

The word “idleness” derives from the Latin *otium*, which refers to the enjoyment of leisure time, rest and tranquility, carrying with it the sense of light, pleasant and desired occupation. However, since idleness houses the idea of rest and appreciated break - ultimately a time to let the thoughts wander out of a contemplative mood - it was easy to take it as synonymous with laziness in societies that attribute to work a divine character.

This understanding of idleness as a harmful activity is utterly opposed to what was recognized in its original Greek perception, as within the scope of the life recreation, contemplation, and apprehension of human integrity. The socio-historical trajectory of contemporary societies has reaffirmed the work as the source of all virtues and, consequently, the workday increased considerably, which caused psychosomatic decompensations of several orders in most people, as demonstrated by critics of the mystification of work and its unnecessary excess ⁽¹⁾.

In this scenario, at the present time, the concept of idleness has been a source of controversy. In Brazil, after the work of an Italian sociologist⁽²⁾ became popularized, new possibilities were summoned to the word, fostering discussions and further studies on the term. Such discussions have pointed out some interesting aspects. For example, it was considered the perspective that the hitherto “father of all vices” carries a value in itself, a subjective autonomy grounded in free choice and autotelism, beyond the usual leisure (which only reaches the meaning of escapist compensation to the dissatisfactions of work, representing a framework for the recovery of the labor force).

These new developments have given rise to varied interests and now guide new elaborations regarding idleness in a strongly consumerist, hasty, and accelerated contemporaneity⁽³⁾.

From Aristotle’s thought until today, philosophers, theorists and scholars, in an attempt to clarify the nature of idleness, have defined a concept that embodies the interrelationship between components such as satisfaction, fulfillment, happiness, joy, enjoyment, and well-being. Thus, idleness relates to a free and necessary experience, that comprises intimate relation with the development of the subject. The understanding of idleness from that point of view relates to the experience of pleasurable and satisfactory experiences, therefore⁽⁴⁾.

The word “idleness” is synonymous with desired and appreciated experience, the result of a free choice⁽⁵⁾. In this context, the attention given to the meaning attributed by those who live the experience must be emphasized. For idleness is linked to each individual’s way of being, thus setting an expression of itself⁽⁵⁾.

It is interesting to add that, from the perspective taken here, the idle experience is not dependent on the variables *activity* or *time*, nor on the economic or educational level of the one who experiences it; it is related to the meaning attributed by those who summons it in view of the very experience.

The seizures of idleness also articulate with issues such as education. The strictly utilitarian conception of the current educational system is categorically criticized, being said that it ignores the individuals’ real needs and that the cultural components of the knowledge construction are engaged in training individuals with

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the mere purpose of professional qualification - forgetting, this way, the thoughts and desires of the students, leading them to fulfil much of their existence with too broad, impersonal themes, without apparent meaning, mostly directed at immediate external interests, which gives rise to disapproval of various orders in people⁽⁶⁾.

One should pay attention to the fact that idleness should not be identified with leisure time, since it does not define the human experience itself. The identification that was formed between idleness and leisure time is the product of the broadly disseminated studies on the sociology of work. Such fact has hindered the understanding of idleness, as the sociology of work does not contemplate the psychological perception.

From this perspective, one cannot say a priori that in time released from obligations reside idle experiences. The term “free time” becomes important in this regard because of the word free, which suggests a voluntary human exercise of identity, desire, recognition and self-recognition. From these psychological approaches, idleness has been defined as “freedom *to* and *for*”⁽⁷⁾.

Idleness, as human experience, is related to values and deep subjective meanings; and only so idleness may have meaning as a significant positive experience, source of human development, well-being, and prevention of negative idleness. For the understanding of what is a transformative experience, it is understood that it is beyond the scope of ordinary daily life, given the component that involves the subjective break in determining the attitude for the conscious experience - desired choice and allowed meeting. Such details promote a different meaning to this kind of experience: these are the so-called true experiences, the ones that touch and transform the individuals⁽⁸⁾.

The common experience, on the other hand, is the one that relates to any action of everyday life, and in it are embedded routines, where everything happens and “nothing concerns us”, since there is no sense in these trivialized activities.

In a similar approach, it was presented the flow⁽⁹⁾ (or, in seizures in Portuguese, *great experience*). From that on, the flow experience is marked by a feeling of fullness and perceived integration between the subject, the action, and the environment. Immersed into a kind of mental flow characterized by pleasure and welled-up sensitivity, the subject experiences a vital, comforting flow. When a person goes through one of these situations, one of the central aims of the self will be to go on experiencing it or seeking other similar experiences, converting them into a meaningful and significant influence that implies health and quality of life⁽⁹⁾.

In the same direction, studies developed in the Multidisciplinary Institute for Studies on Idleness at the University of Deusto, in Bilbao (Spain), guide the possibility of idleness as a health promotion strategy, given the positive impact on the population, having in mind the low cost of investments for that. From these studies, it is observed that the improvement of health is one of the consequences associated with the experience of idleness. It points out that the positive impacts on health have been the main justification for projects that take such experiences as health-promoting factors. As an example, investments are made in sports, which brings benefits of various kinds, such as physiological impacts (bones strengthening, for instance) and psychological impacts (development of empathy and cognitive abilities, educational impacts, transmission of values, and so on). Without a doubt, these benefits have repercussions in areas such as work, family and relationships⁽¹⁰⁾.

From this perspective, the subject who calls idle experiences as a value and a systematic practice promotes the development of their autonomy, leading to increased self-esteem and may also obtain satisfaction and relaxation. Directly, this produces an impact on that individual's social relations, and such benefits the author names “intermediaries”. From those, the “final” benefits are reached: general health, feeling of well-being and quality of life⁽¹¹⁾.

Increasingly, in health, idleness has been recognized for its strength, in both the preventive and the therapeutic factor. In therapy with depressed people, for example, the recommendation to support the strengthening of ties, from experiences in social temporality games, development of interest in hobbies, strolls, etc.

However, we are still living in times when the working hours extend to other spheres of the existence, colonizing the proper temporalities for the enjoyment of true experiences, free and full of subjective meaning. It is known, however, that within such experiences lies the power of the very apprehension, thus being necessary to grow its value.

Discovering idleness as a value to be conquered by its potential is thus vital for health - but, of course, this is not its only end, because, as Aristotle taught, the end of idleness lies in itself. Idleness is autotelic but from it come benefits to an existence in well-being and vital satisfaction.

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