

Ivan ORTEGA-RODRIGUEZ

ivan.ortega79@gmail.com

Universidad Pontificia Comillas Madrid



Technical Civilisation, Boredom and Responsibility in Jan Patočka

In several of his writings, Jan Patočka focused on boredom as one of the traits of contemporary technological civilisation, in an analysis which influenced, for example, the first President of post-communist Czechoslovakia: Václav Havel. According to Patočka, the reasons lie in the overemphasis on “life for life’s sake” and the uniformity and monotony it imprints on our lives, with the “empire of everydayness”. This hides the possibility of getting to a higher level of human existence by virtue of a “jump” or “upswing” (vzmach). Using Patočka’s terms, all this means the prevalence of the first and second movements of human existence. This eclipse means boredom, as it also goes against another deep-seated human need: that of the extraordinary, of “escaping” —albeit for a while— from the burden of everyday life. This escape had been put under the surveillance of responsibility since history began. Now responsibility is obscured, everydayness dominates, but the need for the ecstatic continues. Thus, from time to time society is shaken by “orgiastic” eruptions that seek to forget boredom; and this explains as well the trend of modern civilisation to establish certain moments of “celebration”. However, once the possibility of responsibility appears in humankind, we can no longer be content with just this scheme of everydayness and momentary orgiastic moments. The lack of meaning is only too much present. The only issue is to recover responsibility and bring about a change in civilisation. However, this requires a radical conversion, a metanoesis, whose possibility is open to question.