

THE NECESSITY OF METAPHYSICS IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY YOUTH SOCIAL SUPPORT

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ABSTRACT

Aim. This study analyses the renewed relevance of metaphysics in the context of contemporary challenges faced by young people, with special emphasis on identity formation, psychological vulnerability, and social support, investigating how metaphysical frameworks contribute to psycho-social development, value stability, and existential resilience.

Methods. The study applies a theoretical and interdisciplinary approach combining philosophical analysis, contemporary metaphysical debates, sociological theories of individualisation, and psychological research on youth mental health. It employs comparative conceptual analysis and theoretical synthesis of current literature.

Results. The anthropological and ethical instability experienced by today's youth cannot be adequately addressed without metaphysical grounding. Metaphysics provides conceptual tools for understanding human dignity, objective values, and identity coherence. Social support systems—family, peers, and community—prove significantly more stable and effective when rooted in shared metaphysical or transcendent assumptions.

Conclusions. Metaphysics remains essential for understanding the human person amid cultural fragmentation, normative relativism, and psychological fragility. Its rehabilitation strengthens youth identity formation, value stability, and social resilience, positioning it not as an archaic remnant, but as an indispensable conceptual framework within contemporary educational and social sciences. Future quantitative and qualitative empirical studies on youth populations are recommended to complement these theoretical findings.

Keywords: metaphysics, Gen-Z, social support, identity, resilience, values, mental health

INTRODUCTION

At the turn of the millennium, several experts published studies suggesting that the rapid development of the modern entertainment industry, the massive influence of mass media, and cultural pressures could negatively affect the inner lives of young people, causing them to feel empty and lost despite their high standard of living and abundance of entertainment options (Winter, 2002). The development of digital technologies and the diversity of social networks bring unprecedented access to information and almost unlimited opportunities for self-realisation through cyberspace into the lives of young people today. According to a study by Jean Twenge (2023), today's young people show historically high levels of anxiety, depression, feelings of loneliness and misunderstanding, and uncertainty about their own identity. A strange paradox is emerging despite the hyperconnectivity achieved through digital technologies, young people feel anxiety, isolation, and a loss of meaning not only in their own existence but also in the world as such, leading to an increase in interest in metaphysical connections (Pavlikova & Tavilla, 2023; Smith & Snell, 2009).

Within academic discourse, there is a growing consensus among researchers that the crisis of the younger generation is not primarily economic or technological, but rather metaphysical (Taylor, 2007) and research confirms an increase in young people's interest in metaphysical questions and practices corresponding to the search for the transcendent (Springtide Research Institute, 2021). It is a crisis of what it means to be human, and questions related to the fundamental values of humanity and their

justification, as well as teleological questions about the direction and purpose of human endeavour, with the issues of moral good and truth forming an integral part of this complex. By metaphysics, we do not mean the classical discipline in the sense of investigating the first causes of being, the essence of reality, the nature of truth, time, and so on. We will start from a philosophical understanding of the meaning of things and the contexts that make up human life in the context of the psychosocial development of young people (Mercadante, 2014).

In this study, we start from the hypothesis that the need for metaphysics among the younger generation is not just a philosophical phenomenon or a fashionable trend but has deep psychological and sociological reasons and consequences. Social support, defined as the perceived or actual availability of necessary resources (Cohen & Wills, 1985) relevant to the “metaphysical crisis” from a young person’s perspective can play a significant role in shaping and supporting young people’s metaphysical beliefs, thereby contributing to their psychological well-being and resilience (Roehlkepartain et al., 2006).

THE METAPHYSICAL FOUNDATION OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Today, we can see some of the consequences of developed postmodernism, whose accompanying features, such as the fragmentation of the whole and the loss of coherence in an atomised society, bring with them negative side effects (MacIntyre, 1984). The rejection of metaphysics conditions the image of man as a stable being with inherent value lasting throughout his psychodynamic development. Without metaphysical assumptions, it is impossible to speak of unchanging human dignity, objective values and the resulting binding ethical norms, or the teleology of man and the related meaning of life as such. The weakening of metaphysics necessarily leads to anthropological relativism, which is fully manifested in the environment of contemporary culture of flexibility, autonomous self-realisation, and post-truth (Illouz, 2019).

In their research on the spiritual development of adolescents, Pamela Ebstyne King and Robert W. Roeser (2009) point out that metaphysical questions are an inherent part of the process of searching for their own identity, with those who engage in reflection on existential questions showing higher levels of psychological well-being and better coping with life transitions. It is during this period that they actively explore the “big questions” about reality, mortality, morality, and transcendence (Králik, 2017; Park, 2017). Recent research confirms that the current Generation Z is experiencing a specific form of “existential crisis” caused by a combination of factors, including climate anxiety, economic uncertainty, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the digital fragmentation of reality (Pew Research Center, 2020; Varma et al., 2023). Some contemporary theories of identity (Sirin et al., 2024) point to the relationship between the formation of a stable identity and a solid framework consisting of values, community,

and a relationship to the transcendent. The collapse of metaphysics weakens this framework. Vague metaphysics does not sufficiently stimulate the formation of a healthy individual identity and does not lead it in the desired direction (Mercadante, 2014). The renaissance of metaphysics is thus becoming a pressing challenge of the present.

CHALLENGES FOR THE YOUNGER GENERATION

Extensive findings by the World Health Organisation (2023) show that an increase in mental health problems is evident among adolescents aged 15-19. Sociologists and psychologists agree that the causes of feelings of anxiety, psychological insecurity, and negative internal states can be attributed to chronic uncertainty, pressure to perform, constant comparison with others in the online space, the weakening of family structures and the crisis of the family institution, and the belief in absolute freedom and autonomy in the struggle for self-realisation (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Young people confronted with suffering, limitations, or external uncertainty seek answers to their authentic questions that are not only behavioural or cognitive, but also transcendent. Psychology and sociology can describe the symptoms well, but they cannot suppress the questions about the meaning and purpose of life that constantly arise. Understanding good as a social and cultural construct from the perspective of the younger generation represents an element of instability that exposes them to constant re-evaluation and questioning, which can lead to chronic uncertainty (Bauman, 2000).

A particular challenge for the current young generation is the fragmentation of digital identity (Cigna, 2020). Thanks to the digital environment, it is possible to constantly generate and change one's self-presentation, which brings with it an increased risk of identity fragmentation and loss of authenticity (Turkle, 2012). Constant changes in the external environment of social networks and their requirements create pressure to change one's image and self-presentation, which in the cyber reality environment, where clear boundaries are absent, weakens the stability and continuity of self-experience. This internal instability, combined with the developmental changes that are (*by definition*) part of adolescence, creates an unfavourable constellation which, without significant social support, creates conditions conducive to the emergence of undesirable psychosocial phenomena in terms of internal experience and external manifestations.

Post-factual culture brings with it a rejection of the meta-narrative and thus a denial of universal values (Lyotard, 1984; Peters, 2017). This is associated with a feeling of freedom and autonomy, which corresponds to the prevailing trend of growing individualism, but in the long term, given the development of personality, this creates an environment in which feelings of disorientation are growing among young people (Vattimo, 2011). Without a metaphysical horizon, the changing environment of the adolescent's inner world loses the reason to believe in goodness, truth, or beauty as real entities, putting the individual's mental health at risk. This is why Generation Z in particular shows higher levels

of anxiety and depression compared to other generations (Twenge et al., 2019). Some research shows that young people seek refuge in metaphysical systems to relieve psychological stress (Koenig, 2018). As a result of climate change, political polarisation, economic uncertainty, and the pandemic, the current young generation is experiencing a growing sense of fear of a “terrifying future” (Hickman et al., 2021), which is reflected in an increased interest in questions of purpose, meaning, and the goal of social development.

SOCIAL SUPPORT AND METAPHYSICAL ANCHORING

The theory of social support distinguishes between several types of support: emotional (empathy, care), instrumental (practical help), informational (advice, instructions, information), and evaluative (feedback) (House, 1981). In the context of metaphysical inquiry, informational and emotional support are particularly relevant, as they enable young people to safely explore existential questions (Roehlkepartain et al., 2006). Our empirical research (Máhrík et al., 2025) confirmed that young people aged 14-19 struggle significantly with questions about their future and seek meaning in current initiatives considering what the future may bring. The research showed that the school environment lags in terms of the quality of social support compared to the quality of social support provided by a functional family, coaches, and classmates. The “spiritual scaffolding” model proposed by King and Chris J. Boyatzis (2015) resonates with our findings in that young people long for a supportive environment in which they can ask metaphysical questions without fear of condemnation or ridicule, as their teleological interest is often irrational in nature. Such communities are more durable, psychologically effective, and exhibit greater social resilience, which corresponds to Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development (ZPD) applied to the spiritual and existential sphere of interest of young people (King & Boyatzis, 2015). Research on religious and spiritual communities shows that they represent the most stable form of social support for adolescents and young adults (Smith & Snell, 2009).

It is precisely informational and emotional support (House’s model) that has been confirmed as key to creating an environment in which young people can safely seek answers to their authentic existential questions (Roehlkepartain et al., 2006). It appears that communities based solely on pragmatic or interest-based ties are not as stable as community identities based on metaphysical values (Putnam & Campbell, 0). In a changing cultural, value, and opinion environment, metaphysics becomes a source of value consensus, a stimulus for community identity, a motivation for active altruism, and a basis for hope in times of crisis. For educators, trainers, and youth workers, this challenge presents a task that will need to be addressed in a relevant way. They themselves must be prepared to face metaphysical questions and should address them sensitively and competently considering the challenges facing the current young generation (Twenge, 2017).

Empirical studies confirm that the quality of social support is directly related to the depth of metaphysical horizons that are implemented in social support processes embodied by in the role of a mentor (Drescher, 2016). When young people have open and confidential access to adult mentors, they demonstrate a greater capacity for critical reflection and integration, unlike those respondents who were not provided with such support (Barry & Abo-Zena, 2014). Mentors who are competent around “metaphysical literacy” model the world of young people and demonstrate how to integrate metaphysical beliefs into everyday life, while providing adolescents with concrete examples of “lived metaphysics” (Hardy et al., 2011). Within the framework of metaphysically anchored social support, it is possible to create a safe space for asking any authentic questions and subsequently critically examining them in relation to metaphysical assumptions, which ultimately results in mature and reflective beliefs on the part of the recipients of social support.

It appears that young people who had free access to spiritual mentors showed significantly higher levels of life energy, including better academic performance, better prosocial behaviour, and overall mental well-being (Lerner et al., 2019). According to some study results (Koenig, 2018), coherent metaphysical beliefs in young people lead to better coping with traumatic events and a reduction in depression and anxiety. Research from the Covid-19 pandemic period confirms the positive impact of metaphysical beliefs on the psychological resilience of adolescents (VanderWeele et al., 2016). Similarly, other studies point to the connection between beliefs about a reality beyond the material world and the strengthening of conscious hope and meaningful perspective in times of crisis (Pargament et al., 2013).

COMMUNITY AS A CATALYST FOR METAPHYSICS

Man is not an island unto himself. His metaphysical beliefs are not formed in social isolation, but in the context of communities that provide him with “plausibility structures” for creating a specific perception of the world. For the current young generation, there are several basic types of communities in which they find a “reflection” of their transcendent desires and needs. These are physical religious communities, traditional spiritual communities that have adapted quite successfully in recent years to the needs of young people and offer authenticity, the ambition of social justice, and sufficient space for questions and answers (Drescher, 2016). Online spiritual communities are relatively widespread, digital networks organised according to spiritual interests and preferences, offering excellent accessibility and a high degree of anonymity, but also a corresponding limitation in the depth and intensity of relationships (Campbell & Vitullo, 2016). Some consider the most effective way to be the possibility of joining hybrid communities, which can very flexibly modify online meetings into offline forms and vice versa (Siuda, 2021).

The family is the most important source of social support in a young person's life, and, despite the growing role of peers and the influence of social networks, it remains the decisive social context for the formation of metaphysical beliefs (Boyatzis & Janicki, 2003). It is a complex, multi-layered construct in which family rituals (shared meals, prayers, spiritual conversations, and discussions) play a role in creating space for the transmission of values and metaphysical beliefs (Fiese, 2002). While an authoritative parenting style promotes healthy autonomy in children as they seek answers to spiritual questions, an authoritarian (permissive) approach on the part of parents can lead to rejection or uncritical acceptance of metaphysical beliefs, neither of which we consider optimal. From a psychological point of view, intergenerational dialogue is most appropriate, in which open discussions about existential questions and the sharing of family members' stories encourage other members to continuously develop more sophisticated metaphysical perspectives and reinforce their acquisition (Pavlikova, 2018; Bengtson et al., 2015).

Empirical research (Máhrík et al., 2025) has shown that although school is the most important social entity after the family, the metaphysical dimension of social support lags the expectations of young people. One reason for this is that current education systems in most Western countries systematically ignore the metaphysical dimension of human development, which subsequently creates a significant gap in the quality of social support for young people (Noddings, 2003). It appears that there will be a need to significantly improve the teaching of critical thinking about metaphysical issues as part of the curriculum (Peters, 2017). This implies the need to educate teachers and educators in educational institutions.

In this regard, digital spirituality is a new phenomenon that needs to be addressed in future research, as the online search for the transcendent in today's world of young people requires teachers to master new theoretical frameworks that go beyond traditional dichotomous approaches in the sense of secular vs. religious and represent an urgent challenge (Campbell & Vitullo, 2016). Since most research is conducted in the context of the US and the UK, it is necessary to focus more on the context of Central and Eastern Europe (Zarzycka & Rybarski, 2016) and strategically examine the development of metaphysical beliefs from adolescence to adulthood and their relationship to long-term life outcomes (Lerner et al., 2019). A fundamental prerequisite for success in the society-wide discourse on a sustainable society and quality of life is the understanding of metaphysical questions as a legitimate developmental need and an integral part of human life today (King & Roeser, 2009).

CONCLUSIONS

Metaphysics in this study is not presented as a return to scholasticism, but as an interdisciplinary project integrating psychology, sociology, philosophy of religion, theol-

ogy, and anthropological sciences, capable of addressing answers on both the horizontal (social) and vertical (existential) levels, while being compatible with current scientific discourse (Binetti & Pavlikova, 2019).

The need for metaphysics among the current young generation is not an anachronism, but a vital aspect of healthy psychosocial development. In an era of unprecedented change and uncertainty, young people are looking for answers to eternal questions: Who am I? Why am I here? What has value? What is my purpose? Metaphysics provides a relevant platform for addressing the challenges faced by the current young generation: it provides an ontological framework for identity, stabilises ethical values, responds to cultural fragmentation and value chaos, strengthens resilience, and adds a necessary transcendent dimension to social support.

This study argues for the need to create support systems that recognise and cultivate the metaphysical dimension of young people. This requires a paradigm shift in our understanding of “support.” Social support - in the form of mentors, communities, families, and institutions - plays a key role in navigating young people through these issues. However, this support must be specifically oriented toward the existential and metaphysical dimensions of development; it must not be reduced to practical or emotional needs.

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