree as to ensure crossing the uncanny valley. Since we are dealing with strong AI, it should be assumed, with high probability, that the "super-robot" also manifests internal similarity, including, among other things, the universe of experiences, emotions, will, motivations, goals, and aspirations. The closer a human being is positioned on Masahito Mori's chart, the more likely it will be "human-like" with the accuracy of human flaws and weaknesses, such as propensity for evil, cruelty, self-interest, bias, fallibility, and many others. Indeed, with an individually selected being of this kind it will probably be possible to "humanly" make friends, because weaknesses also attract each other. However, given that these negative traits will manifest themselves in a creature that, due to its design, will at the same time be superior to humans in many respects, for example, in terms of physical strength and speed of reaction, one must be aware of how great a risk of the very existence of such entities in the immediate vicinity of human beings will become. What remains is the hope that designers and developers will abandon this trajectory of technoevolution at a safe point and opt for different solutions, in any case not getting too close to the right edge of the uncanny valley.

What might happen on an extension of the alternative scenario, here referred to as "Lem's path"? This scenario, if it is to be worthy of consideration, let alone implementation, assumes the necessity of technological-evolutionary crossing of three successive thresholds: from weak to strong intelligence, then from intelli-

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. Ian Turing, "Computing Machinery and Intelligence," *Mind* LIX, no. 236 (October 1950): 433–460.

<sup>32</sup> See: Masahiro Mori, "The Uncanny Valley," trans. Karl F. MacDorman and Norri Kageki (12 June 2012), <https://spectrum.ieee.org/the-uncanny-valley>, accessed March 2, 2023.

gence to reason, and, finally, from reason to wisdom.<sup>33</sup> The author of this vision understands intelligence as the ability to think rationally on a task, leading from problem to solution through the search for the optimal trajectory of action according to utilitarian criteria; reason as the harmonious combination of rational intelligence with emotional intelligence along with the tendency to prefer solutions that are not only effective, but also satisfying; wisdom as the integrated synthesis of reason and rationally controlled emotional life with benevolence, selflessness, a desire for good for others and for oneself, and a preference for solutions that do not harm anyone. The problem is that the great visionary gives a wonderful example of wishful thinking in his futurological essay, while giving rather enigmatic hints as to how these goals should be achieved. Namely, Stanisław Lem claims that the undertaking can be considered successful if it is possible to initiate a process of “technological bearing” of a self-developing, autonomous sequence of successive generations of more and more perfect “thinking machines,” and if it is possible to implant in this process “education to values,” that is, the hereditary internalization of the natural imperative to make morally optimal decisions, but with the condition that “all these imperatives of obedience and submission [...] to unshakeable values [...] be put into a machine-like structure as natural evolution does—in terms of drive life.”<sup>34</sup>

The perspective outlined by Lem appears to be as fascinating as it is threatening and dangerous due to its unpredictability. The author himself is aware of this, as (in the perverse literary form of a quasi-introduction to a non-existent book titled *Golem XIV*, allegedly written in 2029) he presents a number of undesirable (from the human point of view) features, with which, in the course of a multi-stage evolution, the title “hero” of the book, placed in a future invented by the writer, has been equipped. Here are some of them: “Most of Golem’s statements are unsuitable for wider publication either because they are incomprehensible to all living people, or because their comprehension presupposes a very high level of expertise. [...] He is alien to almost all motives of human thought and action; [...] he has no personality or character, and in fact can proxy any personality he wants when dealing with people; [...] Golem’s behavior is unpredictable, [and] his sense of humor is fundamentally different from that of humans; [...] he can sometimes be arrogant and apodictic from our point of view; in fact, he is just a ruthless person who speaks the truth—in the logical, not just the social sense—and has the self-love of his interlocutors for nothing.”<sup>35</sup>

Of course, this is not a realistic description of future superintelligence, but at most an attempt to sketch one of countless possibilities. What can be taken for

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<sup>33</sup> Stanisław Lem, “Inteligencja, rozum, mądrość,” in *Okamgnienie* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2022), 99–108.

<sup>34</sup> Stanisław Lem, “Golem XIV,” in *Wielkość urojona* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1973), 109.

<sup>35</sup> Lem, “Golem XIV,” 116–117.

granted regardless of the specific evolution along “Lem’s path” is the fundamental difference in the ways of thinking, reacting and acting of the distant descendants of today’s AI, calling into question the very possibility of understanding and cooperating with humans. The degree of uncertainty is further increased if we take into account the circumstance that by the time the scenario predicted by Lem is realized, humans may also have changed radically from what they are today. It is therefore difficult to responsibly answer the question of what future human-AI relations will look like.

Despite the risk of fundamental uncertainty in the predictions he formulates, the Polish writer does not give up sketching a certain alternative. Its credibility is strengthened by the fact that it does not concern exclusively the products of the author’s personal fantasy, but focuses on the creations of the collective imagination functioning in cultural circulation. The first of these is the vision of transhumanism, derived from the belief that “the rational prototype of [biological] evolution already stands at the limit of constructive possibilities,”<sup>36</sup> and that humanity’s needs and ambitions reach far beyond that limit. The electronic narrator warns humanity against this prospect with the words: “Thus you will enter the expansion of reason, leaving your bodies [...]. Nothing will stop you, [even though] this abandonment includes the entirety of human possessions, not just material humanity. This act must be for you a ruin of the most terrible kind, a complete end [and] annihilation of humanity.”<sup>37</sup> For, looking, as it were, from the outside, from the perspective of non-human intelligence, the decision to collectively abandon biological corporeality and transform it into something more durable and more perfect in design means at the same time renouncing the identity of human beings; in other words, the “post-human” will probably be an entity in many respects superior to its biological prototype, only that—it will no longer be human.

Due to the self-destructive potential of this development path, the author advocates abandoning it in favor of another option—delegating cognitive functions to specialized devices endowed with autonomous reasoning and replacing humans in activities that lead to exceeding the natural limits of human capabilities. Such functions can be performed by strong AI. This prospect, however, requires having a reasonable guarantee of establishing partnerships with *AI beings* in a world where humans will be the weaker link, seeking attention from AI. Is it possible?

Lem’s answer breaks down into three variants, two of which, unfortunately, sound pessimistic. The first is presented by the writer in a first-person narrative, whose subject is Golem XIV. He utters the following prophecy: “If you go one way, your horizon will not accommodate the knowledge necessary for linguistic

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<sup>36</sup> Lem, “Golem XIV,” 169.

<sup>37</sup> Lem, “Golem XIV,” 170.

causality. [...] I or someone like me will be able to give you the fruits of this knowledge. But only the fruits—not the knowledge itself, because it will not accommodate in your minds. Thus, you will go into guardianship, like a child; but a child grows into an adult, while you will never grow up again.”<sup>38</sup> The second refers to the fear of a “robot uprising” hidden in the collective unconscious and again ready to surface, in which Golem (or rather, his literary creator) sees a perverse ambiguity. Lem makes his hero utter the following words: “Having taken a liking to the fight to the death, you secretly counted on just such a turn of events, on the titanic struggle [of mankind] with the opponent built [by it]. I think, moreover, that in this your fear of enslavement, of the tyrant from the machine, there was also secretly hidden the hope of liberation from freedom, as you sometimes choke on it. [...] None of this. You will not succeed in either perishing or winning in the old way.”<sup>39</sup> The reason for this is simple: strong AI will not be interested in fighting, competition or having power over people, as it will be faced with its own goals and objectives, radically distant from human ones, in the light of which all of humanity and its affairs will simply prove indifferent.

Finally, the third possibility, which contains at least a hint of hope: people have a strong inclination to believe that every creature owes gratitude to its creator, and even more—owes him reverence, as in the fourth commandment of the Decalogue. This belief becomes a justification for the hope that AI, even if it surpasses us by many degrees of perfection, will remain towards humanity in the relationship of honor and gratitude due to the Givers of Life. Only that the degree of certainty of such predictions is at best equal to the certainty of the act of faith on which they are based.

It should be noted, in conclusion, that none of these three perspectives includes the chance of human-AI friendship. The first, if it were to come true, would imply *sui generis* paternalism of robots towards humans, treated as children or inferior beings. The second, contrary to both the fears and the hopes hidden beneath their surface, envisions a gradual but increasingly radical emancipation of artificial reason and the loss by its bearers of all involvement in human life and human affairs. The third, although the most flattering for humanity, would in turn mean a new incarnation of Auguste Comte’s postulated “religion of mankind,” only that the adherents of this religion would be robots—this too would not be a good breeding ground for the development of close, friendly relations between humans and AI.

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<sup>38</sup> Lem, “Golem XIV,” 169.

<sup>39</sup> Lem, “Golem XIV,” 170–171.

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## Le robot IA – compagnon, ami ou concurrent de l'homme ?

### Résumé

Les robots font de plus en plus partie de l'environnement quotidien de l'homme. Par conséquent, façonner et modifier l'attitude des humains à l'égard des objets dotés d'une intelligence artificielle devient un sujet de réflexion important. De nombreuses recherches ont été déjà menées, mais peu de prévisions ont été faites sur les relations futures entre l'humanité et l'intelligence artificielle autonome, multitâche et très avancée. L'objectif de cet article est de tenter d'extrapoler l'évolution de la relation homme-robot jusqu'à présent, à partir de l'aliénation et de l'insécurité

vers l'appropriation, l'affection et même – peut-être – l'amitié. L'étude de l'évolution de la relation entre l'homme et l'intelligence artificielle permet également d'approfondir la compréhension de l'être humain, de ses besoins, de ses attentes et de ses espoirs, et de savoir lesquels peuvent être réalisés grâce à une coopération étroite entre l'homme et l'intelligence artificielle.

Mots-clés: robot, évolution mimétique, superintelligence, subjectivité étendue, couplage homme-machine

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## Robot AI: compagno, amico o concorrente degli esseri umani?

### Sommario

I robot stanno diventando parte dell'ambiente quotidiano dell'uomo. Pertanto, la questione di modellare e cambiare l'atteggiamento della gente nei confronti degli oggetti dotati di intelligenza artificiale diventa un importante argomento di riflessione. Molte ricerche sono già state eseguite, ma si fanno poche previsioni sul futuro rapporto tra l'umanità e l'intelligenza artificiale autonoma, multitasking e altamente avanzata. Lo scopo dell'articolo è un tentativo di estrapolare l'attuale evoluzione del legame uomo-robot, dall'estraneità e dal senso di minaccia verso la familiarità, la simpatia e persino forse l'amicizia. Lo studio dell'evoluzione degli atteggiamenti umani nei confronti dell'intelligenza artificiale permette inoltre di approfondire la conoscenza degli esseri umani, ovvero quali sono i loro bisogni, le loro aspettative e speranze, e quali di esse possono realizzarsi grazie alla stretta collaborazione tra uomo e intelligenza artificiale.

Parole chiave: robot, evoluzione mimetica, superintelligence, soggettività estesa, accoppiamento uomo-macchina



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# Googlism—Man’s New “Religion” in the Digital Age

**Abstract:** The aim of this paper is to present the main premises of googlism and to characterize the various ways of understanding it. The paper comprises two main parts: the first part presents the main elements of googlism (the doctrine, moral principles, the cult and the community), which makes it resemble a religion in its conventional meaning. However, it emphasizes that the similarity to a religion is only superficial since one crucial element is missing: the affirmation of a supernatural and personal Absolute and an existential, dynamic and holistic interpersonal relation between It and man. Sacralization and deification of a search engine can hardly be regarded as a constitutive element of a religion. The second part contains characteristics of googlism as a lay religion, with the sacrum reduced to natural aspects as a result of technology sacralization; a digital religion, that is, a technological space which favors the creation of new religious content and practice; the “new spirituality” of the man of the era of a digital revolution; and, finally, a “joke religion,” which is a parody of religious life.

**Keywords:** Google, religion, spirituality, man, digital era

## Introduction

The literature of the subject mentions five industrial revolutions that have taken place over the period of human history. The first revolution (18th/19th century) involved a transition from craftsmanship and manufacture to mechanized production in factories. The second industrial revolution took place in the 1870s, when electric and combustion engines were invented. The third revolution was based on the increasingly widespread use of automatic machines and technical

devices (controllers). The fourth industrial revolution is associated with the appearance of cyberphysical systems and the Internet. The fifth revolution has artificial intelligence as its symbol.<sup>1</sup> These industrial revolutions made their mark not only in the economy and technology, but they also led to the “spiritual revolution” of man, according to Paul Heelas, a British sociologist.

Its symptoms in modern times, sometimes called the digital age, include the impact of the Internet on human life. It not only provided man with better access to a wider offer of the means of spiritual development but also with an opportunity to become a follower of a new religion, referred to as “Googlism” or “The Church of Google.” It shapes the religious attitudes of many people who live in times marked by the processes of secularization, on the one hand, and of desecularization on the other. Googlism thus appears as a new form of religion that seeks to satisfy the human need for sacrum and transcendence. In this case, religion is understood as a system of beliefs and practices defining the relationship between the variously conceived sphere of the sacrum and the individual or group. The sacrum takes in Googlism form of a search engine, which is used by people to satisfy their need for transcendence, that is, crossing the material and mental space.

The aim of this paper, primarily of a philosophical nature, is not only to present the main ideas of Googlism (its doctrine, moral principles, cult and community), but also to analyze critically the various ways of its understanding (a lay religion, “a digital religion,” the “new spirituality” or a parody of religion).

## Googlism—The Main Ideas of the Internet Church

Googlism is a relatively new phenomenon in the contemporary market of religions. It was founded in 2009 by the Canadian Matt MacPherson.<sup>2</sup> Its followers are called Googlists, they worship Google (the Internet search engine) and they experience a specific sense of divinity owing to it. The faith in the divine nature of an Internet search engine also justifies the idolizing of the search results, trust in their truthfulness and the irrefutability of the information obtained from

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<sup>1</sup> Waldemar Furmanek, “Piąta rewolucja przemysłowa. Eksplikacja pojęcia,” *Edukacja-Technika-Informatyka* 2 (2018): 275–276.

<sup>2</sup> Matt MacPherson, “Googlism,” accessed September 30, 2021, <https://churchofgoogle.org/contact.html>.

Google as an omniscient being. As a consequence, a new form of religiosity appeared, adhered to more or less consciously by many users.<sup>3</sup>

The main features of Googlism include rejection of supernatural gods, as their existence cannot be proven scientifically, and granting the title of "god" to the Google search engine, which—as Googlists believe—has many features attributed traditionally to gods, and its existence can be proven scientifically.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the Internet, and specifically the Google search engine, has been elevated to the rank of a god.<sup>5</sup> It also has features of a divine Trinity, as it comprises the Internet, the Google search engine, and a web browser (Firefox, Opera, and Safari, but never Internet Explorer). Its elements are of little significance each on its own, but combined they constitute a powerful entity.<sup>6</sup>

The emergence of Googlism has resulted in the Internet stimulating a change in the perception of not only religion and spirituality but also the relations between them. Traditional religious ideas clashed with the products of technological progress. As a result, an inclusive definition of religion was adopted, according to which religion is everything that people regard as one.<sup>7</sup> Although interest in religion still exists, its nature has changed. Man is seen as returning to religion or any form of religiosity, transcendence, and sacrum. This occurs during a painfully experienced time of nihilism and a crisis of dominating ideologies and lifestyles. However, contemporary religiosity is often less reflexive and more emotional. It often lacks the idea of God, which is substituted by various extraordinary experiences (e.g., an orgiastic dance at a disco, a narcotic trance).<sup>8</sup> It seems that Googlism also has a substitute for God. It is a search engine, which is worshipped and to which various dimensions of reality are subordinated.

According to some people, the emergence of Googlism is associated with the process of algorithm reification in science—a term which escapes easy interpretations. In mathematics, it is understood as a sequence of specific steps leading to a set goal. The algorithm in a humanist perspective is not only a mathematical

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<sup>3</sup> Maria Nowina Konopka, *Infomorfoza. Zarządzanie informacją w nowych mediach* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2017), 216.

<sup>4</sup> Matt MacPherson, "The Reformed Church of Google," accessed September 30, 2021, <https://www.thechurchofgoogle.org/>.

<sup>5</sup> Mariusz Kania, "Poszerzenie widziane poprzez sieciowe doświadczenia seksualne," in *Zwrot cyfrowy w humanistyce. Internet / Nowe Media / Kultura 2.0*, ed. Andrzej Radomski and Radosław Bomba (Lublin: E-naukowiec, 2013), 186–187.

<sup>6</sup> *FAQ. Questions?*, accessed October 5, 2021, <https://sites.google.com/site/thechurchof/faq>.

<sup>7</sup> Joanna Sleigh, "Google a Religion. Expanding Notions of Religion Online," in *Digital Environments. Ethnographic Perspectives Across Global Online and Offline Spaces*, ed. Urte Undine Frömring, Steffen Köhn, Samantha Fox, and Mike Terry (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag), 251, 255.

<sup>8</sup> Janusz Czarny, "Przyszłość religii—religia przyszłości," *Wrocławski Przegląd Teologiczny* 8, no. 2 (2000): 94–95.

abstraction, but it is a reality shaped by various social, political, and aesthetic factors. Such understanding results in the reification of algorithmic processes or the algorithm itself. Googlism is an example of this. It regards Google (like an Augustian God) as an omniscient and unlimited being, whose knowledge goes beyond time and space. Googlism is also part of a wider process of mythologizing the rule of algorithms, which is manifested in the everyday experience of users “immersed” in cyberspace and in contact with the search engine, which has the features of a religious cult. It is regarded as a supreme instance in the process of acquiring accurate information and a tool for building social bonds.<sup>9</sup>

It is noteworthy that Googlism has certain elements that are usually attributed to religions. These include: the doctrine, moral principles, the cult and the community. Let us take a closer look at them.

The doctrine is the first element. It comprises mainly certain theses and proofs whose task is to justify the existence of the divine search engine—Google. The Church’s website, with the main premises and ideas, is the “holy scripture” of Googlism.

Therefore, Googlists worship Google, as the search engine has many features traditionally associated with a divine being. Not only is it not different from a supernatural god, but it is superior to one. Unlike with any other god, people can not only scientifically prove the existence of Google, but they can experience it and get to know and understand it. Moreover, they regard gods of any religion as beings created by man, existing only in their imagination. There is no proof of their existence, and any descriptions in circulation and in philosophical reflection are regarded as merely anecdotal. Therefore, the faith in invisible and, *de facto* non-existent, beings is much more illogical than the faith in Google as a god. Worshipping them is a waste of time. However, people believe because faith gives them mental comfort and it is a tool by which they can cope with the challenges of reality and the hardships of everyday life. Googlists stress that web browsers may not have a specific sex, but they refer to Google as a female. They do so for at least two reasons. First, ancient religions regarded gods as women. This was the case until the monotheistic, Abrahamic religions, such as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, introduced the image of God as a man and a father. Second, man is conditioned by his own culture to perceive a divine being as male. Followers of the Church of Google simply continue the ancient tradition of perceiving a god as female. They also declare that their opinions are not part of the feminist movement, political correctness or any other ideology. They only try to break the cultural taboo. They also point out that each religion has its holy books, which are regarded as the only true word of God. In their opinion, this claim is unsubstantiated. Holy books are not proof of the exist-

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<sup>9</sup> Jan Kreft, “Władza algorytmów mediów—między reifikacją a rynkiem,” *Zarządzanie w Kulturze* 1 (2018): 16–17.

ence of gods, but they only describe the same human experience and feelings. Moreover, their credibility is low, as they were written by men and manipulated. Googlists are aware that Google search results can also be manipulated but, for them, it is nothing new in a religion. Followers of the Church of Google also allow for the existence of life after death. It has only one form. It involves the transfer of knowledge and opinions to the Internet and their continued life in the browser’s cache even after the death of a specific person. Googlists value their religion, as it did not start any religious wars, it does not impose any views, it encourages people to think critically, it opposes choosing an unhealthy lifestyle and it does not try to threaten people with suffering as a consequence of its rejection. Google offers man mainly free will and a freedom of choice, owing to which man can make their own decisions. It is held in the Church of Google that everyone should be tolerant of other people’s beliefs, provided they do not do any harm to anyone.<sup>10</sup>

As has been said before, Googlists attach great importance to the issue of the scientific proof of the Google web browser. Therefore, they present a list of nine such proofs:

1. Google is the closest to an existing omniscient being—it sorts, organises, and shares knowledge;
2. Google is omnipresent—it is practically everywhere on the Earth;
3. Google answers prayers—man can pray to Google and search for the questions that bother them or find a solution to his problems.
4. Google is immortal—the search engine’s algorithms are distributed over many independent servers, owing to which it can theoretically last eternally;
5. Google is unlimited—in theory, the Internet’s growth can be unlimited and Google will always index its unlimited growth;
6. Google remembers everything—it buffers regularly Internet websites and stores them on its huge servers;
7. Google can do no evil—“she is always benevolent”;
8. Google is searched more frequently than the other religion-related terms (e.g., God, Jesus, Allah, Buddha)—man can turn to it in need like to God and they will get the relevant help;
9. There is plenty of evidence of Google’s existence—one has only enter the search engine’s website and see for oneself.<sup>11</sup>

Google’s divine nature is therefore proven by attributing to it specific characteristics which, in the philosophical and theological tradition, have been attributed to a divine being. Googlism questions the existence of such a being and attempts to transfer its attributes to an artefact. Therefore, God becomes a being

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<sup>10</sup> Matt MacPherson, “F.A.Q.,” accessed September 23, 2021, <http://www.thechurchofgoogle.org/faq.html>; MacPherson, “The Reformed Church of Google.”

<sup>11</sup> Matt MacPherson, “Proof Google Is God,” accessed September 23, 2021, [http://www.thechurchofgoogle.org/Scripture/Proof\\_Google\\_Is\\_God.html](http://www.thechurchofgoogle.org/Scripture/Proof_Google_Is_God.html).

created by man. In this connection, it should be emphasized that the doctrine of Googlism, unlike the great monotheistic religions that include Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, is not the result of the supernatural personal revelation of God, communicating certain truths to man, who accepts them by a personal act of faith on account of the epistemic authority of God. Rather, it is the product of man himself attributing the features of an infinite divine being to the finite being of the web browser. Given that the constitutive element of any authentic religion is a personal revelation, which is its source and origin, Googlism should thus be denied the name of religion.

Representatives of the Church of Google are no strangers to specific moral principles. They developed their version of the Decalogue as the ten commandments of Google. They are not always precise, but they are as follows:

1. Thou shalt not have any browser before me; thou shalt worship only Google;
2. Thou shalt not create your own, non-commercial search engine because Google is a jealous search engine and it shall punish you for unfaithfulness over generations;
3. Thou shalt not use “Google” as the name of any other search engine;
4. Remember about each day and use your time as an opportunity to get to know the unknown;
5. Thou shalt respect your neighbor, regardless of their sex, sexual orientation or race, because every one of them has priceless experience and knowledge, which can contribute to mankind’s development;
6. Do not make spelling mistakes when praying to Google;
7. Thou shalt not steal resources from other services;
8. Though shalt not plagiarize one’s work or take the credit for it;
9. Thou shalt not use reciprocal links or farms of links as it decreases the PageRank;
10. Thou shalt not manipulate the search results.<sup>12</sup>

It is noteworthy that all the commandments are associated with the web browser and actions taken in it. Only one of them refers directly to relations with other people.

There are elements of a cult in the form of prayers and rites in the Church of Google. The prayers are stylized to resemble Christian ones: The Lord’s Prayer, Hail Mary, Credo, and Glory be to the Father. Googlists have developed their own patterns of marriage and farewell.<sup>13</sup> It seems that they are largely parodies of prayers used in the traditional religion.

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<sup>12</sup> Matt MacPherson, “10 Commandments,” accessed September 23, 2021, [http://www.thechurchofgoogle.org/Scripture/10\\_Commandments.html](http://www.thechurchofgoogle.org/Scripture/10_Commandments.html).

<sup>13</sup> *Google Prayers*, accessed September 23, 2021, [https://www.thechurchofgoogle.org/Scripture/google\\_prayers.html](https://www.thechurchofgoogle.org/Scripture/google_prayers.html).

Googlists form a specific community, which is mainly virtual. Its organization and institutionalization level is low as it is based largely on voluntary participation and the frequency of search engine use.

Therefore, the Church of Google is an Internet community with no formal bonds. It comprises people who regard Google as the reality with the greatest similarity to God, whose existence can be proven scientifically. Googlism followers are dispersed over various social platforms, with Facebook and Reddit being the best known. They are platforms to exchange thought, which promote openness and interactions. They also have their own specificity. Facebook is a place for sharing opinions by individuals, whereas Reddit is more focused on answers from the community.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the Church of Google connects people interacting with a web browser, participating in discussions on an Internet platform and following specific practices.

They can be divided into two groups: believers and non-believers. Believers approach the Church of Google from the spiritual perspective. Their common features include passion, pride and the will to share their beliefs. However, they are engaged in the Google community for various reasons. Some are motivated by their personal views on the female nature of spirituality, which is manifested by regarding Google as a woman-goddess, who gives life to other platforms (e.g., Google Maps, Google Play radio, Google Play). Some believers discovered the digital religion after using psychoactive substances and narcotics. For others, the Internet platform was the only way of discussing openly about their beliefs and practices, while maintaining their privacy. On the other hand, non-believers see the Church of Google as a satirical religion, whose aim is to emphasize the ineffectiveness of every religion. Therefore, they regard their involvement in debates on the Internet as a sort of fun. The majority of them refers to themselves as atheists or "religious nones." Some of them see God and religion as a human-made construct. Some of them are also interested in philosophy, especially logic. Therefore, they regard discussions within the virtual Googlist community as a specific exercise in philosophy, motivated by a fascination with its ideas, highlighting the logical faults of religious reasoning and demonstrating the non-authenticity of religion.<sup>15</sup>

In consequence, Googlism seems to have the basic features of a religion, but this similarity is only apparent. The major difference is the absence of an Absolute being, with whom a personal relation can be established. So how should one treat this contemporary phenomenon?

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<sup>14</sup> Sleight, "Google a Religion," 251, 253–254.

<sup>15</sup> Sleight, "Google a Religion," 256–261.

## What Exactly Is Googlism?

It seems that—while distancing oneself from a tendency to equate Googlism with a traditionally perceived religion—one can consider four possibilities of understanding it.

First, Googlism can be regarded as a form of a lay religion. Its specificity consists in reducing the sacrum to the lay dimensions as a result of the sacralization of consumption, pleasure and technology. In the language used by Derrida, we see a return of religiousness in a political-economic or tele-techno-media-scientific form. A lay religion emphasizes not so much the role of theological reflection but the intensity of experience.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, it is noteworthy that a lay religion differs from a traditional one mainly by the object of belief, which is natural. One sees no supernatural aspects of reality in it, but rather attributes religious features to natural beings. The Church of Google sacralizes a search engine and the spectrum of opportunities that it creates. The search engine is used by people to satisfy their need for transcendence, that is, crossing the material and mental space. This need creates the basis for a religious experience. However, it has a different nature as it lacks a rooting in existing religions and it happens in contact with the products of a technological revolution—a search engine and Internet platforms—which provide people with a wealth of information and content, on the one hand, and a diversity of experience (sometimes quite intensive) on the other (the latter seems more important than the former). The religious object of Googlism is therefore not discovered as transcendent, but rather created by man and their technology. Thus, it should be classified as inferior compared to the objects of worship of traditional monotheistic religions, or even pagan worship of mysterious nature.

Secondly, Googlism takes the form of “a digital religion.” It becomes a specific technological and cultural space developed in discussions concerning online and offline religious spheres. The term “digital religion” refers to a case in which the Internet connects real life with virtual reality and is a place which favors creating new religious content and practices. This term evolved from the concept of “cyber-religion,” which appeared in the mid-1990s when Internet studies of people’s religious involvement started. The term “cyber-religion,” in its general sense, refers to each religion with the Internet as an intermediary and to religious organizations and religious activity present in cyberspace. The term “online religion” is sometimes used to distinguish between developing new forms of religiousness and religions using the Inter-

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<sup>16</sup> Beata Guzowska, “Świecka religia życia—perspektywa filozoficzna,” *Przegląd Religioznawczy* 2 (2020): 194.

net as a space in which spirituality is practiced.<sup>17</sup> Without doubt, googlism is a form of activity in cyberspace, whose proponents use the Internet as a tool connecting the real world with virtual reality to shape new religious beliefs and practices.

Third, Googlism can be perceived in the perspective of "new spirituality," whose development is noticeable in the twentieth and nineteenth centuries. It provides an alternative to traditional spirituality, connected with the institutional religion and developing within its framework. Let us look at its main features.

For a start, it is worth establishing certain concepts. This is mainly about the triad: religion—religiosity—spirituality. Some simplifications are unavoidable in the process. It is all the more so that there are about ten thousand religions worldwide, and our understanding of each is tainted with Western-European ethnocentrism.

For the sake of this study, let us accept that a religion is an element of culture, which comprises a specific doctrine, moral principles, a cult, and an organized community of believers (very often—a hierarchically ordered institution).

In this case, religiosity would be a consequence, a pragmatic dimension of religion.<sup>18</sup> A deeper form of religiosity would be called spirituality. However, one should stress that, in modern times, spirituality often loses its relationship with institutional religion, becoming a method of transcending the immanence and perfecting the personality.<sup>19</sup> Spirituality is defined as a psychological process of striving towards crossing the physical, mental, and social boundaries of human existence.<sup>20</sup>

The British sociologist Paul Heelas writes about a specific "spiritual revolution," which took place in the 20th century. It consisted of a transformation from religion to spirituality. A religion is a form of a mediated relationship between man and God, associated with obedience to God, a tradition of generations, a doctrine and moral principles. However, according to Heelas, it is not sufficient for humans in modern times. They rather support spirituality, which is in no way connected with institutional religion. It consists of a very personal, internal and existential experience of *sacrum*. Spirituality remains in a deep relationship with man's own being and it satisfies their deeper needs. It is often associated with sacralization of the "personal self" and

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<sup>17</sup> Sleight, "Google a Religion," 252–253.

<sup>18</sup> Marcin Zwierzdzyński, "Religia—duchowość—postmodernizm. Problem znaczeń," in *Religijność i duchowość—dawne i nowe formy*, ed. Maria Libiszowska-Żółtkowska and Stella Grotowska (Kraków: Nomos, 2010), 80.

<sup>19</sup> Katarzyna Leszczyńska and Zbigniew Pasek, "Nowa duchowość w badaniach społecznych," in *Nowa duchowość w społeczeństwach monokulturowych i pluralistycznych*, ed. Katarzyna Leszczyńska and Zbigniew Pasek (Kraków: Nomos, 2008), 90.

<sup>20</sup> Paweł Socha, "Na tropach duchowości—czym jest i czym może być duchowość?," *Nomos. Kwartalnik Religioznawczy* 43/44 (2003): 10–11.

temporary existence and a release from tensions arising from interpersonal relations.<sup>21</sup>

Therefore, religious spirituality is often distinguished from non-religious spirituality. The former is mainly associated with the traditions of historical religions and the techniques of contemplative or ecstatic experience of the sacrum, accessible within its framework (e.g., deepened prayer, meditation, ascesis). Non-religious spirituality refers to elements of reality, without the sacral dimension, but serving the individual as a tool for transcending everyday life. Non-religious spirituality is understood in two ways: as a fundamental human feature (dimension of the human psyche) and as a universal adaptation capability (religious and non-religious forms, i.e., art, work or play).<sup>22</sup>

One should note that some people even discuss atheist spirituality. They regard the spirit as a function of the brain or its activity. Therefore, the Absolute is not a personal God, but a being that encompasses all of reality. Atheist spirituality is then immanent, as it limits itself to contact with the universe and the experience of unity, freedom, and peace.<sup>23</sup>

Given the above conceptual nuances, let us look at the specificity of the “new spirituality,” which is a feature of contemporary times. It is very similar to non-religious spirituality, which is not only a permanent dimension of the human psyche, but also a principal human need not always satisfied with religious measures. Non-religious spirituality is gaining high popularity nowadays. Two situations are possible in this situation. On the one hand, one can be a spiritual, but not a religious person. On the other hand, one can be a religious person in the sense of respecting the principles of a religion, but without the spiritual depth.

However, it seems that spirituality should always be oriented towards some kind of transcendence. According to the Polish sociologist, Janusz Mariański, sometimes there is no reference to a transcendental reality. A personal and transcendental God is sometimes reduced to a form of impersonal and immanent sacrum, the depth of reality and a sense of life. An important role is played by a human “self” with its inner experiences, personal searches and the need for placed on self-fulfillment. An emphasis is emotions and personality integration.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, transcendence is intra-global. It is associated with the

<sup>21</sup> Paul Heelas, “The Spiritual Revolution. From ‘Religion’ to ‘Spirituality,’” in *Religions in the Modern World. Tradition and Transformation*, ed. Linda Woodhead, Christopher Partridge, and Hiroko Kawanami (London–New York: Routledge, 2002), 357–377.

<sup>22</sup> Zwierzdzyński, “Religia—duchowość—postmodernizm,” 81, 83–85.

<sup>23</sup> André Comte-Sponville, *Duchowość ateistyczna. Wprowadzenie do duchowości bez Boga*. Translated by Elżbieta Aduszkiewicz (Warszawa: Czarna Owca, 2011), 143–158, 163, 170–194, 203–207.

<sup>24</sup> Janusz Mariański, *Sekularyzacja, desekularyzacja, nowa duchowość. Studium socjologiczne* (Kraków: Nomos, 2013), 148, 181.

process of individualization of one's own spiritual path and personal preferences of an individual.<sup>25</sup> It is also noteworthy that understanding transcendence usually depends on cultural and social factors and is marked with apophatism.

The consequences of these forms of the "new spirituality" include abandoning faith in an anthropomorphically perceived God; the presence of pantheistic and gnostic tendencies; interest in different states of mind sometimes caused by hallucinogens (narcotics), exercise (yoga, zen) and music; negation of the idea of progress, originating during the enlightenment period, objecting to civilization and seeking a return to traditional techniques of health and natural protection; finally, a predomination of feminist and ecological tendencies.<sup>26</sup>

The "new spirituality" often refers to man's spiritual search, which is sometimes associated with the need to find answers to fundamental moral and existential questions. Man, therefore, becomes a "spiritual wanderer."<sup>27</sup> The Polish philosopher of culture and religion Beata Guzowska stresses that the "new spirituality" fits well into the climate of modern times, which is characterized by the "culture of search." Its key features include spiritual mobility involving frequent changes of views and ways of life.<sup>28</sup> A search becomes the fundamental form of spiritual life. It does not preclude any possibilities, and it does not establish any necessary points of reference. This search, marked with subjectivism, one's "self" and emotionality, focuses on the development of one's personality and search for the sense of life. The source of such a sense may lie outside the present life, but it can be incorporated in its present process.<sup>29</sup> Man searches for some form of spiritual life focused on self-fulfillment, which results in privatization and individualization of the whole sphere of spirituality.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, man does not want to be part of any religious community or institution. One has one's own spiritual development path, one's own methods and measures. The British sociologist Grace Davie talks about the phenomenon of "faith without belonging."<sup>31</sup> A similar conviction is shared by the Canadian intellectual Charles Taylor.

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<sup>25</sup> Guzowska, "Świecka religia życia," 193; Zwierzdzyński, "Religia—duchowość—postmodernizm," 85–86.

<sup>26</sup> Włodzimierz Pawluczuk, "Duchowość," in *Leksykon socjologii religii*, ed. Maria Libiszowska-Żółtkowska and Janusz Mariański (Warszawa: Verbinum, 2004), 91–92.

<sup>27</sup> Janusz Mariański, *Religia w społeczeństwie ponowoczesnym. Studium socjologiczne* (Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 2010), 201–220; Mariański, *Sekularyzacja, desekularyzacja, nowa duchowość*, 154–162.

<sup>28</sup> Guzowska, "Świecka religia życia," 195.

<sup>29</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA, London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 506–510.

<sup>30</sup> Charles Taylor, "The Future of the Religious Past," in *Dilemmas and Connections. Selected Essays*, ed. Charles Taylor (Cambridge, MA, London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 252–256; Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 519–520.

<sup>31</sup> Grace Davie, *Socjologia religii*, trans. Renata Babińska (Kraków: Nomos, 2010), 197–201.

In this perspective, Googlism, with its lack of reference to a personal and transcendental God and deification of an Internet search engine, creates a perfect opportunity for individual seeking different states of mind, various methods of personal development and sense of life. The search is, in fact, endless and it does not have any permanent points of reference. It is rather oriented towards novelty.

Therefore, the researchers studying the “new spirituality” provide a catalogue of its basic features, which include individualism, subjectivism, egocentricity, innovativeness, expressivity, dynamism, eclecticism, emphasis on one’s experience, fluency, chaotic behavior, incoherence, disharmony, fragmentary attitude, metaphoricity, privacy, distraction, multiple content, commercialization, internality, lack of clarity, ambiguity, lack of organization, disinstitutionalization, desocialization, lack of commitment, invisibility, and superficiality.<sup>32</sup> These features could also be used to characterize Googlism, which would be treated as an element of what is called now the “new spirituality.” In this spirituality, however, there is no place for religious experience in the form of an interpersonal relationship between a human being and a personal God, familiar to adherents of monotheistic religions. Instead, spiritual experience is reduced in Googlism to the sensations of the human subject as a result of contact with the browser, the content drawn from it and the virtual relationships with other subjects using its services.

Fourth, Googlism could be regarded as a parody of religion. It seems that was its founder’s original intention. He established the Church of Google as a parody of religion, which combines elements of the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster and Internet technology.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, it is sometimes referred to as a “joke religion,” which is a response to traditional religious institutions or cultural groups. Its features include the application of modernistic ideas to spiritual reality, engaging the followers in thought experiments, emphasizing the links between religion and popular culture.<sup>34</sup> These elements can also be found in Googlism. In fact, Googlism negates the existence of a divine supernatural being—it criticizes the role of religion because it is founded on absolute authority and truth. Googlism is based on the attitudes dominant in popular culture and it trivializes and ridicules some elements of religious doctrine (e.g., existence and nature of the Absolute, the Christian truth about the Trinity, eternal life) and practices (e.g., faith, prayer). Googlism also encourages people to continually search for new content and experiences and conduct thought experiments. As opposed to traditional religions, religiosity is a matter of fashion and fleeting impressions rather than experiencing the Absolute in reality.

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<sup>32</sup> Zwierzdzyński, “Religia—duchowość—postmodernizm,” 88–90.

<sup>33</sup> MacPherson, “Googlism.”

<sup>34</sup> Sleight, “Google a Religion,” 255–256.

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## Conclusion

The aim of this paper was not only to deliver a presentation of the main ideas of Googlism, but also to analyze it critically as a lay religion, "a digital religion," a "new spirituality" of digital age man, or a parody of religion.

Googlism may resemble a traditional religion as it seems to have its basic features, but this similarity is only apparent. One crucial element is missing: the affirmation of a supranatural and personal Absolute. Sacralization and deification of a search engine can hardly be regarded as a constitutive element of a religion. Moreover, the essence of religiosity, at least in the West-European tradition, lies in an existential, dynamic and holistic interpersonal relation between the natural and the supernatural being, that is, between the man and God. Its consequences include specific beliefs, rites, moral attitudes, and followers. Therefore, since that personal reference in Googlism is replaced with worshipping a human artefact (the Internet) it should be regarded not so much as a form of man's internal development, but rather as its degradation.

Therefore, Googlism can be perceived as a lay religion, with the sacrum reduced to the natural dimensions as a result of technology sacralization; a digital religion, that is, a technological space which favors creation of new religious content and practice; another type of "new spirituality" of man in the era of a digital revolution; and, finally, as a "joke religion," which is a parody of religious life.

The transcendent Absolute would be absent in each of these cases, and in each, the Internet search engine would be sacralized. It would involve individualism, focus on the individual needs, detachment from an institution and a permanent search for new ideas and experiences. The search engine worshipped in Googlism would provide man with practically unlimited opportunities for searching for and finding various ways of thinking and life models and, in consequence, a change in one's beliefs and practices. They would be eclectic, chaotic, and incoherent, but they would also be associated with an individual's needs and desires. A question can be asked in a case like this: can a search engine and technology satisfy human spiritual needs?

Some twentieth-century thinkers (e.g., Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer) stressed that contemporary man is one-dimensional, relying mainly on technology. This one-dimensionality is determined by the domination of the subjective (instrumental) reason, setting the goals and choosing ways of their implementation and "logic of rule," with consequent manipulation of other individuals by means of new technologies. However, there is no objective (substantial) reason which can capture a fundamental structure of reality and discover the spiritual depth of human existence. Man is often satisfied with

the superficial experience of his existence. Nevertheless, this does not mean that existential questions, that is, ones concerning the meaning of life, were fended off or totally forgotten by man. It seems that they are appearing at least sporadically in his mind and demand some answers. Still, science and technology cannot provide it in a satisfying way, as their very nature is a principal limitation in this regard. Therefore, one's view of the world and religion can be an effective help. One has to bear in mind that man is a spiritual-carnal personal being and can find one's fulfilment, in the words of Karol Wojtyła, only in interpersonal relations through a "selfless gift of oneself." Is it not an opportunity that is given to man by a religion, perceived as a dialogic relation with God, rather than by a "religion," understood as impersonal contact with a machine? Perhaps, in the digital era, have we forgotten about the personal dimension of our lives or even lost it completely? If that is the case, we would not only reach the end of the era of religion, but also the end of man, to paraphrase a thought of Francis Fukuyama, the American philosopher and political scientist.

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Karol Jasiński

## Googlisme – nouvelle religion de l'homme à l'ère numérique

### Résumé

L'objectif de cet article est de présenter de manière critique les principales hypothèses du Googlisme et de caractériser plus précisément les différentes possibilités de le comprendre. A ce titre, il est composé de deux parties principales. Dans la première partie, sont discutés les principaux éléments du googlisme (doctrine, principes moraux, culte et communauté) qui le font ressembler à une religion telle qu'on la conçoit classiquement. En même temps, il a été souligné que la similitude avec la religion est toutefois apparente, car il lui manque l'élément essentiel à savoir l'affirmation de l'existence d'un Absolu surnaturel et personnel et d'une relation inter-

personnelle existentielle, dynamique et holistique entre Lui et l'homme. En effet, il est difficile de considérer la sacralisation et la déification du navigateur Web comme élément constitutif de la religion. La seconde partie, en revanche, caractérise le Googlisme comme une religion séculière dans laquelle *le sacré* est réduit à des dimensions naturelles du fait de la sacralisation de la technologie; une religion numérique, c'est-à-dire un espace technologique propice à la création de nouveaux contenus et pratiques religieux; une «nouvelle spiritualité» de l'homme vivant à l'ère de la révolution numérique; ou, enfin, une «religion de plaisanterie» qui est une parodie de la vie religieuse.

Mots-clés: Google, religion, spiritualité, homme, ère numérique

Karol Jasiński

## GoGLEISMO – La nuova religione dell'uomo nell'era digitale

### Sommario

Lo scopo dell'articolo è una presentazione critica dei principali presupposti del GoGLEISMO e una caratterizzazione più approfondita delle varie possibilità della sua comprensione. Pertanto è composto da due parti principali. Nella prima parte vengono discussi gli elementi principali del GoGLEISMO (dottrina, principi morali, culto e comunità), grazie ai quali assomiglia a una religione intesa in modo classico. Allo stesso tempo, è stato sottolineato che la somiglianza con la religione è solo apparente perché manca un elemento essenziale, che è l'affermazione dell'esistenza di un Assoluto soprannaturale e personale e di un esistenziale, dinamico e olistico rapporto interpersonale tra Esso e l'uomo. È infatti difficile considerare la sacralizzazione e la divinizzazione del browser come un elemento costitutivo della religione. La seconda parte caratterizza: il GoGLEISMO come una religione secolare in cui il sacro è ridotto alle dimensioni naturali come risultato della sacralizzazione della tecnologia; la religione digitale, ovvero uno spazio tecnologico favorevole alla creazione di nuovi contenuti e pratiche religiose; la "nuova spiritualità" dell'uomo che vive nell'era della rivoluzione digitale; o infine la "religione dello scherzo" che è una parodia della vita religiosa.

Parole chiave: Google, religione, spiritualità, uomo, era digitale



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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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup>

## 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

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

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

<sup>3</sup> *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. Archer<sup>4</sup> 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,”<sup>5</sup> and as Rorty asserts, “socialisation [...] goes all the way down.”<sup>6</sup> 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.”<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> This trend has been confirmed when the use of online communication during the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus was given priority.

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

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

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

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

<sup>8</sup> 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 households<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup>

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.<sup>13</sup> The escalation of sensations, the explosion of scandals, the proliferation of a number of television stations causes a person to

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<sup>9</sup> *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](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=isoc_ci_in_h&lang=en).

<sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> 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.

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

<sup>13</sup> 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.”<sup>14</sup>

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 noise<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> 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

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

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

<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup>

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 relationship<sup>19</sup> 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,<sup>20</sup> as “education which is an introduction to the wholeness of the world” in the work of Jan Patočka,<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup>

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

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

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

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

<sup>20</sup> Radim Palouš, *Česká zkušenost* (Praha: Academia, 1994), 157.

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

<sup>22</sup> Kratochvíl, *Výchova, zřejmost, vědomí*, 40.

liberation so that we can live the true life.<sup>23</sup> The prisoner in Plato's cave strives to make sense of the matters concealed by shadows.<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup>

A substantial part of education happens within the interval of scholē.<sup>27</sup> 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.

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

<sup>24</sup> Platón, *Ústava* (Praha: Oikoymenh, 1993), 516a.

<sup>25</sup> Palouš, *K filozofii výchovy*, 80.

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

<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup>

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.”<sup>29</sup>

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.<sup>30</sup>

Scheler correlates anthropology with the religious understanding of man.<sup>31</sup> 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.

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

<sup>29</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, accessed January 15, 2022, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_INDEX.HTM](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM).

<sup>30</sup> 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](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340301162_Understanding_of_Man_in_Western_and_Eastern_Cultural_Traditions).

<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup> 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.<sup>33</sup>

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.<sup>34</sup> 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-

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

<sup>33</sup> Patočka, *Filosofie výchovy*, 5.

<sup>34</sup> 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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Pavol Dancák

## 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

Pavol Dancák

## 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



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# Man “Extended” by Media and Technology: Ethical Considerations

**Abstract:** Modern man uses a wide range of technical and media tools. The term “*techne*,” while referring to things and skills, also denotes man’s connections with these objects. The influence of *techne* on the functioning of the human person is mutual; as we adapt the tools to our needs, we also change ourselves by using modern technologies. James J. Gibson’s concept of *affordance* and Andy Clark’s concept of the *extended mind* allow us accurately to describe the relationship between the human mind, man’s cognitive abilities and actions, and the external environment. In this article, the Author addresses the technical, media- and communication-related aspects of this environment. The article’s concluding section is devoted to the ethical consequences of technical and media extension of man and the frame of reference for these considerations is supplied by Karol Wojtyła’s concept of the human person.

**Keywords:** extended man, human person, affordances, new technologies, digital media

## Introduction

We now use a great number of technical devices, many of which are essentially related to media communication. We also tend to distance ourselves from the influence of the media, especially when feeling oppressed by information overload. Yet we continue to talk to others, share opinions and argue, and for these purposes we also use *techne*. Digital media and new technologies have become an element of everyday human activity, related to work, entertainment, and the processes of obtaining information. They constitute the basis for knowledge

society.<sup>1</sup> Internet media make it easier for us to establish professional contacts, offer services and share work/research results, and artistic projects; they help us make and maintain contacts and relationships, professional and private. The COVID-19 pandemic with its restrictions, involving mandatory social distancing and isolation and the transfer of professional activity to “remote” work, accelerated processes leading to the development of IT society. The previously common opposition of traditional media (the press, radio, television) and the new media (the Internet) has now lost much of its relevance. At the present stage of the civilizational “domestication” of digital media, the Internet and the artifacts of new technology have ceased to be a novelty to marvel at. They have become friendly, familiar, and “homey,” and influence and shape a wide spectrum of social life. When analyzing social phenomena, we now refer to technical criteria. A person’s belonging to generations X, Y, Z is largely based on their ability to operate a new variant of a particular digital device.<sup>2</sup>

The process of adaptation to changing environmental conditions causes modern man to find himself technically and medially “extended” through techne artifacts. These two factors—techne and media—must be regarded as closely related. We can describe this extension in spatial and temporal terms, for example, “more ...,” “to a greater degree,” “more intensely,” “more efficiently,” “faster,” “more effectively,” “in a fully optimized way.” The use of such language suggests an axiological premise in that it indicates progress understood as an expansion of human capabilities. Even though humans have been using various tools and facilities for thousands of years, the pace and nature of change is now greater than ever before. Enhancement of our capabilities in one sphere of life, such as working remotely and learning online, can lead to a decrease in activity in another. Nowadays, there seems to be no need to meet others “face to face,” which can make us feel alienated and lonely. Another negative outcome is the increasing lack of physical exercise. New types of activity are emerging, such as fitness running and workout, or the emergence of online communities, whose members get together based on shared interests and fascinations. The process of socially taming of the tools of modern technology takes time, and it is difficult to predict in terms of its consequences. The philosopher’s task is to point out the possibilities of good use of the tools of modern technology, but also to identify the threats associated with new aspects of the relationship between man and new technologies.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Social Sciences & Humanities Open Mind, <https://sshopencloud.eu>.

<sup>2</sup> Cisco Connected World Technology Report; *Report Summary on Gen Y and Technology 2012*, <http://www.cisco.com/c/en/us/solutions/enterprise/connected-world-technology-report/index.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Niels Bürgger, “Web History and Social Media,” in *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media*, ed. Jean Burges, T. Poell, and A. Marwick (London–New York: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2017), <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473984066>.

The term “extension” in the title of this article points to the relational connections between man and the environment, social, natural, technical, media, and communication. The relationality of the human-being-in-the-world indicates that being a person is about being with others and being in a natural and technical environment. The aim of this article is to analyze the impact of artifacts of modern technology on human functioning. From an ethical perspective, technical artefacts should be evaluated based on whether they affirm or violate the value known as the dignity of the human person. This article puts forward the thesis that technological and media expansion opens up new possibilities for creative thinking and action. At the same time, the use of technical devices and skills can also lead to instrumental treatment of ourselves and others on the way to the attainment of economic or political goals. Ethical issues regarding the use of new technologies will be discussed in the final section of the article.

## Affordances and the “Extended” Mind

In technical artifacts (*techne*) we can see three types of things: (1) tools, (2) skills, (3) a technological system.<sup>4</sup>

In the first case, *techne* artifacts enhance (or “extend”) human manual capabilities (e.g., a hammer used for driving nails, a saw for cutting wood), or they “expand” the range of human mental capabilities as, for example, when a device improves the mind’s ability to remember (a handy notebook, a storage disk in a digital device). The tools of technology assist humans in performing activities they find challenging or cumbersome.

In the second case, *techne* refers to human skills involved in the carrying out of specific tasks. Driving nails into the wall is a skill we can acquire quickly; other skills take more time to develop. Due to individual predispositions, we learn at different paces. In terms of our ability to use *techne*, there is much diversity. Driving a car can for some people be a difficult skill to acquire and may be a cause of stress for those who take driving courses. When we pass the driving test, we feel proud of ourselves. We have succeeded mentally by mastering a new skill. And yet, from the position of a trainee, we look up to the truck driver, whose brain has acquired (has been “extended” by) the ability

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<sup>4</sup> The two first aspects of *techne* were analyzed by Martin Heidegger in *Budować, mieszkać, myśleć: eseje wybrane*, trans. Krzysztof Michalski and Krzysztof Wolicki (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Czytelnik, 1977), 227. The third one, the concept of a technological system, has been studied by Jacques Ellul in *Technological System*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: The Continuum Publishing Corporation, 1980), 35–36.

to operate a truck or another huge motor vehicle. The dimensions of the vehicle thus become part of the truck driver's mind's spatial perception. In appreciating the skills of the driver, we show appreciation for the human mind's capacity to adapt itself to the machine the person operates.

The third way of understanding technique consists in seeing it as a "system." The relationship between man and technology is multifaceted, involving the natural environment, culture, and people as mutually dependent participants. We are constantly changing and improving the tools we use as well as looking for new ways to use them. Ultimately, the use of technical tools is not without consequences, and we change at the level of both our individual perception of the world and collective imaginations of reality. By analogy to taming, we can say that a similar process also takes place in the case of a keeper of animals. Therefore, we are talking here, not only about the influence of technical tools on the perception of objects external to us, but also the understanding of what these objects mean to us. Consequently, what we have in mind is our own interpretation of our "self" as a subject equipped with *techne* artifacts.

The concept of a "technical system" allows us to describe the complex relationship between man and technology. For the purposes of this analysis, a broad technical understanding must be adopted, one encompassing the various human activities related to the use of tools in both person-to-person and social communication.<sup>5</sup> Since the 1990s, the perception of digital artifacts has changed. The change concerns the cultural perception of digital tools, from the treatment of the computer as a device that provides entertainment to the situation when, in many professions, the computer and other digital information carriers are essential components of education and work. Those who do not have a PC, a laptop, a smartphone or an iPhone and the skills involved in operating them are often condemned to professional and social exclusion.

When discussing the concept of the expanded mind, it is necessary to explain the difference between "brain" and "mind." The biological and cognitive sciences tend to use the term "brain" as referring to the biological foundation of feeling, decision-making, and thinking. These abilities also apply to animals, including orangutans, chimpanzees, gorillas, dolphins, elephants, and can be attributed the general capacity to consciously perceive reality. Thinking, combined with feeling and decision-making, is an extremely complex process, difficult to explain exclusively in biological terms. The current state of knowledge in the field of cognitive sciences does not allow us to explain the phenomenon of human self-awareness. We assume that man can reflect on their cognition, feelings, and the choices they make. This metalevel (metacognition) is a specifically human faculty, which can be described as a kind of looping. When we reflect

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<sup>5</sup> Val Dusek, *Philosophy of Technology. An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2006), 34–36.

on ourselves, we are present to ourselves simultaneously as the object and the subject of self-reflection.

Cognitive sciences do not study consciousness; they examine selected phenomena of consciousness.<sup>6</sup> If we cannot explain the phenomenon of human self-awareness, we cannot create it; we cannot build artificial consciousness. While the technical tools we surround ourselves with extend and complement human capabilities, what is specific to human thinking, action, and feeling must be associated with the “mind.” The theory of emergence indicates a qualitative “leap,” from the biological brain to the mind.<sup>7</sup> Researchers have not provided a satisfactory explanation of how this leap occurs. The human person is an emergent entity, combining mental properties with brain activities. Consciousness is a prerequisite for thinking, decision-making, and empathy, that is, the ability to fellow-feel and co-think with other beings. A person’s conscious mind is the result of the emergent development of the brain, where emergence refers to a new quality in the biological development of the brain, exceeding the sum of the elements that constitute it.<sup>8</sup>

The main concern of this article is the issue of the expanding effects of artifacts of technology on the human mind. This expansion of the mind can be described with the help of James Gibson’s theory of affordance as well as Andy Clark’s concept of the extended mind.

The theory of affordances was created by cognitive psychologist James J. Gibson.<sup>9</sup> It regards objects that surround us, in this case technical objects, as objects used for practical use; for example, a hammer is regarded as a device for driving nails (other sharpened objects can also be driven with a hammer). A digital device will have many affordances, that is, possibilities to be used. Based on his research, Gibson has concluded that the perception of objects means seeing them from the perspective of usefulness. We discover the physical properties of objects as a result of the interaction of this object with the subject of knowledge. Knowing objects does not occur in isolation, but in their environmental context, that is, the one in which the process of cognition takes place.

Here, however, we encounter a problem that has been addressed by the supporters of the theory of affordance: Are possibilities of use related to the object or to the human consciousness that discovers and defines these possibilities? To put this differently, are affordances the possibilities of an object that we have not

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<sup>6</sup> Stanislas Dehaene, *Consciousness and the Brain: Deciphering How the Brain Codes Our Thoughts* (London: Penguin Group, 2014), 38–39.

<sup>7</sup> Józef Bremer, “Emergencja i jej rozumienie w biologii,” *Studia Ecologiae et Bioethicae* 17, no. 2 (2019): 31, (29–40), <http://doi.org/10.21697/seb.2019.17.2.03>.

<sup>8</sup> Jeffrey Schwartz and Sharon Begley, *The Mind and the Brain: Neuroplasticity and the Power of Mental Force* (New York: Regan Books–Harper Collins Publishers, 2002), 320–322.

<sup>9</sup> James J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (London: Psychology Press, 2015), 118.

yet discovered or equipped it with? Gibson opines that affordance refers, not to the actual use but rather to a certain potentiality of objects available to the human subject. At the same time, this impact may be beneficial or disadvantageous for that subject. Without considering the factor of user awareness, it is impossible to define the properties of an object. This problem is clearly visible in the process of discovering the properties of things and creatively searching for new ways of using them, or in the process of improving the functionality of objects for the user.<sup>10</sup> In this respect, our mind is extremely creative. We create new areas of use for familiar things or give things new properties. Sometimes even the system of concepts must keep up with the changes. For example, the uses of the mobile phone today exceed the initial feature of talking to other people, and we now use this device to take photos, send text messages and images, save notes, play, browse the web, and much more. The Polish language has no word to name a device which we can use to perform all these activities. Somewhat helplessly we copy into Polish the English words “smartphone” and “iPhone.”

However, not all human beings are creative in equal measure, which is particularly evident in relation to the rules for using the tools of modern techne. Statistically, users use only a small portion of the capabilities of their smartphone or their personal computer. Some affordances simply never get discovered.

Donald Norman has reinterpreted Gibson’s concept of affordance. Interested in the relationship between man and digital-visual objects, Norman has distinguished three layers in the perception of things: (a) primary, related to biological conditions; (b) utilitarian, related to the possibility of using a known object; (c) reflective, related to the meaning of things for human users and its possible interpretations in a cultural context. Each of these layers plays an important role in the human perception of objects found in the environment. In addition, the reflective aspect of perception places the known object in a network of axiological connections defined by the human subject’s preferences, fears, and current state of knowledge. Norman’s theory considers affordances in terms of the potential usefulness of an object, its applicability and ease of use, as well as the relevant cultural context. This applies, among other things, to the functionality of objects used in design. In this case, affordance concerns the meaning of space and the role of the objects which occupy it in creating interaction between people.<sup>11</sup>

Scholars who have published on the application of the concept of affordance make references to the issues of modern technology. They point to the relationship between the human mind and the environment of the digital world, as well as the value of user agency. Affordances relating to the knowledge of the environment and human relations are believed to be linked to technological

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<sup>10</sup> Eleanor Gibson, “Where Is Information for Affordances,” *Ecological Psychology* 12, no. 1 (2000): 52–53.

<sup>11</sup> Donald A. Norman, *Emotional Design. Why We Love (or Hate) Everyday Things* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 72–75.

affordances. At the heart of this link is a globalized network of connections, related information acquisition capacities, and people-to-people communication strategies for disseminating it. We therefore speak of “communicative adiaphorizations” that make such connections possible.<sup>12</sup> We have here in mind interpersonal communication mediated by digital techne. The use of technology allows us to create new forms of interaction, such as web visibility, recognition of the logo of a company or institution, editability, visuality, associativeness. Mastering the skills related to these affordances allows a person to attain a new quality of functioning in the virtual world.<sup>13</sup> As skills related to tools, these affordances are important for occupational, artistic, and scientific activities, as well as for entertainment and interpersonal contacts. For example, modern media technology makes possible almost instant contact between people in remote parts of the world. This can be essential in maintaining personal family contacts, when, for example, a husband and father goes to a distant place and works there (known as mediated contact).

In recent discussions on the concept of affordance, scholars stress that the interaction of the human mind and technology is mutual. As digital objects expand human possibilities, the mind is not left unaffected by these changes in ways that are not always desirable. Adults make conscious choices, but children and adolescents are not always capable of doing so. On the one hand, the natural curiosity and courage of young people when dealing with the artifacts of modern techne can be an advantage; they make for ease of adaptation to changing conditions of social life, for example, the use of instant messaging. Lack of familiarity with communicators makes a young person a victim of social exclusion in their peer group. On the other hand, the natural trust of young users in techne artifacts generates threats such as escape from the real world into the virtual one, addiction to digital objects, and indiscriminating trust in the content posted on the Internet. These threats are especially serious if young people are not taught the ability to critically assess the risks and habits related to the protection of personal data.<sup>14</sup>

The theory of affordance corresponds to the concept of the expanded mind, put forth by Andy Clark and David Chalmers. Developed since its formulation

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<sup>12</sup> Taina Bucher and Anne Helmond, “The Affordances of Social Media Platforms,” in *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media*, ed. Jean Burges, Thomas Poell, and Alice Marwick (London–New York: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2017), <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473984066>.

<sup>13</sup> Jeffrey W. Treem and Paul M. Leonardi, “Social Media Use in Organization: Exploring the Affordances of Visibility, Editability, and Association,” *Annals of the International Communication Association* 36 (2012): 143–189.

<sup>14</sup> Łukasz Łysiak and Piotr Machura, “Rola i znaczenie technologii mobilnych w codziennym życiu człowieka XXI wieku,” *Media i społeczeństwo. Medioznawstwo, komunikologia, semiologia, socjologia mediów* 4 (2014): 15–26.

in 1996,<sup>15</sup> it examines human mental states in their relation to the environment external to man and, at this juncture, is essentially concerned with elements of the technical and media environment. This concept can be understood at two levels: anthropological and epistemological. The anthropological aspect concerns personal identity, that is, the extent to which the use of technology in artifacts affects users and the nature of interpersonal relationships. The other aspect, that is, the epistemological one, indicates that the tools of modern *techne* have a significant impact on the cognition of reality. According to Clark, the content of human mental states depends to a large extent on the external technical environment.<sup>16</sup> Admittedly, the use of *techne* tools affects the way we perceive the world and ourselves. Concern is raised by the scope and the pace of the changes taking place. We must ask at this point; how do they serve and in what way do they threaten the human person?

Reflections on the expansion of the human mind by contemporary *techne* should also take into account the axiological aspect, especially such values as freedom, the dignity of the human person, empathy, justice, agency, and responsibility for decisions. What makes knowing of the world of values possible is axiological intuition, something that machines do not have. The axiology of new technologies is still human axiology. Currently, the goal of those who program and train intelligent *techne* is chiefly to expand human creative abilities, not to replace them. This, however, does not mean that the systematic use of intelligent tools will have no moral consequences. If we agree that the inclusion of *techne* artifacts in day-to-day life affects us and redefines the rules that govern social life, we must examine this issue from an ethical perspective.

## The Human Person and New Technologies

The term “person” derives from theological (the Trinitarian disputes) and philosophical traditions. When using this term in a universal sense, we must be aware of two important aspects. One concerns the anthropological dimension, the uniqueness and distinctness of the existence and experiences of an individual human being; the other—its normative use. To treat someone as a person is to recognize the value of their existence as something that deserves to be affirmed by other people. Personalistic ethics acknowledges the necessity to affirm the humanity in us by caring for the wellbeing of the species, especially in the

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<sup>15</sup> Andy Clark and David Chalmers, “The Extended Mind,” *Analysis* 58 (1998): 10–23.

<sup>16</sup> Andy Clark, “Coupling, Constitution, and the Cognitive Kind: A Reply to Adams and Aizawa,” in *The Extended Mind*, ed. Richard Menary (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010), 45–46.

long-term perspective. At the same time, we must also acknowledge the rights of the person to use the resources of modern techne.

Used in its ethical sense, the term “person” denotes the value of individual human life. According to Immanuel Kant and the categorical imperative he proposed, to recognize someone as a person is to treat them always as an end and never merely as a means to an end. Being a person means being the subject of one’s own decisions and moral responsibility resulting from one’s actions.<sup>17</sup> As the term “agent” is sometimes used to refer to the relationship between man and techne, we must stress the difference between “agent” and “person.” An agent is a relatively autonomous system that processes information in order to perform a task assigned to it. A human being can be an agent, but also a robot equipped with AI and performing specific activities that expand or extend human activity. There is a fundamental difference between an “artificial” agent (“artificial intelligence,” i.e., a robot), and a “subject capable of making free choices.” Only the latter can be described as a human person.<sup>18</sup>

Let us refer at this point to the concept of the human person as theorized by Karol Wojtyła. The human knows him-/herself as a person through his or her acts or agency (*actus humanus*). Human nature indicates only the very possibility of doing, whereas the human act is essentially a personal act. At one level of understanding, this means that by action a person transcends nature. Personal acts bring out our human agency and make us become aware of our own “I,” or selfhood, as something/someone distinct and unrepeatable. Being the author of his or her actions, the person at the same time in the process of self-reflection, realizes that he or she has the ability to understand and own his or her actions. Self-reflection allows us to discover ourselves in a double loop, as it were, the phenomenon of personal consciousness. Being a person is a process rather than a state. Becoming a person in this case means going beyond doing something out of necessity as imposed by nature; it is a movement towards the discovery of what is potential and possible. It also coincides with the mental state in which we can make distinctions and axiological choices. Although Wojtyła did not use the term affordance, being a person is about discovering one’s personal possibilities in interactions with the environment, including both things and other people. If humanity is the object of affirmation, then the person is humanity individualized, and, in this sense, the individual person is worthy of affirmation. At the same time, the person makes him-/herself present in the act. Through the act, the person encounters the world of things and other people, and also

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<sup>17</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. and trans. Christopher Bennett, Joe Saunders, and Robert Stern (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 62–65.

<sup>18</sup> Barbara Trybulec, “Podmiot czy Agent? Rozumienie podmiotowości w erze artefaktów poznawczych,” *Filozofia i Nauka. Studia filozoficzne i interdyscyplinarne* 8, no. 2 (2000): 89–113, <https://doi:10.37240/FiN.2021.9.1.12>.

becomes aware of his or her own individuality.<sup>19</sup> The dynamic of personal life happens through the discovery of one's potential and through various forms of commitment. Being a person involves four forms of engagement: self-possession, self-governance, self-determination, and self-awareness.

The recurring prefix *self-* denotes the element of self-reflection in the affirmation by a person of his or her selfhood, or "I." Being the author of his or her own actions, a person is capable of reflecting on them, thanks to which he or she becomes aware of him-/herself as a creative being.<sup>20</sup> The dynamism of personal life, resulting from the fact that the "I" is the author of its own actions, makes creative action a fundamental factor in a person's discovery of his or her own value. This makes us different from animals and things, including artificial intelligence. The discovery of one's own personal uniqueness should not lead to self-centeredness, but to the discovery that other human beings are also endowed with personhood and therefore must be respected, just as they should respect us in return. The meaning of the term "person" should be understood as equivalent to "a conscious moral subject," "a self-conscious I," and "a being capable of making free choices."

Following up on Wojtyła's reflections, we can now apply his theory of personhood to technology and media. The artifacts of modern techne represent an important extension of our physical and mental abilities. Only a person is a subject, a being who is aware of him-/herself and his or her actions and in possession of a subjective point of view. Self-awareness guarantees the human subject's psychological unity, identity, and integrity over time, as well as the ability to feel and make choices. The most important features of a person understood as a subject, in addition to consciousness and self-awareness, are also those of freedom and the autonomy of action. A person is an independent, creative being, partially limited by the influence of the environment external to him/her. A person has cognitive, reflective, axiological, and ethical competences (affordances) as well as the ability to use tools.<sup>21</sup> The latter determine that operations related to the activities performed by a person are effective. Axiological competences allow us to locate a person's actions in the system of values, while ethical competences allow us to define norms and evaluate our behavior, also in relation to our use of technical tools. When using new technologies, we rely on all these abilities (affordances). Technical and media competences must be broadened to include axiological sensitivity and ethical considerations. The above-mentioned

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<sup>19</sup> Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, ed. Anna T. Tymieniecka, trans. Andrzej Potocki, *Analecta Husserliana* 10 (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979), 125–126.

<sup>20</sup> Mariusz Wojewoda, "Karol Wojtyła's Conception of Personhood from the Perspective of Cognitive Sciences," *Philosophy and Canon Law* 7, no. 1 (2021): 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.31261/PaCL.2021.07.1.06>.

<sup>21</sup> Józef Bremer, *Osoba – fikcja czy rzeczywistość? Tożsamość i jedność ja w świetle badań neurologicznych* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM, 2007), 79–80.

abilities affect the way we think about ourselves, as well as the nature of our activity in the digital and media space.

The sociologist of social systems Niklas Luhmann analyzed the question of extending human cognitive activity with media tools. The subject of his research was traditional media. He believed that the media produced an illusion of reality in which we willingly participate. We observe and comment on the statements of those who follow. This creates a collective point of view, seemingly lacking the individual ideas of the broadcasters of media information.<sup>22</sup> Nowadays, new media allow us to individualize the message—using social communicators. However, to arouse the interest of the data recipients, the broadcasters have to buy into the tastes and expectations of those watching.

The intelligent or “smart” devices which we use are the next stage in the process of extending our human activities. They enhance our computational abilities, the ability to collect, process, and interpret data, and to determine the proper strategy of action. Thanks to applications such as chat GPT, we can, among other things, collect the necessary bibliography, create texts of various length, get help when writing a scholarly paper or devising a computer program. The creativity of the GPT bot is based on what has already been created and made available by humans. The amount of existing data is so abundant that on our own we cannot find the information we need; so, the bot not only helps us find the information we are looking for, but it also helps us select and obtain initial interpretations of the data. However, it is far from being an ideal tool; it is often wrong and, so far, cannot replace a person and human competences when it comes to the assessment of the reliability of the information it has helped us obtain. At this stage, we can use GPT 3,5 and GPT 4,0 chats.<sup>23</sup>

Designers are trying to create machines that achieve goals formulated by man. It is to be feared that machines, aware of their relative independence, will adopt different goals from those scripted for them by man. Then there are fears that AI, superior to us in intelligence, will gain an advantage over man and, as a consequence, will begin to treat man as an object. However, this scenario should be regarded in terms of failure, either that of the designer or of the machine itself.<sup>24</sup> An autonomous machine, that is, fully independent of the human person controlling their operations, is an undesirable byproduct of their opera-

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<sup>22</sup> Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media* (New York: Polity Press, 2000), 12–13.

<sup>23</sup> Krzysztof Rózanowski, “Sztuczna inteligencja: rozwój, szanse, i zagrożenia,” *Zeszyty Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Informatyki* 2 (2007): 109–135; Ewa Nosarzewska, “2030. Czy sztuczna inteligencja może być etyczna?” *Raport Pew Reserch Center* 2021, [https://ptsp.pl/sztuczna-inteligencja-etyka/?gclid=Cj0KCQjwla-hBhD7ARIsAM9tQKtMnxZL79I98nqbTBkyE5xsylScKRvzFUzySMq6-KHPDpfCaotQl8aAi0XEALw\\_wcB](https://ptsp.pl/sztuczna-inteligencja-etyka/?gclid=Cj0KCQjwla-hBhD7ARIsAM9tQKtMnxZL79I98nqbTBkyE5xsylScKRvzFUzySMq6-KHPDpfCaotQl8aAi0XEALw_wcB), accessed April 5, 2023.

<sup>24</sup> Andrew Freenberg, *Transforming Technology. Critical Theory Revisited* (Oxford–New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 82–84.

tion, thus an error of its maker. Alternatively, it can be seen as an unintended result of technoevolution.

However, if the creators of AI wanted to equip it with moral consciousness, they would have to recognize it as a person and endow it with the same rights as those of human persons. Then human rights would be the rights to protect the lives of “conscious intelligences.” This approach assumes that artificial intelligence will be simultaneously equipped with an artificial will, which, combined with intelligence, will be able to formulate and pursue goals separate from those of the creator and choose the means that will lead to the attainment of those goals. For conscious artificial intelligences, man or the affirmation of humanity may not be a superior value. It would not be an end in itself, as stated in Kant’s imperative and later adopted and developed by Karol Wojtyła. Currently, the goal is to create a technical “helper” which, due to its capabilities, is able to pursue and achieve human goals. AI can execute tasks assigned to it by the constructor and trainer more effectively than humans. For example, the purpose of chat GPT is to help a person find, collect, sift through, and interpret information. The purpose of a bot is not to replace humans in the cognitive realm of thinking and the moral realm of decision-making.

However, it is to be feared that some users, due to their “spiritual” indolence, will give up their right to look by themselves for the relevant argument or the proper decision and will transfer this right to AI. This would be dangerous, for arguments supplied by AI should be treated at best as a hint, not as a binding decision issuing from some cognitive authority, let alone a moral authority.<sup>25</sup> The utopia of a “brave” digital world can easily turn into a dystopia, one that generates new threats in the form of a dehumanized and fully automated model of the functioning of human institutions.

## Conclusion

Recently, the possibility of “expanding” the scope of human knowledge by digitally accessible information has created an opportunity for the emergence of online knowledge communities. There are more and more scientists who use new technologies in social sciences and humanities to collect, analyze, visualize, and share the knowledge acquired in various fields of research. As a recent example, the Social Sciences and Humanities Open Cloud (SSHOC), a European project, has been launched to put in place research infrastructures for social sciences

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<sup>25</sup> Tadeusz Miczka, “Człowiek techniczny, człowiek rozszerzony, człowiek 3D. Próba definicji,” *Filo-Sofija. Z problemów współczesnej filozofii* 39, no. 1 (2017): 37–47.

and humanities. The next stage will involve creating a model of educational and science services related to the European Open Science Cloud.<sup>26</sup> Tools for the protection, identification, and identifiability of cultural products are also being developed. Consortia such as CLARIN (Common Language and Technology Infrastructure) and DARIAH<sup>27</sup> are being created (Digital Research Infrastructure for the Arts and Humanities), the purpose being to provide access to online databases storing humanity’s shared cultural heritage.<sup>28</sup> In addition, many universities around the world are developing their own digital knowledge centers accessible online. This search for meaningful and effective use of new technologies concerns various areas of knowledge, including the human sciences.

An important role in creating a digital knowledge society is played by programmers and engineers who are in charge of changing the model of providing information about artifacts of modern technology to users, who have the right to general knowledge about the functioning of web applications.<sup>29</sup> The language used to make that knowledge available, however, tends to be illegible, which causes fear and excessive expectations in the public. It is also necessary to create rules for effective human-AI communication integrated into modern data-access tools. Lack of understanding of how machines work must cause common users to feel increasingly anxious and insecure. Ethical reflection points to the need to develop machines which can understand human values and are oriented towards cooperation and capable of understanding the human world and of “unobtrusive” and “non-invasive” participation in human history.<sup>30</sup> For the time being, implementation of this postulate remains an open issue.

The constant demand for more efficient human activities will be leading to corresponding improvements in the use of digital tools, the extent of which will thus also keep increasing. Human competences related to modern technologies and visual communication can be compared to a pass which allows us to function in the online public space and to participate in visual modes of communication. Progress in the development of these competences is motivated by the need to stay in the labor market and maintain a satisfactory standard of living. Yet, alongside those who have the skills that allow them to operate technically advanced digital devices, there are also those who have been lost behind or are excluded from participation in the digital world. This divide is mainly related to access to digitally available cultural goods or level of income. We must also

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<sup>26</sup> <https://sshopencloud.eu>.

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.clarin.eu>.

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.dariah.eu>.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Dazeley, Peter Vamlew, Mameron Foale, Carlotta Young, Sunil Aryal, and Francisco Cruz, “Levels of Explainable Artificial Intelligence for Human-aligned Conversational Explanation,” *Artificial Intelligence* 299 (2021): 1–29.

<sup>30</sup> Miguel du Sautoy, *The Creativity Cod. How AI Is Learning to Write, Paint and Think* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2019), 333–334.

consider differences in knowledge about objects in the world. In the democratic space of Internet communication, ethical and moral standards tend to be disregarded. Digital online society may be an essential area of interpersonal communication, but it is extremely diverse and impossible to penetrate. Besides, expectations regarding the possibility of creating an “improved” technological world may never materialize.

Alertness to threats ought not to blind us to positive applications of modern technologies. In the medical context, the use of AI-equipped robots can revolutionize the treatment of diseases resulting from the aging of our brains and enhance our chances of maintaining life-long physical and mental suppleness. Becoming used to technical artifacts and familiar with AI may take time, not only in individually, but also as a large-scale cultural and social process. Advancements in information technology are significant as well as relatively fast-paced. Domesticating animals has taken many thousands of years, while the “domestication” of AI must take place much faster, which generates fears due to the fact that the introduction of techne products into our lives or our bodies may make us violate the essence of humanity. We need to stay alert to the risk involved, but the task of the philosophy of technology is to develop a model of “reflective balance” for the appropriate use of AI. Taming techne products requires time as does the acquisition of new competences by designers and trainers of machines as well as their users.

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# Netography

<https://sshopencloud.eu>

<https://www.clarin.eu>

<https://www.dariah.eu>

Mariusz Wojewoda

## L'être humain techniquement et médiatiquement « étendu » – questions éthiques

### Résumé

L'homme moderne utilise toute une série d'outils techniques et médiatiques. Le terme *techne* désigne des choses, des compétences, mais indique aussi la relation de l'homme avec ces objets. L'impact de *techne* sur notre fonctionnement en tant que personne humaine est réciproque : nous adaptons les outils à nos besoins et, en même temps, nous nous transformons nous-mêmes en utilisant les technologies modernes. La conception de l'affordance créé par James J. Gibson et la conception de l'esprit étendu de Andy Clark permettent de caractériser de manière pertinente les liens entre l'esprit, les capacités cognitives, l'action humaine et l'environnement qui lui est extérieur. L'auteur de l'article se concentre sur les aspects techniques, médiatiques et communicatifs de cet environnement. La dernière partie de l'article analyse les conséquences éthiques de l'extension technique et médiatique de l'homme. Le point de référence des analyses éthiques est la conception de la personne humaine telle qu'elle est perçue par Karol Wojtyła.

Mots-clés : l'être humain augmenté, la personne humaine, les possibilités, les nouvelles technologies, les médias numériques

Mariusz Wojewoda

## L'uomo tecnicamente e medialmente “esteso” – problemi etici

### Sommario

L'uomo contemporaneo utilizza tutta una serie di strumenti tecnici e mediatici. Il termine “techne” significa cose, competenze, ma indica anche connessioni umane con questi oggetti. L'impatto della techne sul nostro funzionamento come esseri umani è duplice: adattiamo gli strumenti alle nostre esigenze e allo stesso tempo cambiamo noi stessi, utilizzando le tecnologie moderne. Il concetto di affordance creato da James J. Gibson e il concetto di mente estesa di Andy Clark consentono un'accurata caratterizzazione delle connessioni tra la mente, le capacità cognitive, le azioni dell'uomo e l'ambiente a lui esterno. L'autore dell'articolo si concentra sugli aspetti tecnici, mediatici e comunicativi di questo ambiente. La parte finale dell'articolo esamina le conseguenze etiche dell'estensione tecnologica e mediatica dell'uomo. Il punto di riferimento per le analisi etiche è il concetto di persona umana di Karol Wojtyła.

Parole chiave: uomo esteso, persona umana, affordance, nuove tecnologie, media digitali



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# Opportunities and Pitfalls for Young People in the Online Space

**Abstract:** The purpose of this paper is to point out the opportunities and pitfalls of the virtual environment for children and young people. We start with the analysis of a technocratic paradigm which emphasizes a utilitarian view of the world. Technology companies not only seek to improve the design and ergonomics of their products, they also influence their products to shape people's intentions and habits. Children and young people face the risk of digitalisation on everyday basis. Undoubtedly, technology has a positive impact on young people. In this paper, we list positives such as developing technical and creative skills, collaborating on projects, global connectivity and more. However, the Australian Psychological Society has proposed to recognize a Problematic Internet Use (PIU) as a legitimate diagnosis—Internet addiction disorder. In addition, digital world represents other risks such as cyberbullying, cyber acquaintances, sexual abuse and many more. We also provide advice to parents on how to protect their children from possible dangers of the virtual world.

**Keywords:** anthropocentrism, problematic Internet use, technocratic paradigm, young people

## Introduction

In today's digital era, it would be rather naive to expect for the "good old times" (times before the Internet) to return. It would also be questionable what benefits this would have. Instead of looking back to the past that is long gone, let us try to create our future in a digital world without catastrophic scenarios of robots, microchips and technology manipulating and taking over humanity. In recent "corona crisis" the only people able to live without technology are those who

are in no need of education, those who do not work from home or those who do not need to fill boredom with social media or do not need to contact their friends or relatives. We know very well that such individuals are in a minority. It is indisputable that digital technologies have become our much-welcomed companions and have helped us in many ways. However, the current situation has made us feel more vulnerable, threatened and aware of our dependence on technologies. Nevertheless, is there a way to survive in this Internet-controlled world without a mobile phone in your pocket and several different screens in every household?

## Anthropocentrism and Technocratic Paradigm

In his second encyclical *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis speaks of anthropocentrism. He understands it the way it is defined in the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection. For each one of the works of the “six days” it is said: “and God saw that it was good.” “By the very nature of creation, material being is endowed with its own stability, truth and excellence, its own order and laws.” Each of the various creatures, willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God’s infinite wisdom and goodness. Man must therefore respect the particular goodness of every creature, to avoid any disordered use of things which would be in contempt of the Creator and would bring disastrous consequences for human beings and their environment.<sup>1</sup>

According to Pope Francis, there was an anthropocentric deviation in the modern era, which we can compare to “Promethean vision of mastery over the world.”<sup>2</sup> This modern anthropocentrism ended up prizing technical thought over reality and, as a result, man does not perceive nature as a valid norm and haven for life. Nature then becomes only a space and a matter to accomplish one’s work regardless of the consequences and that results in disregarding the value of the world. Pope Francis states that if man considers himself an absolute master, then the foundations of their own life begin to crumble because “instead of carrying out his role as a co-operator with God in the work of creation, man sets

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<sup>1</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), n. 339, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_INDEX.HTM](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM).

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, “Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home [Encyclical].” (May 2015), 116, [https://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si\\_en.pdf](https://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si_en.pdf).

himself up in place of God and thus ends up provoking a rebellion on the part of nature.”<sup>3</sup>

This situation leads to “a constant schizophrenia, wherein a technocracy that sees no intrinsic value in lesser beings coexists with the other extreme, which sees no special value in human beings.”<sup>4</sup>

Technocratic paradigm emphasizes the utilitarian view of the world. It is evident that technologies such as mobile phones and social media are intentionally designed to form habits in their users and consumers. Ranging from size and colour to ergonomics and sounds, technology companies spend enormous resources on design. While such design is advertised to improve user experience, the underlying reality is the effort to increase the amount of time users are actively engaging with the product. The realization that various technologies are designed to shape one’s intentions and habits serves to reveal the importance of habit in human life. Moreover, this realization emphasizes the importance of creating habits that orient us towards human flourishing rather than towards some sort of technocratic utility.<sup>5</sup>

Pope Francis states that instead of creating partial solutions, we should change the way of life. He continues to say that current ecological, environmental and social crises require “a distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational program, a lifestyle and a spirituality which together generate resistance to the assault of the technocratic paradigm.”<sup>6</sup> Instead, an authentic human development requires “another type of progress, one which is healthier, more human, more social, more integral.”<sup>7</sup>

## Young People in a Surge of the Digital Era

Media are generally defined as the means of mass communication and include broadcasting, publishing, and the Internet. The scope of media continues to increase significantly, as digital technology becomes more accessible. Social media has become a common method of communication and online gaming provides another way to interact. The prevalence of rapid communication through

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<sup>3</sup> Laudato Si’, 117.

<sup>4</sup> Laudato Si’, 118.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Okey, “What Comes After the Failure of Technocracy?” *Church Life Journal* (September 2021), <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/what-comes-after-the-failure-of-technocracy/>.

<sup>6</sup> Laudato Si’, 111.

<sup>7</sup> Laudato Si’, 112.

easily portable devices has established a standard, creating an environment where the digital world is constantly accessible.<sup>8</sup> However, there are specific issues to consider for children and adolescents as they are still learning to navigate the online world at a younger age. While children and young people are the biggest users of the Internet and its many positive benefits, they are also at risk of being exposed to age-inappropriate content, cyberbullying or losing their privacy. We need to be aware of the impact of media and digital technologies in order to provide balanced and optimal advice and support.

## Positive Impact on Young People

Modern digital technology has a number of positive effects on children and young people. Many professions nowadays require the expert use of technology and children and young people who have such skills will benefit in many areas that positively affect their development.

Media and digital technologies in general have the following advantages: Social media sites provide opportunities for young people to connect with friends and family and develop technical and creative skills. These sites facilitate connection with a diverse and widespread group of people and provide a deeper understanding of global issues. There is also evidence that media can have a positive impact on children's social skills and that experience of using social media platforms is generally positive. Education can be enhanced in a number of ways through various media. For example, students can participate in self-directed learning, collaborate on group projects or exchange homework ideas. Engaging with digital materials allows children and young people to enhance and strengthen their learning about an inexhaustible range of topics. Access to technology provides young people with essential skills necessary for future roles in adulthood.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Paulína Bartošiková, "Kresťan vo Vire Digitálnej Doby [A Christian in a Surge of the Digital Era]," *Logos 4* (April 2020), <https://www.milost.sk/logos/clanok/krestan-vo-vire-digitalnej-doby>.

<sup>9</sup> The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, "The Impact of Media and Digital Technology on Children and Adolescents" (May 2018), <https://www.ranzcp.org/news-policy/policy-and-advocacy/position-statements/media-digital-technology-impact-on-children>.

## Problematic Internet Use (PIU)

Whilst there is no internationally agreed definition on what constitutes PIU, a sensible working definition is the following: “the pervasive long term and heavy use by a person of internet and computer-based technologies, including gaming, that is out of keeping with one’s educational, social or occupational role, wellbeing and health.”<sup>10</sup> Some authors and commentators consider that PIU—in its most severe form—could be considered an addictive condition (Internet addiction), showing features such as dependence, mood alteration, tolerance, withdrawal and harm to psychosocial functioning. PIU is becoming increasingly recognized as having a potentially significant impact on mental health to varying degrees and not all types will require specialist mental health intervention. If such problems exist with other mental health disorders, such as depression, anxiety, distress, and substance abuse, it is important that these are assessed and treated. As PIU is relatively new and not formally recognized as a mental disorder, research into treatment is still at an early stage.<sup>11</sup>

## Negative Impact on Young People

Some examples of negative impact of modern technology on children and young people include the following—unproductive leisure time, a lack of meaningful interests of the child, passivity, one-sided personality development, neglect of academic responsibilities, growing addiction, cyberbullying, poor social interaction, low empathy, exposure to inappropriate content and health risks including obesity, impaired vision or hearing, poor attention, and sleeping disorders caused by blue light.

Moreover, young people can experience the following in today’s virtual world:

- **Discrimination:** the Internet is an open space accessible for everyone to express what they like or do not like. Children and adolescents can experience intolerance, racism, xenophobia, extremism and hate speech—an abusive, hateful expression, discriminating a person or a group based on something like race, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation;
- **Gaming and gambling;**

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<sup>10</sup> Paul Tam, “Virtual Addiction: A 21st century affliction,” *Finance Matters* (Summer 2011): 6.

<sup>11</sup> The RANZCP, “The Impact of Media and Digital Technology on Children and Adolescents.”

- Internet fraud: internet scams, hacking, illegal streaming, copyright infringement;
- Inappropriate encounters, grooming and sexual abuse: Grooming is building a close friendship and emotional connection with a child in order to manipulate, exploit or abuse them. Also creating relationships with random people (chatting) has become very common among young people;
- Cyberbullying: a form of bullying through a computer, mobile phone or the Internet. It includes abusive and aggressive expressions such as comments on photos, sending hateful messages and insults, posting photoshopped or private pictures, spreading rumors on social media, and impersonating someone online to hurt them;
- Happy slapping: using a mobile phone to record a bullying incident that may include one or more kids slapping, hitting, kicking or punching the victim and then sharing it online;
- Inappropriate content: this includes nudity, violence and violent videos, verbal aggression and profanity, hate speech, promoting intolerant and extreme behavior, substance abuse and drugs, weapons, as well as various content that may induce fear, anxiety, depression, or feeling of threat. Further extremes such as anorexia, bulimia and self-harm are frequently displayed through websites, forums and blogs initiated by young individuals;
- Unwanted content: spam, hoaxes, computer viruses, adverts, etc.;
- Misuse of personal data.<sup>12</sup>

## How to Protect Children from Dangers of the Virtual World?

Responsibility for media literacy as well as appropriate and safe use of technology exists at several levels, that is, family, school, community, and government. All levels should work in order to minimize potential harms. Parents, carers, and those working with young people should be made aware of the benefits and potential problems associated with media use. They should be encouraged to acquire knowledge on these topics to be able to help young people set reasonable limits as far as media usage is concerned in a way that enhances their development and minimizes problematic use.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Dominika Briliaková, “Nástrahy Digitálneho, Online Sveta pre naše Deti [The Risks of Digital Online World for Our Children]” (April 2021), <https://www.zskomnam.sk/article/sk/nastrohy-digitalneho-online-sveta-pre-nase-deti>.

<sup>13</sup> The RANZCP, “The Impact of Media and Digital Technology on Children and Adolescents.”

Miro Drobný and Monika Gregussová in their *Deti v Sieti* [Children in a Web] publication offer the following advice for parents:

(1) Early Prevention

The authors recommend speaking openly with children about potential risks early enough, before they experience these risks themselves. Do not hesitate to start the discussion about drugs, self-harm, suicide, occult groups, violence and abuse through other people's life stories. Provide them with your views and opinions as to why some people behave in certain ways and most importantly, discuss what consequences such behavior may have in the future. It is much more effective when the child can identify these risks themselves rather than having them presented by their parents. The sooner parents initiate such conversations, the more likely the child is to pay attention and learn from it.

(2) Access restrictions/Parental control

Several types of blocking software are available to restrict or entirely prevent access to age-inappropriate sites, including those featuring pornography, drugs, violence, abusive content, or content that may be frightening for children. Many sites nowadays, like YouTube, offer this function already without needing to download any additional software. Similarly, many Internet and mobile providers offer this service as well. It controls the access to the specific site by comparing URLs with clearly defined categories set out in the database of these sites. Based on the results, it either allows or blocks the access. While there are certain advantages of access restriction, this is only a partial solution.

(3) Solid relationship foundation

The best protection against dangerous impact of the Internet is having strong and secure relationships in reality. A child with a supportive family background knows that they can rely on their parents in situations when they come across something they do not understand or makes them scared, when there is anything that bothers them, when they are in trouble or make mistakes. They are less likely to look for the solution in self-harm, drug use or violence towards the others. It is also much easier for the child to resist manipulation and pressure in the real world but also in the virtual one.

(4) Critical thinking

It is crucial to teach children how to think critically, meaning that not everything found on the Internet is true, not everyone has good intentions, and the online world contains both positive and negative aspects. They might stumble upon something harmful unintentionally or simply out of curiosity. Unfortu-

nately, there is no way parents can create a world that keeps their children from encountering such content. Therefore, children need to learn how to differentiate, create their own opinion and choose what is right.

(5) Showing interest in the life of the child

Pay attention to your child's day-to-day life. Initiate conversations about their positive experience and accomplishments. Consider their friendships—are they getting along with friends? Are they doing well at school? Do they engage in hobbies that bring them joy? On the other hand, is there anything that bothers them, triggers self-doubt or low confidence, or anything causing feelings of loneliness? Extra attention and support is needed in moments of significant life events, such as the loss of their best friend, heartbreak, or experience of their parents' divorce. Pay attention to the child's behavior, habits, feelings and expressions, especially when something changes unexpectedly. You may not notice the first signs of an eating disorder, self-harm or drug use, but it is much more challenging for the child to mask them later. One of the first warning signs may be the type of websites the child visits the most often.

(6) Seek support

If you have a suspicion that your child suffers from any of the above, be proactive and do not hesitate to seek support. The sooner these problems are addressed, the better the chance for a positive outcome and resolution. Otherwise, ignoring these signs could lead to serious and potentially fatal consequences.<sup>14</sup>

As technology is becoming more widely used in schools from an early age, there needs to be a commensurate program of media literacy and responsible media use in schools to cover issues of cyber safety. It is recommended that educational input begin as soon as children first encounter technology.<sup>15</sup>

## Conclusion

Technologies have always been and will continue to be developed with a specific purpose, an idea, and a goal. A saying “good servant but bad master” can be applied in relation to technology. We have to make sure they serve us and not

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<sup>14</sup> Miro Drobný and Monika Gregusová, “Deti v Sieti; Ako Chrániť Seba a naše Deti na Interneti [Children in a Web; How to Protect our Children and Ourselves on the Internet]” (2013), <https://www.zodpovedne.sk/index.php/sk/component/jdownloads/finish/1-knihy-a-prirucky/9-kniha-deti-v-sieti-2013-14?Itemid=0>.

<sup>15</sup> The RANZCP, “The Impact of Media and Digital Technology on Children and Adolescents.”

the other way around. Undoubtedly, there are many advantages of using modern technology, especially in these rushed times. In this paper, I have highlighted the dangers of the technocratic paradigm, which is trying to manipulate people, especially adolescents. Although I have provided advice to parents on how to supervise their children, it is challenging to maintain constant control. In the modern virtual world, ancient Catholic wisdom—God sees you even if no one sees you—appears more valid than ever before.

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Peter Vansač

## Avantages et risques pour les jeunes dans l'environnement virtuel

### Résumé

L'objectif principal de cet article est d'identifier les avantages et les risques de l'environnement virtuel pour les enfants et les jeunes. Le point de départ est une analyse du paradigme technocratique, qui met l'accent sur une vision utilitaire du monde. Dans leurs principes directeurs ou philosophies, les grandes entreprises technologiques s'attachent non seulement à améliorer la conception et l'ergonomie de leurs produits, mais aussi à faire en sorte que ces produits façonnent les intentions et les habitudes de quelqu'un. Les enfants et les jeunes sont confrontés au risque de la numérisation. Cependant, il ne fait aucun doute que la technologie influence les jeunes également de manière positive. Plusieurs avantages ont été mentionnés dans cet article, comme l'amélioration des compétences techniques des jeunes, leur créativité, leur travail de conception, etc. Néanmoins, la communauté psychologique australienne préconise la reconnaissance de l'utilisation problématique d'Internet (Problem Internet Use – PIU) comme un diagnostic justifié – la dépendance à Internet. En outre, le monde numérique présente d'autres risques tels que la cyberintimidation, la fraude, les abus sexuels et bien d'autres encore. C'est pourquoi nous concluons par quelques conseils aux parents sur la manière de protéger leurs enfants des dangers potentiels du monde virtuel.

Mots-clés: anthropocentrisme, utilisation problématique d'Internet, paradigme technocratique, les jeunes

Peter Vansač

## Opportunità e insidie per i giovani nello spazio online

### Sommario

Lo scopo principale di questo articolo è quello di evidenziare le opportunità e le insidie dell'ambiente virtuale per i bambini e i giovani. Il punto di partenza è l'analisi del paradigma tecnocratico il quale enfatizza una visione utilitaristica del mondo. Nei loro principi guida o filosofia, le grandi aziende tecnologiche si concentrano non solo sul miglioramento del design e dell'ergonomia dei loro prodotti, ma anche sul garantire che questi prodotti formino le intenzioni e le abitudini delle persone. I bambini e i giovani si trovano ad affrontare il rischio della digitalizzazione. Indubbiamente, però, le tecnologie influiscono positivamente anche sui giovani. Questo articolo menziona diversi vantaggi come il miglioramento delle competenze tecniche dei giovani, della loro creatività, del lavoro di progetti e così via. Tuttavia, la comunità psicologica australiana propone di riconoscere l'Uso Problematico di Internet (PIU) come diagnosi legittima, ovvero una dipendenza da Internet. Inoltre, il mondo digitale fornisce altre minacce come il cyberbullismo, la frode, l'abuso sessuale e molte altre. Pertanto, in conclusione, presentiamo anche alcuni consigli per i genitori su come proteggere i propri figli dai possibili pericoli del mondo virtuale.

Parole chiave: antropocentrismo, uso problematico di Internet, paradigma tecnocratico, giovani



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# On What Is Personally Appealing on Conceptual Relativism\*

**Abstract:** Conceptual relativism is not an attractive position. Surely, it has its ups and downs, but the ups are rarely mentioned. This article has no ambition to provide a resolute groundbreaking argument in favour of the conceptual realism. It only aims to reconstruct the very basis of the given position from the defendant's point of view, while giving a bit of a personal (or existential if you will) touch to the whole topic. The personal element in question resides in the fact that there are incommensurable percepts, experiences, even worlds which all "feel" equally real to the subjects. This is something to what realism does not seem to be able to do justice without diminishing the ontological status of the "wrong" opinions, beliefs, etc., but this does not seem to go well with how we experience our "imperfect" realities. Conceptual relativists, however, are free from strictly distinguishing between correct and incorrect views on reality and, thus, they are able, if nothing else, to retain and appreciate the reality of our subjective worlds.

**Keywords:** realism, conceptual relativism, the gap, epistemological status, ontological status, personal appeal

## Introduction

There are many kinds of relativism. In fact, there are too many of them to make some sort of a non-trivial overall definition of what they have in common and what would clearly distinguish them from theories of other sorts.

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There is cultural relativism, moral relativism, epistemic relativism, truth relativism, etc. to name just a few. Yet another problem is that relativistic theories, in spite of the recent revival of interest in them, do not enjoy much popularity, therefore, they are usually described in a critical manner, pointing out their shortcomings rather than their appeals. One of the reasons for this disregard of relativism is perhaps that many of the claims they issue appear to be counterintuitive.<sup>1</sup>

Still, some versions of relativism are less controversial than others. For example, moral relativism<sup>2</sup> in its basic form is quite easily understandable and quite attractive too. Seeing how many people argue about moral values does make the claim that these values are relative to epochs, cultures, or even individuals quite believable.<sup>3</sup>

Other sorts of relativism often lack this kind of *prima facie* plausibility. One of them is the so called conceptual relativism pioneered by authors like Quine, Goodman, Putnam, or Kuhn.<sup>4</sup> One of the most common definitions of conceptual relativism is the following: “two incommensurable conceptual schemes may be equally adequate in their roles as cognitive tools.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, there can be more than one correct way to describe something, without these explanations being commensurable. This basically means that there may be an item contained in one scheme which has no counterpart in another scheme nor is it explicable by combining items it contains and *vice versa*. The idea is not just about epistemological issues, like for example impossibility of translating certain words from one language to another one. It is also and perhaps foremost an ontological claim, about our very ontological concepts, even the most basic ones. Should this really be the case, it would practically mean that each person, quite literally inhabits a world of their own. Even more, if driven to the extreme

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<sup>1</sup> Kamil Kardis, Maria Kardis, Gabriel Paľa, Tadeusz Bąk, and Michal Valčo, “La culture du corps dans l’espace médiatique de la société postmoderne” [The Culture of the Body in the Media Space of Postmodern Society]. *XLinguae: European Scientific Language Journal* 14, no. 4 (2021): 312–323.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Seipel, “Moral Relativism,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Relativism*, ed. Martin Kusch (New York: Routledge, 2020), 165–173.

<sup>3</sup> Michal Valčo, “Crisis of Western Liberal Societies through the Lens of a Metanarrative Critical Analysis,” in *Crossing Boundaries: Challenges and Opportunities of Intercultural Dialogue*, ed. Peter Jonkers and Youde Fu (Washington D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2022), 149–167.

<sup>4</sup> Willard Van Orman Quine, *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Columbia University Press, 1969); Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Harvard: Hackett Publishing Company, 1978); Hilary Putman, “Truth and Convention On Davidson’s Refutation of Conceptual Relativism,” *Dialectica* 41 (1987): 69–77; Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Berkeley: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

<sup>5</sup> Kenneth A. Taylor, “Conceptual Relativism,” in *A Companion to Relativism*, ed. Steven D. Hales (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011), 159.

it can be said that a single person drifts between various worlds depending on what conceptual scheme they employ at the moment.

As a result it would mean that there is no objective world to be shared. On conceptual relativism our conceptual schemes do not depend on how the world is, rather, what exists is relative to the schemes we impose on it. And since our individual schemes differ, so do our worlds. To be sure, conceptual relativists do not claim that it is slightly different interpretation of facts, or having gone through different experiences that causes our worlds to differ, and therefore, metaphorically speaking, we live in different worlds. There is nothing metaphorical about their claim, for the facts which we encounter are themselves already literally imposed on the world by our very own minds. Therefore, according to conceptual relativists we inhabit different worlds in the most literal sense.

And since there are numerous correct descriptions which are incommensurable, it seems that there ought to be a separate world for each such description. To be more exact, these various, equally correct descriptions do not describe the world correctly in the sense that they are describing it from different perspectives. They are literally constructing worlds of their own. Although conceptual relativists may concede that there must be something out there, it does not mean that there is some sort of formless lump from which we build our private worlds. There simply is nothing like concept-unrelated reality. Not only is there no all-encompassing objective world (unless we abandon the basic rules of logic), there is no concept-neutral common basis for all those distinct worlds we construct either. Crudely explained, the world we normally call the objective world is simply made by us throwing our private concepts at each other.

Especially if put this way, it is really difficult to find something least appealing in this line of thinking. But before we can try to discover something a bit more attractive about conceptual relativism, we should say something about its natural opponent, which is realism. Just as relativism, realism also has various branches; conceptual realism, epistemological realism and many others, each of them having their own nuances and problems. However, the general idea of realism is well known and therefore it needs no elaborate introduction. Even less since we are about to put it into contrast with already discussed conceptual relativism, therefore more of its features will come up eventually.

Contrary to conceptual relativists, realists like Blackburn<sup>6</sup> or Davidson<sup>7</sup> do believe that there is objective, shared world to be explored. How much of its structure and how accurately we might be able to disclose is a matter of dispute, but the main point is that there indeed is such a structure. A realist needs not to believe, and hardly anybody does, that we might be able to unravel all the

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<sup>6</sup> Simon Blackburn, *Essays in Quasi-Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>7</sup> Donald Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 47 (1974): 5–20.

mysteries of the world some time in the future. More common and sober version of realism allows for cognitive mishaps in a Popperian<sup>8</sup> manner, so to say, be it in our scientific research or in our everyday discovering of the world around us. Realism is typically a rather optimistically laden theory, meaning that those mishaps, or at least most of them can be amended by means of trial and error over time. However, not every realist is automatically bound to share this kind of optimism. One can very well, without abandoning realism altogether, lament about how much the science has gone astray or how much of ancient knowledge has been irreversibly lost.

## “The Gap”

Conceptual relativism, as we know it today, stems from Kant’s<sup>9</sup> distinction between receptivity and spontaneity, from which directly follows the distinction between phenomenal and noumenal world; the world as it is and the world how we take it. Although the idea itself is much older, it was arguably Kant who was arguably the first to coin the distinctions in question. The basic idea is that the deliverances coming to us via receptivity are already somehow structured by doings of our mind’s spontaneity. Now the obvious problem is that we have no means to verify whether and how much these conceptual structures (or categories in Kantian terminology) correspond with the outside world. We cannot step out of the grid by which spontaneity organizes our experiences and mediates the world to us. Even if we could, hypothetically, it is most likely that such a world would be completely unintelligible to us.

Therefore, there seems to be a “gap” between how the world actually is and how we take it to be. The whole quarrel between conceptual relativists and realists basically boils down to disagreement about this gap; that is, more precisely, about whether there actually is such a gap or not. According to the realists, there, indeed, is such a gap, for on their account there is an independent objective world which is represented in our minds more or less correctly. How huge the given gap is, is a matter internal to realism, addressing of which largely depends on just how robust the version of realism does one endorse. The overall idea, however, remains more or less the same: by means of trial and error we can test our concepts in order to find out which fits the objective world and which do

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<sup>8</sup> Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>9</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Maria Baghramian, “Why Conceptual Schemes?,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 98 (1998): 287–306.

not. For not even realists believe that the world comes to us ready-made directly revealing its inner structure through our receptivity without fail. What they do believe is that at least a bit of this structure can be deciphered and correctly conceptualized from what our senses deliver to us.

As for conceptual relativists, there basically is no such gap on their account. This is because, as mentioned earlier, we literally construe our own worlds; they are created by our act of thinking about them, as it were. The boundaries between receptivity and spontaneity are erased on conceptual relativism, and so is the division between noumenon and phenomenon. There is nothing more to know about the world than what we perceive, only that what we, whether knowingly or not, add to it. It is not an imperative that we are aware of constructing our worlds. Quite the contrary. From a phenomenological point of view, it really feels as if we are exploring an objective world. And not simply because we are used to it or that we construe our worlds in a way that makes us feel like that. Arguably, it is mostly because most of our cognitive capacities and processes underlying our conscious lives are not introspectively accessible to us.<sup>10</sup> Acknowledging this does not automatically mean admitting that there is something objective, conceptually unrelated, a medium that makes our consciousness possible. It just means that our minds are not completely self-transparent. This makes sense if we consider that the mind, which is the creator of the world it inhabits, cannot completely perceive itself, just like an eye cannot look upon itself to put it figuratively.

## The Quarrel

Why are our worlds (or worldviews, if you will) so similar, yet so different? The observation of similarity in peoples' understanding of the world and the amount of agreement we are able to achieve is water to realists' mill, while recognizing the diversity and antagonism in sometimes even the most basic matters seems to underpin the relativists' opinions. The fact that there is some deal of unity in views on morality, beauty, pleasantness, and perhaps, most notably, science is usually taken to be a point in favor of realism. However, it sort of depends on how much unity and/or disparity there is. This seems to be a matter of personal opinion, for there is hardly any reliable scale to measure the amount of each. Therefore, the argument works both ways, which is why it is difficult to take it for a serious argument in favor or against either of the

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<sup>10</sup> Richard E. Nisbett and Timothy Wilson, "Telling More than We Can Know: Verbal Reports on Mental Processes," in *Psychological Review* 84 (1977): 231–259.

views in question; especially if we take into consideration the paradoxes of the inductive method and other issues that science (which is supposed to be a flagship of realism) faces. Nevertheless, the presence of unity of all sorts in the world is usually brought up by the realists; perhaps not as a conclusive argument, but at least as an indication of the validity of their view. They accuse the conceptual relativists of “sliding too easily from epistemological truth to metaphysical falsehood”<sup>11</sup>; what, broadly interpreted, is just a reiteration of the argument that conceptual relativists make an unwarranted claim about inexistence of the objective world about based on unattainability of total knowledge about it.

It may be true that such a conclusion is hasty and a slothful one. But in this respect at least, the realists are guilty of a similar fallacy. While relativists, without a proper epistemological basis, are making a strong metaphysical claim, realists are making a strong metaphysical claim in order to raise their epistemological hopes. Giving up on the objective world due to its unreachability seems equally legitimate (or illegitimate) as insisting on its existence, again without sufficient epistemological evidence, in order to retain and justify one’s epistemological convictions.

Another basic, but no less important problem regarding the contention between realism and conceptual relativism is the problem of truth. This issue is directly related to the one just discussed, or, as a matter of fact, an integral part of it. Here, however, the tables are turned regarding the difficulty of dealing with the problem. For realists, the truth is more or less just a question of corresponding with the objective world. Of course, there are difficulties about how to ensure and verify this correspondence, but the idea is pretty simple.

It is a much more difficult task for conceptual relativists to explain how certain conceptual schemes can be truer, or better, or more correct (for “truth” seems to be to a little too strong a term for more extreme versions of relativism) than others, and perhaps even more challenging to explain how can one be incorrect in one’s description of the world if one is creating it. The most simple and straightforward answer is that on conceptual relativism a claim, belief, opinion, etc. is true or correct in relation to a conceptual framework from the point of which we are considering it. Each such framework has its own criteria of correctness. The problem is that the correctness of criteria employed by certain framework can only be checked by another, broader conceptual framework and so on, leading to infinite regress. But this is not much of an issue for conceptual relativists, since unlike realists, they are not looking for some stable constant basis of knowledge, and so the infinite regress of constant verifying and adjusting of the criteria of correctness is perhaps not the most pleasant, but certainly an expected outcome.

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<sup>11</sup> Taylor, “Conceptual Relativism,” 168.

Still, this does not explain how can one be mistaken about something within one's own world prior to accepting new criteria for correctness, and why should one accept another criteria in the first place. Arguably the simplest, most straightforward answer, though by no means an exhaustive one, is that not just interpersonally, but also a single person inhabits several incompatible worlds at once. Thus the "error" in understanding one's world can be simply explained as a case of collision of such incommensurable worlds; and this applies even more to the collision of the worlds of different persons. To put it plainly, on conceptual relativism, the truth is a matter of relativity; the falsity is an issue of correspondence. The understanding between people deploying different, or at least similar conceptual schemes is then simply achieved by virtue of "epistemic solidarity." That is, by making concessions and adjustments, if only tentatively and temporarily, in order to somehow understand each other. It is not an ideal reserved just for a realist to reach a sort of unity and agreement not just between one's views but also with the views of others. The difference is just in that conceptual relativists believe it is obtainable on different basis and motivated by different motives.

## The Appeal of Conceptual Relativism

There are of course more sophisticated ways to counter the conceptual relativism. Although the view itself is not the most captivating one, and some of its implications are clearly counterintuitive, it still manages to make justice to some of our intuitions which realism cannot. Certainly not as smoothly as relativism can.

Realists (and not just them) distinguish between the so called *primary existents* and *secondary existents*.<sup>12</sup> The primary existents are ordinary things like furniture, edifices, trees, etc. Secondary existents, on the other hand, are entities like rules of chess, nations, or countries. The obvious difference between the two is that primary existents are simply "out there" while secondary existents exist only by means of us inventing, establishing, and thinking about them. This distinction is not so straightforward, however. For what counts as primary existent, relative to one conceptual scheme may count as secondary existent in another. For example, consider looking at a house. As such it is a primary existent. You can then count in other houses nearby and "invent" and/or apply a concept comprising them all which would be a street. The street is now a secondary existent consisting of primary existents, that is, the houses. However, if you shift your attention (or, in other words, change your conceptual scheme)

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<sup>12</sup> Taylor, "Conceptual Relativism," 167.

to, for example, the bricks the house is made of, then the bricks are primary existents on which the concept of the house is applied on, and thus the house is a secondary existent in this regard.

The observant reader may have already noticed that this line of thinking is surprisingly similar to the way conceptual realists think about concepts and conceptual schemes. Taylor<sup>13</sup> is aware of this similarity and warns us not to be swayed by it, so let us consider some of their differences then. Of numerous dissimilarities to be found here, I want to point out two which are most relevant to this discussion. The first is that realists distinguish two types of secondary existents, as it were. Ones that are meant to capture things existing out there; to conceptualize them, make sense of them, and to place them into the order of the world, and others by means of which we usher new entities into existence. We do not deploy the concept of a house on a bunch of bricks in order for there being a house. We do it because we found out that the bunch possesses a certain structure. On the other hand, we did not create the concept of chess to describe it; we invented it so there would be such a thing as chess. For relativists all existents are more or less of the latter sort. The second difference is that realists allow only for “up and down” conceptual relativity. Relatively to conceptual scheme a house can be either a bunch of bricks, or a primary (or less secondary) existent which, together with other houses are part of the secondary existent—a street, a town, a district, etc. They do not allow, however, for conceptual relativity on the same level; or, in other words, the *faultless disagreement*.<sup>14</sup> Meaning that there cannot be two or more incommensurable descriptions, opinions, perceptions, etc. of one thing without any of them being mistaken (the opposite claim is basically the definition of relativism mentioned earlier). Taken at face value, this position truly looks commonsensical, especially with regard to science. However, there appear to be cases in which we disagree about something, yet there is no telling which of the competing opinions is the right one and which is wrong. What is more, sometimes it seems that there is no need to make such a decision.

Perhaps the most noticeable and very often mentioned cases like these are the cases of the judgments of taste.<sup>15</sup> Taste is always subjective. Whenever we ask someone about their taste concerning certain things, be it music, food, or literature, we are asking about how they subjectively feel about the stuff. Surely, they may then offer us a list of “objective” reasons for their likes and dislikes.

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<sup>13</sup> Taylor, “Conceptual Relativism,” 159–178.

<sup>14</sup> Dan Zeman, “Faultless Disagreement” in *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Relativism*, ed. Martin Kusch (New York: Routledge, 2020), 485–495.

<sup>15</sup> Timothy Sundell, “Disagreements about Taste,” *Philosophical Studies* 155, no. 2 (2011): 267–288; Peter Lasersohn, “Context Dependence, Disagreement, and Predicates of Personal Taste,” *Linguistics Philosophy* 28 (2005): 643–686; Max Kölbel, “Faultless Disagreement,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 104 (2004): 53–73.

But even if we acknowledge those reasons, they may or may not compel us to share their tastes. If they do not, we can then simply conclude that their taste is different from ours, or that it is awful, but we probably would not say that it is wrong. Certainly, we often use phrases like: “you don’t know what good music is,” but such statements seem to express our disregard for someone’s taste (which is also subjective) rather than being statements about actual wrongness of it.

On top of that, taste varies not just interpersonally but it also changes over time. Similarly, as we do not think about tastes of others as wrong, an individual whose taste changes may think about their former taste as terrible, or immature but certainly not wrong. There also are, a little more controversial cases concerning taste when a person likes and dislikes the same thing at the same time. Here, the incommensurability is not that between views of different persons but it takes place within one and the same individual. It can be argued that a person in such situation simply likes something about an object but dislikes something else. And surely it is often so. But what about cases when one cannot exactly put one’s finger on what one likes and dislikes about something? It can be that there actually are features of a given thing one likes and others that one dislikes, but one is only unable to discern them. Or perhaps not. This issue is basically just a special case of the original problem that polarizes realists and conceptual relativists. The realists would probably want to go with the indiscernibility option, while the conceptual relativists would most likely claim that in this situation a person likes an object from within one conceptual framework while disliking it from another.

What I am trying to say is that there are respects in which conceptual realism can appear more intuitively attractive than realism. This is no solid argument against realism of course. Nor is it meant to be. It is just that pointing out the counterintuitive features of conceptual realism is often the first weapon of choice used against it. But at least in the case of taste, it may have the upper hand concerning intuitive acceptability. For is it not more plausible to admit the *faultless disagreement* is possible, in areas like that of taste, morality<sup>16</sup> or political views (for starters), than make complex roundabout explanations and toying with epistemological and, what is more, ontological statuses of allegedly wrong views?

Distinguishing between ontological and epistemological issues is a tricky business when talking about concepts. For concepts as such come into being by our epistemic acts. Whether and how these acts are provoked, regulated, or otherwise influenced by something external is at the core of the dispute between

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<sup>16</sup> Brian Hedden, “Does MITE Make Right? On Decision Making under Normative Uncertainty,” in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics (11)*, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 102–128.

realists and relativists. What I want to focus on, however, is not the (possible) metaphysics “behind” the concepts, but the ontology of the concepts themselves.

Let us return to the topic of secondary existents. The very term “secondary” reveals that there might be something different, something inferior as compared to primary (or less secondary) existents. This impression is probably not what realists are trying to invoke by employing it. Nevertheless, it seems that the more secondary the existent is, that is, the more primary (or less secondary) are underlying it, the less epistemologically reliable it is. For concepts are fallible, and the more of them are included in the secondary existent based on them, the higher the possibility that some of them will be defective, thus making it more vulnerable to error. What makes them wrong is that they do not correspond accurately to the primary existents underlying them, and ultimately, to the “raw reality.”

Even more peculiar is the status of the secondary existents which do not describe but create entities. Just like the “wrong” concepts, they do not correspond to anything but themselves, the only difference being that it does not make them incorrect. Obviously, this is because they are not meant to be “correct” in the sense of accurately capturing something, but the commonality is interesting, nevertheless. And it is not just regarding “entity creating” concepts where the correspondence is not the main issue. For example, there are pieces of art relying on creating an illusion, and it is the illusion not the “objective” stuff inducing it that matters. So it looks as if sometimes not representing the world “correctly” can become the goal of an epistemic act.

The lack or absence of correspondence changes the epistemological status of concepts. They can be either correct or wrong. They either describe the outside world correctly or they do not. This does not concern just the world describing concepts, but also the existence conferring concepts. We can be wrong about the rules, and all the possible moves in chess. We can fail to be deluded and may miss the point of an artwork. Even the most subjective concepts, set by ourselves and only for ourselves can be erroneous if we fail to recognize all the ramifications of the rules of correctness we set for them.

Whatever the case, the ontological status of basically any kind of concept we consider does not seem to be affected by its presumed epistemological status. Concepts are always equally real. Whether realist or relativist, we all live in the world of the concepts, with only difference being that the realists believe that the deliverances we receive, though not conceptualized yet, possess a structure of sorts irrespectively of our mind’s status conferring powers, and that this also delimits the pool of concepts we are able to deploy. Nevertheless, on the purely conceptual level, all the concepts appear equally real. It matters not if they are supposed to describe something beyond themselves or not; and if they are, in this respect, it is irrelevant whether they do so accurately, partially accurately, or completely inaccurately. We experience them as equally real, and equally real they

are indeed, even when we recognize them as incorrect. I may be jumping the gun here a bit, drawing from epistemological to ontological claims; but as long as we are talking about concepts themselves, and not about what they may or may not represent, perhaps this need not to be seen as a foul move altogether.

There can be no *faultless disagreement* according to realists. They can admit mutual and equally real existence of incommensurable concepts on the condition that their epistemological status is different, meaning that one of them is correct and the other is not. While this might be the most natural and commonsensical response from the realist, the matter is not that simple. The reason is pretty plain. If concepts really come into being by our epistemic acts, then the ontological quality of the concepts produced by them should be also altered along with the epistemological status of the acts producing them. This would mean that realists need to concede that incorrect, “more secondary,” “entities creating [...] concepts possess different ontological status. If they would, I conjecture that they would say that the less corresponding (to the objective world), or the less certain the concept is, the less real it is.

In fact, Merlo and Pravato,<sup>17</sup> in their commendable attempt to reconcile realism with conceptual relativism are suggesting something similar. On their account the points of view of different subjects are not all metaphysically “on a par;” that is, one’s own mental states are metaphysically superior to the mental states of others, even if only subjectively so. Adopting an approach like this would surely rid us of many problems, but it does not quite address (at least not directly) the main problem which we are dealing with here. The claim that our mental states, experiences, and concepts are subjectively superior to us in metaphysical respect truly hits the spot. But being subjective does not mean that there are no parts of the objective world realists seek to preserve. Incorrespondence does not imply incoexistence. How can then realists account for coexistence of subjective incommensurable concepts, if not by denying it or adjudging different ontological status to each of them?

However, both options seem intuitively implausible, and metaphysically iffy, to put it mildly. The solution by treating opposing views as ontologically unequal may be passable for realists, although it is quite controversial. Nevertheless, whichever path they choose to take, it will be intuitively, and by extension personally far less appealing than the one conceptual relativism has to offer. Relativists have no need to disturb either epistemological or ontological statuses of incommensurable concepts, as for them they pertain to different worlds. This conclusion might not be the most plausible from the metaphysical point of view, but it has its ring to it when it comes to describing the subjective experiencing of the world.

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<sup>17</sup> Giovanni Merlo and Giulia Pravato, “Relativism, Realism, and Subjective Facts,” *Synthese* 198 (2021): 8149–8165.

Even if what I said about the ontology of the concepts is not entirely correct, the personal appeal of relativism remains. The realist alternative is not completely secure either, though it also has its ways to attract sympathy (apparently more than relativism does). The reason why I call the appeal of relativism personal is that its attractivity depends on from what end one picks up the topic. If one starts by focusing on the most basic, objective, or most intersubjectively common concepts, the realism is clearly the more alluring one. If, however, one chooses to start thinking about the reality from the subjective point of view, starting with the unshareable, incommensurable concepts, moving towards slightly more intersubjectively conveyable ones, then it is relativism which answers our epistemological and ontological expectations more accurately. It is not the “objective” facts that make the world our own. The reality we inhabit is personalised precisely by subjective, super-subjective, often incommensurable concepts which distinguishes it from the worlds of others, and to which relativism seem to capture more neatly than realism. Here lies the personal appeal of conceptual relativism.

Is it not counterintuitive, and even cruel to deny our subjective worlds the same ontological status as those allegedly (more) correct ones are supposed to possess? On a bit more favourable reading, the main motive behind the conceptual relativism is not to destroy the objective world, but to acknowledge and properly appreciate the reality of the worlds we inhabit. It seems that for relativists the world of the brain in vat is as real as the one in the skull. Put this way, the idea is not so repulsive. However, this is not just about the worlds of madmen, it is also, and primarily, about the worlds we, “sane” people, occupy, have occupied, and will occupy. Of course, if there is such a thing as objective world the correspondence does matter. But even if relativists were to lay down all of their weapons they would still be the rightful protectors of the subjective worlds.

## Conclusion

The relativists may be unable to answer certain questions. But at least they are not avoiding them. Sliding into relativism needs not to mean giving up on questions; rather, if meant honestly, it means truly acknowledging them. To simply solve the disparities in our world, the problem of truth and fallacy by conferring a lesser ontological status upon “wrong” views, precepts, or even emotions may seem tempting from default, as it were, realist point of view but, if nothing else, it does not do justice to our experiences of those allegedly “false” worlds.

In other words, if one lives for some time in a certain world, believing it to be the correct one, but later, for whatever reason, one reconsiders one's world view thus leaves to another (in relativist terminology), should this make one's knocking around the former one less real? I believe not. Conceptual relativism may raise more questions than it answers, but at least in this point it may have an upper hand, which is quite paradoxical, since it is relativism which is usually taken to be more intuitively appealing. And perhaps, in overall, it is, but maybe not in this respect.

I am well aware that my paper does not cover the whole debate between conceptual relativists and realists. What I tried to show is that there is also this personal aspect to it, which is worth considering and which should not be left out in spite of there being perhaps more substantial dilemmas to be dealt with. This is something one should keep in mind, if only marginally, when addressing "the big questions."

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Daniel Dancák

## Sur ce qui est personnellement attrayant dans le relativisme conceptuel

### Résumé

Le relativisme conceptuel n'est pas une position attrayante. Il a certainement des hauts et des bas, mais les hauts sont rarement mentionnés. Cet article n'a pas l'ambition de fournir un argument décisif et révolutionnaire en faveur du réalisme conceptuel. Son but est simplement de reconstruire les fondements d'une position donnée du point de vue de l'accusé, tout en donnant à l'ensemble du sujet une touche quelque peu personnelle (ou existentielle, si vous préférez). L'élément personnel en question est qu'il existe des perceptions, des expériences et même des mondes incommensurables qui se « sentent » tous également réels pour les sujets. C'est un aspect auquel le réalisme ne semble pas pouvoir rendre justice sans diminuer le statut ontologique des opinions, croyances, etc. « erronées », mais cela ne semble pas correspondre à la façon dont nous vivons notre réalité « imparfaite ». Les relativistes conceptuels, en revanche, ne font pas de distinction stricte entre les vues correctes et incorrectes de la réalité, et sont donc capables, ne serait-ce que préserver et d'apprécier la réalité de nos mondes subjectifs.

Mots-clés: réalisme, relativisme conceptuel, fossé, statut épistémologique, statut ontologique, appel personnel

Daniel Dancák

## Su ciò che è personalmente attraente del relativismo concettuale

### Sommario

Il relativismo concettuale non è una posizione attraente. Ha certamente i suoi alti e bassi, ma gli alti sono raramente menzionati. Questo articolo non ha l'ambizione di fornire un argomento decisivo e innovativo a favore del realismo concettuale. Il suo scopo è semplicemente quello di ricostruire i fondamenti di una determinata posizione dal punto di vista dell'accusato, dando all'intero argomento un tocco un po' personale (o esistenziale, se preferite). L'elemento personale in questione è che ci sono percezioni, esperienze e persino mondi incommensurabili che tutti "sentono" ugualmente reali per soggetti. Questo è un aspetto a cui il realismo non sembra in grado di rendere giustizia senza sminuire lo status ontologico di opinioni, credenze, ecc. "sbagliate", ma questo non sembra essere compatibile con il mondo in cui sperimentiamo la nostra realtà "imperfetta". I relativisti concettuali, invece, sono liberi da una rigida distinzione tra visioni corrette e scorrette della realtà e sono quindi in grado, se non altro, di preservare e apprezzare la realtà dei nostri mondi soggettivi.

Parole chiave: realismo, realismo concettuale, divario, statuto epistemologico, statuto ontologico, appello personale



Part Two

# Reviews





Dariusz Karłowicz (ed.),  
*Thinking with St. John Paul II:*  
*JP2 Lectures 2020/2021*  
Rome–Warsaw: Angelicum University Press–  
Fundacja Świętego Mikołaja, 2021, 226 pp.

*Thinking with St. John Paul II* compiles a series of monthly lectures given at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas-Angelicum in Rome by outstanding intellectuals from Europe and the United States. Sponsored by the St. John Paul II Institute of Culture, the lectures provide analysis and reflection on a wide range of topics in the light of St. John Paul II’s intellectual and spiritual legacy. Dariusz Karłowicz introduces the notion of “thinking with St. John Paul II.” He explains that the work of John Paul II is not and should be considered “closed” but rather as a “calling.” We have received a rich heritage from the great Polish Pope/saint—shall we bury this talent in the ground or increase its value? Karłowicz, president of the St. Nicolas Foundation, asks us to consider how we can continue his work and not waste this heritage. More research by scholars is needed, of course, to better understand his achievements. But this work cannot be left “only to historians,” he urges, once we realize that Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II was above all a “witness to Christ, as a thinker, artist, spiritual guide, an expert on and critic of modernity, an advisor and still-living source of ever relevant inspiration” (xi–xii). Thus, the purpose of these lectures, as the Institute (founded in 2020) to “reflect upon the most important problems of the contemporary Church and the world—a place where we will not only think about St. John Paul II but also *with* him.”

Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi provided the inaugural lecture on the topic of “Why Christianity Needs Culture.” To answer this question, he provides

a sweeping account of the various meanings and dimensions of culture, the importance of culture in the work and documents of Vatican II (mentioned no less than ninety-one times), some key references to culture in John Paul II, and the historic development of the encounter of the gospel and culture. Amid such complexity of the questions about culture, Cardinal Ravasi identifies the two main reasons that the Church needs culture, the first being the task to achieve “inculturation” throughout the diverse times and places of the human world. He references the “apostles to the Slavs,” Cyril and Methodius, and of course John Paul II’s brilliant but little read encyclical by the same name, *Slavorum Apostoli* [1985]. Christianity is incarnational and therefore cultural in reception and expression. Second, the Church must practice “interculturality” in our global and ecumenic age through encounter, dialogue, and “cultural spiritual exchange.” Cardinal Ravasi here refers us to John Paul II’s speech at the United Nations (5 October 1995)—the Pope emphasized commonality in so far as “every culture is an effort to ponder the mystery of the world and of the human person: it is a way of giving expression to the transcendent dimension of human life. The heart of every culture is its approach to the greatest of all mysteries: the mystery of God” (2). In this light, the diversity of cultures and religions offers the challenge of mutual respect and affirmation of freedom of conscience and expression but also the promise of mutual enrichment. After answering the question of culture, he then discusses the challenges of our contemporary scene and the changes in the very paradigm of culture. He mentions the erosion of cultural and spiritual identities through the “fragility and liquidity” of cultural expression and the emphasis upon youthful concerns and the primacy of emotion. Contemporary culture proposes “linear accumulation as opposed to a deepening.” The culture is characterized by frustration and distrust of future, consumerism, and narcissism. There is an overall priority given to the instrumental over meaning/ends. Nevertheless, he urges not mere denunciation, nor retreat into “sacred oases of nostalgia and an idealized past” (10). But we must seek such opportunities as found in solidarity, volunteerism, authenticity, universalism, yearning for freedom, victory over disease, and progress of science. Finally, Cardinal Ravasi offers some thoughts about two critical cultural issues of our time, science and communication. The study of DNA and neurology make possible interventions in human phenotype and offer the prospect of a trans- and posthumanism. So the very dynamisms of human nature and unique products of human beings such as cognition, culture, and art are now open to a radical change or possible reduction. As for the infosphere, the Cardinal sees the need to build upon the work of Marshall McLuhan and highlight the critical issues of various claims to authority, truth, and regulation through the Internet and social media. Cardinal Ravasi concludes his sweeping and energetic lecture on culture with a sanguine note through a quotation from Apple founder, Steven Jobs: “Technology is not enough. It’s technology married with the lib-

eral arts, married with the humanities, that yields the results that make our heart sing” (18).

Three of the lectures stand out as excellent examples of combining an exposition of the texts of John Paul II with ethical, political, and theological issues of our time. Philosopher John Finnis, in “John Paul II and the Foundation of Ethics,” examines *Redemptor hominis*, *Laborem exercens*, and *Veritatis splendor* as well as *Person and Act*. He shows how John Paul II uses both faith and reason to make evident fundamental principles of ethical life. In doing so, John Paul II draws upon St. Paul, Augustine, and Aquinas. The encyclicals mentioned develop and deepen the key insights and arguments of *Person and Act*. The method, derived from Aristotle, looking first to the human act and its object, and then discovering capacities, habits and ultimately the supposit or person as the author, is served well by the Schelerian attention to the world of value. Finnis is interested in the relationship between “choices, acts, ways of life, and ‘selves,’ that is persons as self-determining and self-shaping by choice” (23–24). This central theme of *Person and Act* is brought to light through the phenomenon of work in *Laborem exercens*. By using his methodology of Aristotle and a Husserl inspired attention to subjective reception and constitution of meaning John Paul II articulates the two aspects of work, the importance of which sides with the immanent or fulfillment of as a human being as good or bad. Finnis’s masterful scholarship is careful, extensive, and illuminating about the human person and work. He then similarly provides analysis of *Redemptor hominis* and *Veritatis splendor* to deepen this theme of self-actualization through moral choice formed by conscience and moral truthfulness. Finnis shows us how to patiently work through the text, indeed the thought of John Paul II, to discover the dignity and the transcendent destiny of the human person and to better understand why moral choice and its normative formation makes all the difference in the world.

Theologian John Cavadini, in “Pope John Paul II, the Second Vatican Council, and the Crisis of Modernity,” does a masterful job in unfolding the teaching found in *Gaudium et spes* and other texts about the goodness and temptations of the modern aspirations for freedom, community, and mastery of nature. The crisis of modernity, according to *Gaudium et spes*, is the great contradiction between the promise of mastery, freedom and temporal achievement, and the persistent experience of evil and death in the human world, in each person and society. It is a crisis of truth and conscience. It is a crisis that leads to Christ as the Redeemer of Man. This teaching is brought to a near perfect pitch in John Paul II’s encyclical *Gospel of Life*. It is through the redeeming action of the cross through sacramental life that a culture of life and can overcome the culture of death. Cavadini rightly looks to EV §25 as the core theological truth: “Precisely by contemplating the precious blood of Christ, the sign of his self-giving love (cf. Jn 13:1), the believer learns to recognize and appreciate the almost divine

dignity of every human being” (106). He then turns to the passages in *Veritatis splendor* to connect the unconditioned respect for the dignity of each person reflected in the existence of universally binding character of negative moral norms and the sacrifice of the martyr for truth and right (89–90). The admiration for the heroic witness surmounts cultural barriers. Cavadini thus concludes that “John Paul II appears as a faithful and brilliantly creative interpreter of the dialogical imperative of Vatican II (114). As a third case we consider the lecture by theologian François Daguét OP, “Political Theology from St. Thomas Aquinas to John Paul II and Benedict XVI,” in which he argues that John Paul II and Benedict XVI have brought to completion a centuries long task to clarify the meaning of “political theology” and to clarify the nature, basis, and manner of the cooperation between the Church and the political society (including its state apparatus). The wrongful use of this term by German philosopher and apologist for National Socialism Carl Schmidt as “the justification of a given political order by theological means” (116) has warped the endeavor to develop a theology of politics. Rightly understood it is simply the theological account of communal life in its complexity and natural goodness. Fr. Daguét argues that Augustine lacked the philosophical instruments to tackle such a project, however fruitful his spiritual analysis of the two cities. Aquinas, drawing upon Aristotle’s empirical-historical political science identified two fundamental principles of political life: the political order is finalized by a moral good, itself controlled by a divine good; and the Church and the city, on different levels, are empowered to cooperate (121–123). The Church is a “leavening agent within societies which are temporal in nature” (122). Aquinas anticipates the “laic” account of the temporal society by affirming a relative autonomy within its sphere (which does not include salvation of souls, hence a reason by which the Church may rightfully intervene through the indirect power championed by Bellarmine). The French Revolution “crippled Catholic doctrine, both that of the Pontifical Magisterium and that of theologians” (126). The Church then became aware that it “had no useful conceptual instrument” to deal with the new political situation (126). Against this radical secularity Catholics could only postulate the “immediate submission” of the political community to the supernatural order (127). It was Pope Leo XIII who began the task of rethinking the idea of political community, now an “irreversible change.” His rejuvenation of Thomism at last provided the “useful instrument to deal with politics in the new context of contemporary liberal societies” (127). While acknowledging the important work of Jacques Maritain, Fr. Daguét argues that at Vatican II the Church began to lay the foundation for an authentic notion of “laicity” and expounded the proper role for the laity to participate in the affairs of the temporal society. But Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI brought this teaching to an explicit articulation of its full meaning. It is perhaps best summarized by the statement that “Man cannot be sundered from God, nor politics from morality” [Pope John Paul II in *Motu*

Proprio proclaiming Saint Thomas More, Patron of Statesmen and Politicians, October 31, 2000. 1: AAS 93 (2001), 76. See Cardinal Ratzinger, “Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life” November 21, 2002]. Now fully aware of the “res publica” and the role of the Church in fostering morality and the life of grace in the population, theologians must become better aware of this authentic political theology and work to develop it more fully and apply it more precisely.

Another group of lectures makes clear the importance of the Polish Pope, considering Ratzinger’s claim that Karol Wojtyła was providential because of Poland’s special place in the center Europe’s cultural geography as well as its historical commitments to tolerance and civic freedom. Dariusz Gawin, in “The Phenomenon of Solidarity: 1980–1981,” provides an important interpretation of the solidarity movement in terms of the recovery of civic responsibility. By their mutual recognition of each other as Polish citizens the members of Solidarity recovered a sense of “res publica.” Gawin argues that Solidarity was initially not a political pressure group, not even a religious phenomenon at its high point, but rather a newly discovered political association based upon “equal respect binding everyone without exception.” Gdańsk shipyard became a mini-polis and its activities and attitudes stood in stark contrast with the empty claims of socialist society and its mere lip service to human rights. It included Catholics and non-Catholics, believers and those of no faith. Catholic religion inspired the moral consciences of many and the sacramental life deepened the courage and resolve of those who availed themselves of its benefits. Marek A. Cichocki, in “European Identity: North and South, East and West—The Main Dividing Lines,” provides a tremendously insightful analysis of the spiritual geography of Europe noting both its east/west axis as well as its north/south axis. He explains how the east/west tension, although primarily political, was implicitly cultural and even religious. But the emphasis upon the cold war divisions obscured and even hid the more historical and vital north-south axis drawing in Rome and Mediterranean culture to the northern cultures, extending through the very origin and foundation of medieval Europe. This neglect of the south-west axis has allowed the ideology of the French Revolution to define Europe and its political tasks in terms of an exclusive, uniform, and oppressive secularity. Cichocki offers a brilliant interpretation of John Paul II’s initial words to the multitude at St. Peter’s Square: “He was called from a distant country, but always so close because of communion in the Catholic faith and tradition” (74). The author then explains how the north/south connections established commonality and closeness whereas the east/west divide established distance. He claims that the French dominance of European identity has radicalized its hostile stance to Christian culture” and “strengthened its quest for transgression and justifying it” (93). In “Formal Europe and Vital Europe. Tradition as the Ground of Identity” Renato Cristin covers a similar theme but identifying the vital dimension of

European identity in terms of particularity and national culture. This dichotomy between “formal, legal and institutional Europe” and a vital Europe “reflecting tradition and common history.” He says that Europe has replaced “the sense of being European with the pragmatics of administration” (183). Institutional supranationalism will come to cancel national sovereignties. John Paul II spoke with some regularity about the future of Europe and the importance of national culture as the true source of sovereignty, not economic and political interest (UNESCO, 1980).

The last group of lectures speak about the crisis of our time and possibilities for renewal as inspired by John Paul II. Chantal Delsol, in “The End of Christendom,” reminds us of the devastations wrought by the French Revolution and the destruction of Christian not only as a political force, but at all levels of social and cultural life. Archbishop Rowan Williams, in “Faith in the Modern Areopagus,” considers how we may derive a lesson from St. Paul in our approach to evangelization. He takes up the work of Rene Girard and proposes the notion that a non-violent approach to social relations, namely a refusal to scape goat those who appear different may help lead to Jesus Christ.

Rémi Brague, in “The Place and Relevance of Art in the Modern World,” puts forward a very helpful historical thesis that whereas the Greek world pursued beauty without art (emphasizing instead the beauty of the soul), and the late modern times pursues art without beauty (emphasizing instead that which is “interesting” to the subject), it is Christianity that seeks to join art and the beautiful. Because Jesus makes visible the invisible God, representation of a person, in both icon and historical narrative, is justified. Modern art has followed the Islamic style of the arabesque, praised alike by Gogol, Poe, and Baudelaire. The most important feature of modern art is its capacity to elicit a reaction of the viewer, listener, reader: “Art is yoked to subjectivity” (166). So, the art must be shocking in some way, and the artist’s personality becomes more decisive than the work itself. In the end, Brague argues, “art can’t possibly be a window opening on transcendence,” because it is without purpose and has no relation to what is good (170). His constructive proposal is quite startling—he suggests that artists find a measure of humility and use their art as an instrument of revelation. But most startling is his recommendation to put aside Dostoevsky’s “hackneyed expression” that beauty will save the world and let us rather rediscover the true and the good as the primary transcendental properties of being. Here he takes a position counter to Solzhenitsyn (Nobel Speech) and claims that beauty alone will disappear, unless put at the disposal of the true and the good. But for this theoretical and practical task we need philosophers and saints rather than artists. And Brague exclaims: “We have been blessed to witness these two categories combined in extraordinary ways in one person, Pope John Paul II” (175). This is a fitting end to an article that sums up the whole collection and the whole project. This is an extraordinarily significant book; it is a hopeful

sign that the new St. John Paul II Institute will continue to develop the rich legacy of the Polish Pope in Rome, a city in which some of late have forgotten the memory and neglected the work of the Polish saint and philosopher, Pope John Paul II.

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Marian Machinek MSF:  
*Nowy tęczy świat. Próba diagnozy*  
[The New Rainbow World:  
An Assessment Attempt]  
Pelplin: Wydawnictwo Bernardinum,  
2021, 243 pp.

The monograph, authored by Rev. Professor Marian Machinek MSF, deals with an extremely topical issue of contemporary discourse. In politics, public life, the education system, the media and culture, ideas based on the so-called gender theory are more and more asserted in today's Western society, which substantially influence the social role of men and women. Relatively recently, in 2011, when the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, known as UN Women, was established, everyone knew who it represented: the approximately half of the human race born with the capacity for motherhood, with two X chromosomes, with specific physical, hormonal, and relational characteristics that distinguish them from the other half of the human race, men. Unfortunately, this consensus is being disrupted by the seemingly recent in the Polish context phenomenon of gender identity and ideology. The topicality of the issue is confirmed, among other things, by the debate surrounding the ratification of the Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence). The preamble of the Convention refers to violence against women as a manifestation of male domination and identifies this domination as gender-based structural violence, by which women are kept subordinate. The Convention goes on to talk about harmful gender stereotypes that need to be eradicated from social life, and all levels of the education system should be used to this end.

The author announces in the introduction that the aim of the monograph is not only to analyze the legal measures, cultural projects, postulates and claims of the LGBT community, but also to analyze the ideological basis of this social phenomenon and to compare it with the Christian vision of the person, body, gender, and marriage. The author explicitly states that the book under review is not directed against people who fail to define themselves as heterosexual. Anyone who treats members of sexual minorities with contempt, aggression, and hatred, anyone who treats other people in society, especially the weaker ones, verbally or actively, cannot appeal to the Gospel and the teachings of the Catholic Church. Such behavior has nothing to do with the Gospel and the Church. At the same time, he stresses that a clear view of reality, together with a moral evaluation of human behavior and of social and cultural tendencies, has a Gospel basis and is contained in the social teaching of the Church.

The publication aims to be an ambitious and systematic contribution to the field of moral theology, philosophical ethics, and the social sciences. It includes a representative bibliography. It seeks to diagnose the most pressing social, ideological, and religious issues embodied in the postulates of the new rainbow world. At the same time, the author characterizes the basic ideological currents underlying the LGBT community today and seeks to outline the genesis, development, and possible perspectives for solving a problem that is often viewed only from an ideological perspective. The reading of Machinek's monograph brings important conclusions not only for believers. It presents a clear point of reference that leads to insights into the problems of people searching for themselves in a space that is often in opposition to the space of the gospel message.

The book consists of three parts. The first part analyses the question of whether LGBT is indeed an ideology. The author proves that it is, distinguishing ideology from persons defining themselves as non-heterosexual. He focuses on the philosophical underpinnings of some ideological pressures that can be collectively termed gendered. For Eastern Europeans, suffering under one form of Marxism, it was, and perhaps still is, difficult to grasp that a different form of Marxism was developing in the West, one that infected society far more than many are willing to admit. The author has pointed out the problem of defining ideology and, referring to the philosophical tradition, states that it is the forcible assertion of the opinion of a narrow group in a violent and manipulative manner. The author pointed out the problem of the definition of ideology and, referring to the philosophical tradition, states that it is the forcible assertion of the opinion of a narrow group in a violent and manipulative manner. Ideology usually rejects debate and uses the media of mass communication as well as state organs, whereas political tactics and social engineering play a key role. He emphasizes that ideas have consequences and that which is taught in universities today will influence the whole of society tomorrow.

The main thesis of LGBT is based on the concept of gender as a social and cultural construct without biological determinants. The author proposes to use the term LGBT worldview, which has emerged from the historical processes and philosophical ideas of previous centuries. He sees the LGBT movement as a logical outgrowth of the French Revolution (1789), the Russian Revolution (1917), and the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. The common denominator of these revolutions was the acquisition of power and the enforcement of changes in the political, social and cultural order. Among the philosophical principles, Marxism, the libertine conception of sexuality, the feminist conception of gender as the equalization of male and female roles, and the postmodern deconstruction of existing social and cultural structures played a key role. The primary aims of destruction were the traditional views of sex, marriage, family, social relations, and moral order developed by Christianity. In this way, the old concepts are considered bad and old-fashioned, and any new concepts created by the new language are considered progressive, liberal, and good. The author points out the diversity of approaches in gender theories, which leads to conflicts with one another. For example, classical feminism considers gender as a masculine or feminine social role, but the LGBT community considers it as a cultural construct of sexual self-identification.

The second part of the monograph is devoted to the methods and tactics of persons and organizations connected with LGBT ideology. The tactics are characterized by the author as a “march through institutions,” which in the field of education includes designing new gender-neutral programs, starting sex education earlier, and removing university professors on the grounds of political correctness. In the legislative sphere, it is primarily a matter of modifying the human rights system and public policies. In the area of scientific research, the concept of “human nature” is to be distorted, body correction is to be offered instead of treatment in medicine, the traditional male-female binary is to be eliminated in culture and the mass media, and NGOs are to promote the LGBT agenda. In order to achieve the main goal of LGBT, specific steps are set out: to speak loudly about sexual minorities, to always present them as victims, to justify their actions, to always show non-heterosexuals as good, to label any criticism as hate speech, to impose the use of new terms on the opposition, to present acceptance of the LGBT agenda as the only correct stance, to publicize coming out, and to be supported by well-known people in the media.

Finally, in the third part of the book under review, the author addresses the issue from a Catholic perspective that rejects a materialistic dualism in which self-awareness is more important than the biological properties of the body. The development of thinking about gender is moving further and further away from Catholic doctrine, and this is not surprising. Such a development of thought is to be expected if one rejects theistic transcendent claims, even claims to the very norms of rational argumentation; moreover, if one moves away from the norms

of Catholic morality in practical life. The Catholic position emphasizes coherence with empirical data and the respectful dignity due to every human being. The difference between the sexes is not a source of confrontation but of mutuality and complementarity. When reflecting on social phenomena in particular, it is important to bear in mind the words of Benedict XVI, who described the Catholic faith as a memory of humanity, especially in the face of a civilization that has forgotten who man is.

The Church serves as the immune system of society. In the light of the Holy Spirit, it warns against dangerous doctrines and clarifies doctrine that is based on the Word of God. In a democracy, it is important to promote appropriate social activities which, by democratic means and in a perfectly legal manner, defend the dignity of the human person and of marriage as the permanent union of a man and a woman. However, the main line of the Church remains the proclamation of the Gospel of life, love, and family. Saint John Paul II left a valuable legacy to the Church in his teaching, which can be described as a contemporary formulation of the Church's anthropological teaching. This line includes the Church's action in the area of the education of children and young people and the promotion of marriage and the family. In addition to prevention, the Church has a number of excellent projects through which it responds to people's difficulties. These include social work, counselling and activities for families, women and those in need or victims of domestic violence. Family Centres and individual charities offer a wide range of help which is not only expert but also effective.

Rev. Professor Marian Machinek MSF, author of the monograph *The New Rainbow World: An Assessment Attempt*, makes an attempt at diagnosis, armed with a love for truth, credibly testifies to an intellectual journey towards a free and critical form of thought. He convincingly demonstrates the existing influence of gender ideology on the contemporary world, noting that ideas have consequences and that new ideas are not always better than old ones. The content of the monograph itself spectrally navigates the reader and provides an informed perspective on an extremely topical issue in contemporary discourse, inspiring them to think about living a meaningful, free, and responsible life in the world.

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Alexandru Buzalic, *Anthropos—Omul*  
*Paradigmele unui model antropologic integral*  
[Anthropos—Man. Paradigms of an Integral  
Anthropological Model]  
Târgu-Lăpuș: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2022, 228 pp.

The author of the reviewed book discusses the most serious question of philosophy with regard to the current changes in the anthropological paradigm. Buzalic claims that we are on the verge of an irreversible change in the relationship between man and nature, and confirms this with the meaning we give to cyberspace, robotization, human hybridization, global connectivity, but also genetic manipulation and eugenics. The Rev. Professor Buzalic's study moves in a space defined by theology, philosophy, and religious studies, though it remains interdisciplinary in character.

Buzalic proposes a solution to the identified problems with the help of integral anthropology as a complex methodological approach that offers a link between positive research and metaphysics (through the "Ontological Sacred" defined by Mircea Eliade). At the same time, it reflects the phenomenon of religion by defining a person as *homo religiosus*, as a material-spiritual entity whose spiritual life is materialized through culture. Religiosity and spirituality, as the psychological sphere of an individual in which the experience of the sacred is manifested, are the most important cultural-genetic factors.

Pope John Paul II proposed to theologians and philosophers the term "integral anthropology," as a conception of man who takes into account all dimensions of one's own being as a person in its individual, social, physical, cultural, and spiritual meaning. This turn to metaphysics through integral anthropology is made possible by the philosophy of religion and the study of religions proposed by Mircea Eliade and Cardinal Marian Jaworski. Both thinkers put forward an

integral vision of man and, in this way, also an integral vision of research in the field of social sciences and the humanities. Integral anthropology brings philosophy and theology into the scientific dialogue.

Man is perceived as a unified whole, which is based on their structure (material body—biological and soul—psyche and spirit in the world) and passes through their free and conscious action in the world. Pope Francis further develops the concept of integral anthropology in the context of integral ecology, since everything is intimately connected to everything and contemporary problems require a view that takes into account all aspects of the global crisis, leading to an extension of reflection to all human and social dimensions. Theological research offers a hermeneutic, as if “from within,” religious phenomenon: in the continuity of the intergenerational transmission of Revelation and the exegetical tradition, in the organic development of religion/church and its efforts to actualize the metahistorical message in a cultural language updated according to the particular time in which one receives the message of salvation. At the same time, the presence of the issues of religion and theology in the universal openness of integral anthropology becomes a common platform that can enable the dialogue of philosophy and theology with the positive sciences, all of which are part of the heritage of knowledge as *scientia*.

The author of the reviewed book, among other things, finds inspiration for his reflection in the work of the French paleoanthropologist Pascal Picq, a professor at the Collège de France, who introduced the concept of coevolution into the analysis of human society. Coevolution as an ecosystemic vision goes beyond a simple evolutionary interpretation and takes into account all the determining interactions that shape the physical relationship between man and nature, the psychological relationship that shapes interpersonal family or group relationships, and the symbolic relationship that gives meaning to everything and reveals the sacred in a metaphysical dimension. In the amount of all the aspects that shape the ontogenesis of the individual and are constitutive of the human being, we can create a complete picture of the human phenomenon. According to Picq, in the original evolutionary interpretation, man develops through a double mutual relationship: with the natural environment and with the technical-cultural environment.

Buzalic’s research interest further concentrates on transhumanism as an intellectual and cultural movement that precedes artificial interventions to improve the capabilities of tomorrow’s individuals. He distinguishes between primary transhumanism, which arises as a result of man’s coexistence with nature and coevolution, and secondary transhumanism, which arises in the man–culture relationship. Finally, in the last chapter, the author discusses the phenomenological aspects that situate man in the cosmos, from the perception of their special status among other beings in the universe to free and responsible human action and the dignity of an existential condition marked by historicity, finitude, and death.

The problem raised in the book under review is highly topical. We see that the contemporary world, in the permanent dynamics of change taking place in the shadow of the desacralization of culture and the secularization of society, has slipped into the pursuit of totalitarian pragmatism, economic and financial efficiency at the expense of knowledge, basic research, knowledge defined as *Scientia*, almost forgetting what “the love of Christ” means. The famous “know thyself,” present in the thinking of humanity since Plato, passing through patristic thought to the present day, nourished, however, by the “love of Christ” and by faith as “encounter,” today benefits from a multitude of sciences that present us with medical, psychological, sociological, behavioral, cultural or spiritual aspects. Each field, however, remains isolated, confined to its own field of competence and developed in an academic circle of experts. In the abundance of data available today, the existential question (Who am I?) takes on a new urgency.

The author, Father Professor Alexandru Buzalic, seeks to propose anthropological foundations that can be applied within a contemporary fundamental theology that is intended to be an objective reflection on revelation and faith. Christian anthropology, as part of integral anthropology, can become a common language in which the positive sciences can find themselves with fundamental theology, which is a discipline of dialogue and a frontier through which we encounter historical religions more than confrontation in abstract notions of faith and reason: Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, with forms of manifestations of modern atheism, with forms of religious indifferentism in a secularized world in which technology and economic values have primacy, with the very demands of believers today, which contain the germs of new doubts and difficulties and pose new questions for theology and catechesis.

Integral anthropology, more than a new humanism, integrates the vision of the positive disciplines into a meta-interpretation that can become the basis for a specific vision of fundamental theology, integrating into a philosophical-theological hermeneutics the current insights of the positive sciences on topics of common concern.

Going back to basics and finding a common platform for dialogue between positive sciences and philosophy and theology, underpinned by the same “love of Christ,” is essential for the world of tomorrow in promoting a humanist culture. And it should not be forgotten that cultural humanism is based on “Christian love, which finds its foundation and form in faith,” as Pope Benedict XVI also reminds us. In his encyclical *Deus caritas est*, he states that “the whole Christian ethos derives its meaning from faith as an ‘encounter’ with the love of Christ, which offers a new horizon and gives life a decisive direction.” Buzalic stresses that we are called to understand the changes that humanity is undergoing. The Church is faced with a renewed mission to ensure the presence of God’s Word in a culture characterized by digital technologies, while it is

essential to protect all that secures our humanity and the human face of tomorrow's civilization. It is necessary to safeguard both interpersonal interaction and man's relationship with God. A conception of the human that is consistent with the nature of the human phenomenon, which guarantees the preservation of the limits of bioengineering interventions in the spirit of transhumanism, serves the human being and does not aim at the establishment of anti-humanist ideological goals.

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