

Unit 7 Cyberspace and Human Relations

Text A

Preparatory Work

(1)

Academic interests: Roger Scruton is an English philosopher who specializes in aesthetics. He has also written several novels and a number of general textbooks on philosophy and culture, and he has composed two operas.

Main publications: He has written over thirty books, including *Art and Imagination* (1974), *The Meaning of Conservatism* (1980), *Sexual Desire* (1986), *The Philosopher on Dover Beach* (1990), *The Aesthetics of Music* (1997), *Beauty* (2009), *How to Think Seriously About the Planet: The Case for an Environmental Conservatism* (2012), *Our Church* (2012), and *How to Be a Conservative* (2014).

(2)

Virtual reality: Virtual reality or virtual realities (VR), also known as immersive multimedia or computer-simulated reality, is a computer technology that replicates an environment, real or imagined, and simulates a user's physical presence and environment to allow for user interaction. Virtual realities artificially create sensory experience, which can include sight, touch, hearing, and smell.

Cybercastle: imagined private sphere of internet users who do not want to reveal to others on the Internet.

Status update: constantly add and change information about yourself on the Facebook.

Narcissism: Narcissism is the pursuit of gratification from vanity or egotistic admiration of one's own attributes. The term originated from Greek mythology, where the young Narcissus fell in love with his own image reflected in a pool of water. Narcissism is also considered a social or cultural problem, usually considered a problem in a person's or group's relationships with self and others.

Cyberego: It refers to the self-concept, or what you believe you are, presented or displayed on the Internet or cyber space.

Avatar: In Hinduism, it means the "descent" or incarnation of a deity on earth. In the text it refers to the virtual characters in the virtual world created by the cyber space users as proxies for themselves.

Alienation: A sociological concept developed by several classical and contemporary theorists, is "a condition in social relationships reflected by a low degree of integration or common values and a high degree of distance or isolation between individuals, or between an individual and a group of people in a community or work environment".

Fetishism: A fetish is an object believed to have supernatural powers, or in particular, a man-made object that has power over

others. Essentially, fetishism is the emic attribution of inherent value or powers to an object. Internet users are obsessed with the cyber space is an example of fetishism.

Objectification: In social philosophy, objectification is the act of treating a person, or sometimes an animal, as an object or a thing. Martha Nussbaum has argued that the topic of objectification is not only important to sexuality, which has been discussed at length, but to the Marxist view on capitalism and slavery.

(3)

Tool	Distinctive features	Common features
E-mail	Electronic mail is a method of exchanging digital messages between computer users. Email servers accept, forward, deliver, and store messages. Neither the users nor their computers are required to be online simultaneously; they need connect only briefly, typically to a mail server, for as long as it takes to send or receive messages.	They are all different kinds of means of communication (exchange of information) created due to the technological development and the availability of the Internet and mobile phones.
Blog	A blog is a discussion or informational site published on the World Wide Web consisting of discrete entries ("posts") typically displayed in reverse chronological order (the most recent post appears first).	
Microblog	A microblog differs from a traditional blog in that its content is typically smaller in both actual and aggregated file size. Microblogs "allow users to exchange small elements of content such as short sentences, individual images, or video links", which may be the major reason for their popularity.	
Facebook /Renren	A for-profit corporation and online social networking service based in Menlo Park, California, United States.After registering to use the site, users can create a user profile, add other users as "friends", exchange messages, post status updates and photos, share videos, use various applications (apps), and receive notifications when others update their profiles.Renren is the Chinese version of the Facebook.	

(Tencent) QQ	Tencent QQ, popularly known as QQ, is an instant messaging software service developed by a Chinese company named Tencent Holdings Limited. QQ also offers a variety of services, including online social games, music, shopping, microblogging, movies, and group and voice chat.	
WeChat	WeChat is a mobile text and voice messaging communication service developed by Tencent in China. WeChat provides text messaging, hold-to-talk voice messaging, broadcast (one-to-many) messaging, video conferencing, video games, sharing of photographs and videos, and location sharing.	

Critical Reading

I. Understanding the text

1.

Part	Paras.	Main idea
I Overall introduction to the thesis and basic concepts	1-4	Human relations and the self-image of the human being have been profoundly affected by the Internet.
II Friendship and control	5-12	Real friendship shows itself in action and affection in reality, but the shift to making friends and maintaining friendship through the Internet is affecting true friendship in a negative way.
III Freedom requires context	13-21	The "avatar" phenomenon in the interactive cyber game Second Life has further changed the meaning of free human beings and caused alienation.

2.

(1) Human relations, and the self-image of the human being, have been profoundly affected by the Internet and by the ease with which images of other people can be summoned to the computer screen to become the objects of emotional attention. No more need to get up from your desk and make the journey to your friend's house. No more need for weekly meetings, or the circle of friends in the downtown restaurant or bar. All those effortful ways of making contact can be dispensed with: a touch of the keyboard

and you are there, where you wanted to be, on the site that defines your friends.

- (2) The major difference lies in the speed—the former is rather slow and the latter is almost instant in its delivery. This also causes another difference—we write letters to important people and therefore do it in a careful way while for an email we simply compose it in a hurry and send.
- (3) Real friendship shows itself in action and affection. The real friend is the one who comes to the rescue in your hour of need; who is there with comfort in adversity and who shares with you his own success. This is hard to do on the screen.
- (4) It is cost-free, screen-friendly, and very convenient and thus attracts many people to use it, but the users tend to develop obsession about making friends and maintaining friendship through the Facebook and thus might affect their real lives and their real relationships.
- (5) “Avatars” are virtual characters in virtual worlds created by cyber space users as proxies for themselves; avatars enable those users to live in complete self-complacency behind the screen, exposed to no danger and yet enjoying a kind of substitute affection through the adventures of their cyber-ego. In vesting one’s emotional life in the adventures of an avatar, one retreats completely from real relationships. Instead of being a means to augment relationships that exist outside of it, the Internet could become the sole arena of social life—but an unreal life involving unreal people (a kind of alienation and fetishism).
- (6) The game *Second Life* offers a virtual world and invites you to enter it in the form of an avatar constructed from its collection of templates. It has its own currency, in which purchases can be made in its own stores. It rents spaces to avatars as their homes and businesses. Second Life also provides opportunities for “social” action, with social positions achieved by merit—or, at any rate, virtual merit. In this way people can enjoy, through their avatars, cost-free versions of the social emotions, and can become heroes of “compassion,” without lifting a finger in the real world.
- (7) According to Hegel, we human beings fulfill ourselves through our own free actions, and through the consciousness that these actions bring of our individual worth. But we are not free in a state of nature, nor do we, outside the world of human relations, have the kind of consciousness of self that allows us to value and intend our own fulfillment. Freedom is not reducible to the unhindered choices that even an animal might enjoy; nor is self-consciousness simply a matter of the pleasurable immersion in immediate

experiences. Freedom involves an active engagement with the world, in which opposition is encountered and overcome, risks are taken and satisfactions weighed: It is, in short, an exercise of practical reason, in pursuit of goals whose value must justify the efforts needed to obtain them.

(8) *Selbstbestimmung*, that is, self-determination or self-certainty.

(9) Marx uses fetishism as manifestation of alienation. The consumer in a capitalist society, according to Marx, transfers his life into the commodities that bewitch him, and so loses that life—becoming a slave to commodities precisely through seeing the market in goods rather than the free interactions of people; as the place where his desires are brokered and fulfilled.

(10) “The realization of the self”: the process of raising ourselves above the animal condition as a self-knowing agent, capable of entertaining and acting from reasons, and with a developed first-person perspective and a sense of his reality as one subject among others. It is a process that depends upon real conflicts and real resolutions, in a shared public space where each of us is fully accountable for what he is and does.

“The alienation” of the self”: Anything that interferes with that process, by undermining the growth of interpersonal relations, by confiscating responsibility, or by preventing or discouraging an individual from making long-term rational choices and adopting a concrete vision of his own fulfillment.

II. Evaluation and exploration

(1)

Tentative answer: Scruton’s argument is reasonable from the perspective of traditional idea about friend who can meet you in person frequently and provide emotional and/or physical help – “a friend in need is a friend indeed”. However, as we have entered a fast changing era and the Internet time, it’s increasingly impossible to make friends or maintain friendship in the traditional way. The Email and the Facebook offer a quick means to make friends and maintain friendship. But the drawback is that it is hard to go deep due to lack of face-to-face interaction.

(2)

Tentative answer: Scruton’s argument is about “real friend” or close/intimate friend which is very few in any era. In one’s life, one may have different circles of friends whose functions are different and who can meet your different needs, for example, close friend (moral, emotional or even financial support), friend at work (work support), friends who share same hobbies with you such as sports. We need all of them in our life.

(3)

Tentative criticism: (Para. 11): (1) One usually uses the Internet mainly as a means of quick and effective communication including making friends and maintaining friendship, not as barrier or control; (2) Even if it serves as a means of control, we can also argue that you are under the same control in the same system; (3) In fact, communication through the Internet may empower you and your counterpart to be more open and challenge each other than the face-to-face interaction. (4) You can still make appointments with your friends if you need to meet them face to face.

(Para. 12): It is true that the Facebook experience might encourage a kind of narcissism (which is actually part of the human nature neglected in the past), but through this display of self, friends can learn more about their friends (strengths and weaknesses) and therefore strengthen their bond. Besides, the display of self, and listed others on the website make it easier for people to find, make friends and maintain friendship than in the traditional way.

(4)

Tentative challenge: It depends on the definition of “real life”. Scruton obviously uses the term as “existing in the physical world, not just in someone’s imagination or stories” (Macmillan English Dictionary 2003). It is true that human life is based on and cannot separate from the physical world, however, imagination and ideas are also inseparable or are even more important part of human life. Interaction in the virtual space has been increasingly becoming important part of one life as computer technology advances. We can even argue that “real life” is not complete without the Internet and virtual life, or even “real life” is increasingly becoming “virtual life”.

(5)

Tentative answer: These ideas of freedom, self-consciousness, and alienation may also be applied to the virtual world where individuals are self-conscious and have freedom which is conditioned (that is “right comes with duty”). And also, overly depending on the Internet (obsession and addiction) may also cause alienation or fetishism which are bad for human’s well-being.

(6)

Tentative brief answer: Human beings are complicated features who have many sides in their life, and sometimes “performance” is part of the “real life”. As Shakespeare wisely stated, “All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players: they have their exits and their entrances; and one man in his time plays many parts.” The reality TV programs reveal the unknown part of these celebrities’ life (that they want the audience to know to keep their popularity). Its impact on the audience are twofold – the audience

learn more about the celebrities or stars to like them or hate them; the fans' obsession about their idols might cause them to imitate (and make their own life videos to be released and shared with netizens).

Language Enhancement

I. Words and phrases

1.

- (1) C&F(2) E&F(3) B&E(4) C&D(5) A&D
(6) B&D(7) C&E(8) B&E(9) B&D(10) B&D

2.

- (1) by/from; in/within; with; from/ by; within/in
(2) with; to; within; on; in

3.

- (1) summoned(2) prompt(3) severed(4) carry out(5) bewitched
(6) underpins(7) vested in(8) intimidate(9) bound up with(10) dispense with

4.

- (1) on end(2) give rise to(3) in tandem(4) contribute to(5) removing...from
(6) offer(7) retreat from(8) fulfill(9) recognize(10) distinguish...from

II. Sentence and discourse

1

- (1) The availability of the Internet and the ease with which images of other people can be summoned to the computer screen as the objects of emotional attention has greatly influenced human relations and the self-identity of the human being.
- (2) The absence of someone causes less pain with the help of the Internet and telephone, but the use of the Internet and telephone also evokes a less keen sense of feeling than face-to-face interaction.
- (3) The real friend in real life comes to the rescue when you need it; he can also comfort you when you are in a bad situation and share with you his own success.
- (4) Exactly because attention is paid to the other there is an opportunity for self-knowledge and self-discovery, and this expands freedom in the other's presence which is one of the joys human beings get from life.
- (5) To conduct relationships through the Internet and in front of the computer screen, I enjoy a power over the other person at the other end of the Internet. The other person is not really aware of this kind of power of manipulation since he doesn't know how much I wish to retain him in the space of the computer before me.

2.

- (1) The purpose of the contemporary TV entertainment programs is to

use all kinds of means to make sure that the audience stay glued to the screen.

- (2) With the rapid development in information technology, WeChat has gradually substituted other means of communication as the mainstream.
- (3) In the era of the Internet, shyness and diffidence are no longer considered character defects, because the Internet provides people with a virtual freedom to display themselves in front of the computer screen without feeling awkward.
- (4) With the risks of face-to-face interaction removed, interaction through the Internet is becoming the main channel for people to make friends and maintain friendship.
- (5) Our social system should provide everyone equal opportunities to bring out their advantages and potentials.
- (6) According to the theories of Hegel and Fichte, we can only fulfill ourselves through self-consciousness of our values and actions of free choices.
- (7) Face-to-face interaction compels the participant to recognize that he is merely another human being in the eyes of others and thus realize his full individual self-consciousness.
- (8) The process of people's interaction in reality is constituted by real risks and solutions, and everyone has to account for his words and behavior.
- (9) In the Internet era, everyone is losing interest in people in the real world and retreating into his own cyber space.
- (10) Hiding behind the computer screen, one can retain control over the interaction and greatly reduce the possibility of direct conflicts/confrontations with others at the same time.

3.

真正的友谊体现在行动和情感上。真正的朋友会在你切实需要时援手相救；在你遭到挫折时出现在身边给你安慰；在他自己成功时来与你分享。而这很难在电脑屏幕前做到——电脑主要是信息的一个汇聚点，也就勉强算一个行动的地点，如果我们将交流算做行动的一种表现形式。在朋友（受害者）在现实世界受难时，需要抵御敌人的打击时，需要任何有形的实际帮助时，我们在电脑上发出的对他们的安慰只有言词而非实际行动或物质帮助。有一种受到争议的观点认为，人们越是通过网络满足交友的需求，他们就越不可能发展友谊，那种能够在真实生活的考验中提供帮助和安慰的友谊。主要在屏幕上发展起来的友谊也不太可能轻易

地脱离屏幕，而即使这种友谊能够脱离网络时，也不能保证它能经受住任何挫折和考验。的确如此，正是因为互联网的免费与方便特性吸引了许多人使用它，其实用如此普遍以至于我的学生们告诉我，他们害怕上瘾，经常强迫自己一连几天不去查看他们的脸书账户，就是为了能够过真实的生活并维持真实的友情和社会关系。

4.

(4) (3) (2) (1)