

The Chances of an “Open” Metaphysics A Dialogue with Jan Patočka

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Abstract

The main issue of the paper is the question of the contemporaneous chances of metaphysics. This question arises through a special analysis of Jan Patočka’s ideas, which by validating the principle of openness delineates the possibility of a new metaphysics, the essential feature of which is the openness that does not allow any kind of dogmatic finality, or any kind of final answers, conclusions. On the contrary, its main principle is to continuously maintain the state of quest and questioning. Open metaphysics does not inspire to transcend being, but it attempts to question beyond the actual, to take on that authentic openness that in fact could mean the validation of man’s freedom. That is the freedom of the endless questions through which man would always aspire beyond his boundaries. This interpretation of Patočka’s philosophy also elucidates the fact that open metaphysics represents that productive mental environment from which the Czech philosopher’s subjective phenomenology and ontology of movement spring. Moreover, beyond its theoretical significance it leads from the openness of existence through the openness of spirit to the openness of life itself, – to such a practical philosophy that is the foundation of responsible actions as well as of a rich, versatile and active life.

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Jan Patočka is one of the most productive and highly thought of Czech thinkers, although outside his home country he is mostly known as the analyst of Husserl’s and Heidegger’s philosophical dialogue.¹

¹ See Richard Rorty: “Jan Patočka – Philosophy and Selected Writings”, *The New Republic*, July 1991.; Edward F. Findlay: “Classical Ethics and Postmodern Critique”, *The Review of Politics*, Summer 1999.; Erick P. Schellhammer:

Furthermore, Paul Ricoeur's note that Patočka is "the most Socratic"¹ philosopher regarding his thinking and his life and death, is also often quoted. In the West his work is considered difficult to access, while in Central and Eastern Europe he is mainly known for his political philosophy and exemplary life.² Few have undertaken the task to go deep into his outstandingly rich and original thinking.

Patočka has not created a "system". His thinking in its entirety can rather be called concentric, as it is centered upon certain basic topics, "focal points", essentially interconnected with each other. It derives from this interrelatedness that a consistent elaboration of any of these topics necessarily leads to all the others. In his view, the task of philosophy is to reveal the world in its entirety and problematic nature. One must also emphasize that Patočka, as he himself admits, is guided in his philosophy by the intention to draw attention on questions, and not to rigidly answer them.

The purpose of this paper is to place the principle of openness, of all the principles guiding Patočka's philosophy, in the center of an interpretation which, keeping in mind this above-mentioned concentricity, may lead to possible conclusions connected to the present chances of metaphysics. The application of the principle of openness to metaphysics may not only yield a new metaphysics, but even more a kind of "practical metaphysics"...

"Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History", *The Review of Metaphysics*, June 1999.; Ijja Srubar: "Aszubjektív fenomenológia, életvilág és humanizmus" (Asubjective phenomenology, life-world, and humanism), *Gond* 13-14 (1997): 251-264.; Renato Cristin: "A világ mint mozgás és egzisztencia" (The world as movement and existence), *Gond* 13-14 (1997): 183-193. Csák László: "Szabadság és egység avagy Patočka és korának értelme" (Freedom and unity or the meaning of Patočka's age), in Jan Patočka, *A jelenkor értelme* (The meaning of modernity), Pozsony (Bratislava): Kalligram, 1999.; Vajda Mihály: "A létezés problematikussága" (The problematic nature of existence), in Jan Patočka, *Mi a cseh?* (What is the Czech?), Pozsony (Bratislava): Kalligram, 1996.; Petr Pithart: "Egy szókratészi gondolkodású és sorsú filozófus" (A philosopher of Socratic thinking and fate), in Jan Patočka, *Mi a cseh?* (What is the Czech?), Pozsony (Bratislava): Kalligram, 1996.

¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Preface*, in Jan Patočka, *Essais herétiques sur la philosophie de l'histoire*, Legrasse: Édition Verdier, 1981.

² Cf. Aviezer Tucker: "Shipwrecked. Patočka's Philosophy of Czech History", *History and Theory*, May 1996.

The principle of metaphysical openness

The presentation of the problem

According to Patočka, the revision of metaphysics is made necessary by the widespread view that metaphysics can be blamed both for the reservations connected to philosophy, and for the pervading effect of mathematical sciences. Husserl has already drawn attention to the fact that man lives in a twofold world, both in a natural environment, and in a hypostatic reality of the sciences. He perceives the crisis of the West in the idealism of a scientific worldview.¹ Although accepting Husserl's diagnosis of the crisis, Patočka does not agree with its roots. Following Heidegger, he also thinks that nihilism, as the consequence of 2000 years of metaphysical thinking is more dangerous than idealism. He also accepts that Plato's metaphysics meant a break in the self-interpretation of metaphysics. But, as opposed to Heidegger, Patočka discovers in Plato's philosophy the possibility of an interpretation which could have prevented the unfortunate situation which allowed the adjective "metaphysical" to be used today as an offence.

By all means, the revision of metaphysics seems necessary, and this is what Patočka intends to do, not by the refutation of the accusations brought to it, but by the rethinking of the history and historicity of metaphysics. This also means to search for that spiritual context in which the way of thinking which is called today metaphysics was only one of the possible answers. Because if it was possible to grasp the moment and causes of its creation, then there would be a possibility to return, since metaphysics would not seem any more inevitable or unavoidable.

However, before turning to the historical presentation, it seems appropriate to make a differentiation coming from Patočka's analyses, when he consistently distinguishes between the metaphysics after Plato and the beginnings of metaphysics. This is why it does not seem too far-fetched to distinguish also terminologically between two kinds of metaphysics. The most appropriate would be to speak about negative and positive metaphysics, but this would be disturbing, since the terms seem to indicate an evaluation, and what is more, one exactly opposing Patočka's intentions, who prefers the negative interpretation in applying the principles of openness.² Therefore I would rather use the terms open

¹ Edmund Husserl, *Az európai tudományok válsága* (The crisis of European sciences), I-II, Budapest: Atlantisz, 1998.

² See Patočka, "Negatív platonizmus" (Negative Platonism), in Patočka, *Mi a cseh?*.

and closed metaphysics. The thematic elaboration of the difference between the two will be made below.

Open and closed metaphysics

Patočka differentiates between two kinds of human experience. In his view positive sciences arbitrarily limit reality to the field of the senses, when the only recognized instance for deciding what is correct is the experience we *already have*. They forget that what is primary: the experience which we *are*.

While the primary, sensory experience is the passive and positive, the other one, which Patočka calls the experience of transcendence, is active and negative. This latter one is man's basic experience that we are not bound to things, we can keep the distance from things, we can surpass any materiality. This is a negative experience since it only has the nature of non-satisfaction, of non-relief, not a positive experience of a being beyond materiality. It is an authentic human experience, the experience of completeness, which is rooted in the basic difference between being and non-being, and expresses man's negative experience about that which is beyond any being: transcendence.

The experience of transcendence meant the basis of metaphysics, this created the need for metaphysics, which had originally been the asking beyond being, and as such, it has been open. This free questioning, relieved by any constraints, means open metaphysics, the symbol of which in Patočka's philosophy is Socrates.

We have seen thus that once metaphysics has been standing on the ground of authentic human experience. But even Plato's concept of Idea meant a change in itself. He applied a distinct terminology to explain the experience of transcendence, and his system wanted to be both positive and material. It wanted to become similar to the description of sensorial experience, that is, a science – this was Plato's hidden purpose, and that is why his concept of Idea can be regarded as the first closed metaphysics. Closed, because instead of an open questioning it fixes final answers, and it falls into the temptation to describe a negative (and thus open) experience as a positive, material experience. Closed metaphysics also knows the experience of transcendence, but it can only make use of it in a speculative way. Thus, it settled the fate of philosophy for the following 2000 years. Today, it has become a widespread and attractive mistake to extend the descriptions and conclusions offered by natural sciences to the whole universe. This is why natural sciences can also be regarded as closed metaphysics.

However, metaphysics as such could never become science because the nature of the experience of transcendence does not allow it. But the objectivizing thinking characteristic for closed metaphysics has also ruled the decline of metaphysics, and has defined, more or less consciously, the self-understanding of sciences as well.

Thus, a historical overview must reveal the motif which has formed the authentic ground of metaphysics. Then there will be a possibility to return anew to the original openness and save it.

This differentiation is merely a sketch, and it only intends to make the terminology in use be more at hand. The deeper differences between open and closed metaphysics and their consequences will serve as the guidelines for this paper.

Metaphysical openness and open metaphysics

One of the central issues of Patočka's philosophy analyses the formation of history, philosophy, and politics. His most outstanding piece of writing in this subject is the *Heretical essays in the philosophy of history*, in which he arrives at the conclusion that philosophy, politics, and history all have the same roots, and they came into being at the same time.

Patočka's arguments come from ideas connected to the prehistorical world, the world of the myth. This is first of all characterized by the fact that the world is not yet problematic for man, because he knows everything about it in advance, and he accepts his place and his gods' place in the world-order without questioning anything.

The prerequisite of the formation of philosophy is the fact that man senses the world's inexhaustibility, experiences concealment as an absence, and the insufficiency of his previous understanding of the world. This idea does not mean philosophy in itself, but it becomes philosophy when man questions this inexhaustibility, questions the seemingly stable interpretations of the world. At the first awakening man knows nothing, only discovers the limitlessness, infinity, and shapelessness of the world, and marvels over it. It is commonplace that philosophy starts with marveling, but Patočka emphasizes that in fact one can speak about philosophy when the problematic nature of relating to the world is expressed in questions. Questioning means a problem which is already made conscious, it means that man is no longer opposed to the world as a passive, all-accepting party, but the world appears to him as something awaiting interpretation. Man undertakes the task of interpretation, and the

basis of his questioning is a new kind of relation to the world: a relation to the world as to such a wholeness which is filled with secrets and mysteries. The world's accepted meaning shatters, the relation to existence is no longer expressed by ready-made answers, but by free and open questioning, which is already philosophy.

An interesting conclusion can be drawn from what Patočka writes on the formation and beginnings of philosophy: philosophy came into being as metaphysics, if by metaphysics we understand what Heidegger did in his work *What is metaphysics?*, the transcending of being.

It is part of man's substance to need transcendence, infinity. His openness is shown in the fact that he does not regard his reality as a cold and objective thing, but as flexible and problematic. However, intellectual knowledge is not enough to grasp this problem, as it must indeed be grasped as the essence of human life. And thus we have left behind any rational falsity, because the true heights and dangers of our existence have been revealed to us. And this is the state about which Heidegger writes that we do not cover our eyes in front of the nothing,¹ and which Patočka calls the amplitude of life.²

Openness and the amplitude of life means that man rejects cheap hopes and "artificial gardens of Eden", and he becomes aware that life has to bear the burden of the whole world. Patočka considers the sensation that finiteness cannot fill us as the essence of humanity because the awareness of finiteness comes exactly from the discovery of the infinite inexhaustibility of the world. Openness thus also expresses that we like eternity, and although it remains an eternal secret to us, we relate to it so as not to put an end to it, but to keep it at all costs. Not to end the secret is only possible for us by accepting our own finiteness.

The world in which man lives is not the sum of all beings, but a wholeness which the being who acts in practice understands from his purposes and means, from the possibilities open to him. But as it appears from those said above, our roots are in the non-given, in that which we are not, but which in some way there is for us (in a negative experience).³

¹ Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Mi a metafizika?* (What is metaphysics?), Budapest: Egyetemi Nyomda, 1945.

² J. Patočka, "Az élet egyensúlya és amplitúdója" (The balance and amplitude of life), in *Mi a cseh?*.

³ J. Patočka, "Mácha és az időbeliség" (Mácha and temporality), in *Mi a cseh?*, 138.

Thus Patočka distances himself from one of the basic theses of Husserlian phenomenology, since, according to him, the primary characteristic of life is not intentionality but transcendence, man's transcendence to the world. This transcendence is not the activity of the mind and of reason, but a basic human attribute of existence.¹ Because if man did not transcend, did not ask beyond being, then he would never relate to the being either, as he could not win the being in its entirety for understanding. Thus questioning is not merely a kind of "spiritual activity", or an intellectual behavior, but it also has the character of existence. The being in its entirety implies this revelation and concealment, Existence and Nothing essentially converge in it.

Patočka here admittedly finds himself under the influence of Heidegger, and thinks that the importance of his "ontological turn"² lies in the recognition that the starting point of philosophy is not thinking, but human existence. Patočka adds to this that the reality of human life excludes the point of view of an external, impartial contemplator, because man will never be able to withdraw from the world, and acquire knowledge about it by raising above it. Despite this, man needs complete and absolute meaning, what is more, he cannot live without it. But he can live in the search for, and problem of, meaning – this is what Socrates expressed.

The earliest philosophy did not possess much knowledge, what is more, it almost delimited itself from knowing much. It was rather characterized by a practical relation to things, it dealt with certain questions with a definite purpose.³ This is how it acquired a kind of special knowledge, which was essentially different from today's scientific knowledge, as it specifically derived from life and practice, and not acquired in a theoretical way.

Socrates has a symbolic significance in Patočka's whole work, since Patočka regards him as the last representative of ancient knowledge, and at the same time the culmination point of this kind of thinking. His knowledge was the knowledge of not knowing: knowledge as a question. And thus also completely free, as "he is not bound by anything terrestrial or extra-terrestrial".⁴ He frees himself continually and tenaciously from any existing pattern, which first of all needs an extraordinary braveness, because Socrates thus finds himself in a space where there is nothing real

¹ J. Patočka, *Essais herétiques*, 292.

² *ibid.*, 294.

³ Patočka, "Negativ platonizmus", 42.

⁴ *ibid.*, 43 and following.

to depend on. This kind of relation in Patočka's view reveals one of the basic contradictions of man – his original relationship to wholeness, and his inability (and even impossibility) to express this relationship in the form of an everyday, finite knowledge. Socrates' knowledge is not the type which can be expressed in material and positive theses, as his truth is only negatively revealing: it "lives in the truth" in an indirect way, by questioning, skepticism, and the denial of any closed pattern.

The negative explanation of Plato's concept of Idea still keeps the Socratic openness. Patočka undertakes this original interpretation in his study entitled *Negative Platonism*, where he emphasizes the *chorismos*, the division of the ideas from our reality. This division does not conceal another material sphere, but it is self-sufficient, and therefore it is only possible to read "another world's secret" from the *chorismos* itself. We could say that the *chorismos* marks in fact a borderline which negatively refers to a certain mysterious non-being – more exactly, to the fact that it exists for us, and not to how it is, or what it is like. It is so because the absolute division does not permit to perceive the Idea as a being, what is more, it must be deprived of any contemplative, object- and image-like nature, and must be made the symbol of transcendence.

The non-existent in Patočka's negative interpretation can be perceived as a relational concept, "as the relation between the existing things". The non-existent "is lurking", and if we regard the concealed as the source of every openness, then the non-existent "appears to be an original power", because it gives a negative judgment about all things, and from here all our finite experiences will be the expressions of that which is not transcendence, "which does not reach the Idea". As the eternal symbol of this opposition, the Idea also unifies all finite beings – inasmuch as they exist, and are not nothing.

Patočka's interpretation almost turns poetic, when he calls the Idea "inexpressible, incomprehensible, eternal mystery", "the true appeal of transcendence".¹ But his purpose is not to argue for some kind of poetic or mystic cognition. He emphasizes that it is impossible to imagine the relation of the Idea and the material being, because it is only possible to imagine objects, while the Idea is that *by which* we see, and not *what* we see. It has thus a negative illuminating power by revealing man's limits.

The concept of Idea understood like this cannot say anything positive in content, because it cannot communicate that what it knows as a material knowledge. It remains open, and devoted to Socrates' spirit,

¹ Patočka, "Negativ platonizmus", 69-71.

because it keeps that basic human possibility to direct itself (and fight for) a truth which is not relative, but neither is positive. Such a metaphysics does not ask beyond the existent in order to acquire and possess the truth, but in order to permanently search it. This openness will have thus a practical side, that is, man's ambition and desire to permanently go beyond materialities and permanently create something new, that is, to actively relate to his environment and to himself.

The formation and history of closed metaphysics

The essence of closed metaphysics is that it wishes to give answers to Socrates' questions. The inappropriate answer given to a real problem deriving from the authentic experience of the difference between the existent and the non-existent is a tempting error in which metaphysics has fallen and has remained in ever since. Such a metaphysics has simply searched for and found false reasons for something which man needs out of his nature. It is so because Socrates' questions do not bear final answers, since these extinguish exactly the possibility of further questioning. In this sense closed metaphysics "returns" to the mythical world by covering that what is problematic, offering solutions to it, "it throws off the secret".

The analysis of the history of metaphysics in Patočka's philosophy is a thread to which he often returns, examining in variable details the process which has led to the modern mechanical worldview. There is no place here for the detailed and thorough presentation of these essays on the history of philosophy, but it is important to emphasize the essential instances in order to understand what closed metaphysics is, and what kind of thinking it has led to.

Patočka traces the beginnings of this way of thinking also back to Plato's concept of Idea, more exactly to a certain interpretation of this concept. But Plato's roots also hold on to ancient knowledge via Socrates, therefore they also contain the possibility of an open interpretation.

Plato was interpreted and understood in a way which resulted in the creation of a new kind of knowledge, which was considered superior. Plato was led by the intention to reveal the positive and consistent nature of Socrates' apparent ignorance, in a way he wanted to justify his master. Already Heidegger called it the irony of Platonism that his intention led to completely opposing results, and Patočka also agrees to it, but he does not completely ignore the possibility of a correct interpretation of the

concept of Idea. It should also be examined how Platonism came to be the first closed metaphysics.

The illusions and errors which generated closed metaphysics derived from trying to project to one single level, the material level, that what actually had nothing to do with it. This way of thinking is ahistorical because it takes the meaning of things as final and given, as a self-sufficient meaning. In opposition to this, Patočka emphasizes that the existent has no meaning in itself, only in the open understanding, and understanding is a process and movement by its own nature.¹

Plato also sustains that man necessarily relates himself to the extra-terrestrial being as well. Thus, man transcends, but then he returns to his everyday reality, and tries to explain it with the help of transcendence. The possible message of this is that only the analysis of spiritual beings may lead to the explanation of the totality of the world. Patočka identifies a very important and determining exchange in the concept of Idea: what he (Patočka) calls the non-existent, Plato changes for the “eternal being” (Idea), “The place of the historicity of the Socratic fight against the decline of life is taken by the imitation of the eternal, ideal world.”² Furthermore, the idea as the source of absolute truth becomes the source of every being and every life, and in this sense it is absolute object. If we regard it as absolute object, then it will secretly contain an invitation that man should stand in the middle of the world and bring it under his power. Naturally, this desire for power and possession does not unfold completely either in Antiquity or in the Middle Ages, but its hidden seed, according to Patočka, can already be found with Plato.

Then it is again Plato who created the most effective (closed) metaphysical motif: the abyss between our surrounding world and the world perceived by the mind, considering this latter one as reality. Without this, in Patočka’s view, neither theology, nor natural science could have existed.³

The next stage in the development of this thought was Aristotle’s philosophy. In Patočka’s view it is only there that transcendence completely turns into a supernatural reality, that is, a transcendent deity. Aristotle formulates it as a task to create an absolute, objective, and positive whole – and this is the task undertaken by the sciences now developing. Thus the idea of the science of totality is born.

¹ Patočka, *Essais herétiques*, 297.

² Patočka, “Negativ platonizmus”, 45.

³ Patočka, *Essais herétiques*, 304.

But this idea first became the instrument of Christian theology. Patočka considers it a basic spiritual fact of Western civilization that it connected metaphysics and theology. Their interconnectedness has become so complete and final that they have always been defended or attacked together ever since. This has brought about relatively dangerous consequences, because, even if some of the faults or deficiencies of closed metaphysics are recognized, criticism will always become one-sided, directed to theological metaphysics. It is exactly what Patočka wishes to emphasize, that theology has only been one period of metaphysics, and their identification will only cover the true meaning of metaphysics.

Christian thinking regards metaphysics no more as the exploration, or even the finding of the universe, but as the instrument to rationalize faith. It also propagates the view that the world is the totality of things, which God has put at man's disposal, to rule over it and exploit its sources. Nature understood as such is not the kind to which man also belongs, but distant and strange, because it is the object of construct and conclusion.¹

Descartes has taken a new step to the deepening of closedness. Patočka re-examines him first of all in Husserl's² mirror, but in his conclusions he surpasses his master. Patočka also considers that Descartes's question is correct and appropriate, but his purpose is wrong. His purpose was to legitimate something which he thought he had already known – about God, the world, man, etc. This “previous knowledge” stopped him being radical, and thus he preserved the most important prejudice, that is, that we know who we are: things among things. In Patočka's view its consequence was the loss of the *sum*, the personal nature of existence.³ Its suspension and doubt eliminates exactly the world directly accessible to us (in Patočka's term, the natural world), and, since all its ambition is of a mathematical nature, it replaces this reality with a world which for us (or more exactly for our thinking) is only mediated by causality. Thus the world of *sum* and *cogito* are permanently

¹ *ibid.*, 308.

² Patočka's starting point is Husserl's work, *Karteziánus elmélkedések* (Cartesian meditations), Budapest: Atlantisz, 2000.

³ Patočka, “A husserli fenomenológia szubjektívizmusa és egy “aszubjektív” fenomenológia lehetősége” (The subjectivity of Husserlian phenomenology and the possibility of an “asubjective” phenomenology), *Gond* 13-14 (1997): 101-115.

divided,¹ because the phenomenological field in which the existent can appear has turned into “the structure of the subject”, or, in Patočka’s words, “thinking has gone to the detriment of existence”.²

Modern sciences are entirely in the world of the *cogito*, and thus they will sooner or later arrive to the contradiction that they need totality but they want to reach it in the form of a positive knowledge. They try to delimit themselves from metaphysics identified with theology, but in fact they only succeed to delimit themselves from old metaphysical terms, and not from closed metaphysical thinking. But theological thinking also influences them inasmuch as they recognize man as a creature who is the crown of the creation, and therefore has to rule over nature. However, sciences also gradually replace God (as an ethical forum) with the idea of a regulated and necessary material nature, which will equally prove to be a metaphysical fiction.

Nature for the mathematical natural sciences is not any more what shows itself to be, but the object of construction and experiment. Patočka takes over the criticism of their idealizing activity almost entirely from Husserl’s *Crisis*, emphasizing however that his arguments do not go against sciences, but against a worldview built upon them, which is artificial and covers man’s original attributes of life. Modern science as a closed metaphysics does not reflect upon its object’s mode of being, but it simply accepts its reality, and it accepts the world’s as well, which is not a matter of acceptance, but the condition of the existence of anything else.³ The existent is not simply there, but it is constructed by thinking, and it is part of the world of “things-in-themselves” – our everyday world is but a subjective image of that. This is how man finds himself in the situation that his world is practically doubled, his life and his thinking are divided, and this latter one is considered primary.

The world of *cogito* and *sum*

The previous chapter showed how closed metaphysics led so far that today man has a twofold world: a natural environment, and a sphere of only mentally approachable entities. The scientific worldview

¹ Patočka, “A természetes világ és a fenomenológia” (The natural world and phenomenology), in *Mi a cseh?*, 82.

² Patočka, “A husserli fenomenológia szubjektívizmusa...”, 104. In Descartes’ definition *sum* has become the existence of the *substantia cogitans*, *ego* the substratum, and *cogito* an essential attribute.

³ Patočka, Afterword for the 1970 edition of the *A természetes világ és a fenomenológia*, 121.

emphasizes the primacy of the latter, but in opposition to this Patočka argues that thinking must be reversed in order to settle again the world's original characteristic of existence. For him, this means that the problem of natural world must again be examined, and it must be revealed that our original world is not in which we think, but the one in which we live and move. He wants to call attention to the fact that we experience much more things than what we can perceive, formulate, and express.

Patočka's specific ontology will be understood in the light of his thoughts about the natural world, in which existence is revealed as movement, and which, by the critical continuation of Heidegger and Husserl, will lead to the possibility of an "asubjective phenomenology". For sake of consistency, it is important to refer first of all to the major points of Patočka's criticism of the scientific worldview, in order to understand why a return is needed, and what is its use from man's perspective.

The closedness of the scientific worldview

Patočka accepts Husserl's observations on the idealizing activity of sciences, but he also points out in an effective criticism that the scientific worldview is not only the consequence of this idealization, but other ideas have also had a role in its formation, such as theological ones.

In his work, *Az európai tudományok válsága* (The crisis of European sciences), Husserl marks as a task to unravel the original "lifeworld", forgotten by natural sciences. He accuses sciences of rendering a "pattern-world" to nature, and, since they make discoveries in this world ever greater in number and efficiency, they cover the basis of this whole process of idealization: the world of our everyday, naïve experiences. By this, sciences "clothe the world in an ideatic robe", and expect, and also attain, that we consider a real being that which is in fact a mere method. Patočka appreciates Husserl's attempt as a contribution to the liberation of man,¹ but he disagrees that modern science may have been directly created by the advancing idealization of nature. In his view metaphysics and theology also had a major role in it.

Sciences cannot answer the problem of the world as a whole without metaphysics, and, as they reject metaphysics, they become relative, and have to give up the meaning of the whole. But instead, they

¹ Patočka, "Edmund Husserl *Az európai tudományok válsága és a transzcendentális fenomenológia című műve*" (Edmund Husserl's *The crisis of European sciences and transcendental phenomenology*), *Gond* 13-14 (1997): 9-20.

create new meanings legitimized by new goals: they accept the organization of the world's accessible part in the name of "social commission"¹ (which in fact covers the rule of man as the crown of the creation). They reveal objective connections and necessities with the help of the mind, and then extend it to the subjective world.

But what is missing from a scientific worldview is precisely the living, existing man, who is excluded from the understanding of this complicated hypothetic reality and from any activity in it. Scientific worldview does not take into account the living man, only his material substratum. This is dangerous because meanwhile it boldly propagates the humanism and success of the sciences. In reality modern science has abandoned the truth with the slogan of man's well-being, success, and rule, but it succeeded in making man neither more relaxed nor more satisfied.

This worldview also contains the necessary transparency of human relations, it reckons with bound, predetermined humans who operate as machines. When science handles man as a machine, it actually proves and validates its immense greed for power, as it considers itself the master of man (there is a saying, he who only sees slaves sooner or later will consider himself their master).

In a mathematically constructed reality the seizure of the present or the deeper connections of history or the spirit cannot be described, therefore a scientific worldview denies their existence, as well as anything else it cannot reckon with. The rule of this worldview meant the rule of nihilism, that is, the denial of any values or perspectives. Consequently, in any interpretation, this is a closed world, which either stiffens man in mere formulae, or drowns him in nihilism.

In the long run, the greatest danger that the sciences afflict on man is not idealization, and not even nuclear war, but an image of the world and of man in which man is deprived from its own substance, open questioning. Both rigid formulae and nihilism hinder open questioning, and result in a "solution-centric", that is, eliminating handling of problems.

The natural world

In order to avoid misunderstandings, it is important to emphasize that man's natural world does not mean a world opposed to the scientific world, and even less a worldview. It means the original world of the living human being, as it is revealed by experience and

¹ Patočka, *Essais herétiques...*, 31.

practice, that is, the concretely experienced world. When one of Patočka's interpreters says that the Czech philosopher wants to describe the world in its innocence,¹ as it revealed itself before the sin of the scientific explanation, he only partly achieves his goal. Patočka returned to this topic several times, and has reached much further and deeper than this original view.

The subject of the natural world has witnessed an interesting development in various stages of Patočka's life. His 1936 study, *The natural world and phenomenology*, still strongly mirrors the influence of Husserlian phenomenology. But an *Afterword* to this study written in 1970, as well as the *Heretical essays in the philosophy of history* already show a change in the approach, which may be due partly to the Husserl-criticism carried out in the meantime, and partly to Heidegger's influence. Comparing these writings, it appears that Patočka considered and revised the questions raised in 1936 in a deeper and more radical manner. No matter how Patočka's relation to the problem of the natural world changed, it always maintained the core and essence of the problem, the concept of life as movement. What is more, it can also be argued that it was precisely his ontology of movement that led to the revision of his views on the natural world. The following short presentation will be mostly based on the *Afterword*, emphasizing those points in which Patočka has moved on since 1936.

In the article "A természetes világ és a fenomenológia" (The natural world and phenomenology) Patočka aims at unfolding in an absolute reflection the world experienced by man in its originality and richness, and describe it phenomenologically. This unfolding meant for him to search for, and grasp an invariable which is common in all modalities (and all ages) of human life.

In the *Heretical essays* Patočka considers this search for an invariable impossible precisely as a phenomenologist.² For this, his "asubjective phenomenology" had to be completely crystallized and mature beforehand. He arrived to the conclusion that the human world is indeed the world of phenomena, but not of subjective phenomena. It is not us who create the phenomena, not even if they could not exist without us, and thus they are only accessible for an open attitude, that is, only if we allow them to reveal themselves. This open attitude is necessarily temporal and historical, and it is in continuous movement. Therefore

¹ Roger Scruton, "Masaryc, Patočka, és a lélek gondozása" (Masaryk, Patočka, and the care of the soul), *Gond* 13-14 (1997): 251-264.

² *ibid.*, 259.

there is no sense in a discoverable, invariable natural world, because in the human discoveries of existence there are always new historical worlds appearing. And every historical world is natural, only some activities and the worldviews built thereupon are artificial, because they are not grounded on phenomena but on constructs of the mind.

In the 1970 *Afterword* Patočka completely rejects the reflection that he posited in his first article, and states that phenomenological reduction is not a gate to the absolute. He has obviously turned away from Husserl. The way to the natural world is not open by contemplation, but by reflection as a constituent part of praxis, because it is not our theoretical curiosity which leads us, but our lives, the things, and the search for our own meaning. Our natural world reveals itself from human practice. Here he reformulates the problem of the natural world by saying that a new concept must be found for the relation of man and material being on the basis of which one can understand both their individual attributes of life, and their mutual interdependence. The natural world in itself means therefore the encounter of existence closed up within itself and the open man. By being aware of his finiteness, man always exists in the totality of its being, in the happening existence which appears and conceals at the same time. It was probably Heidegger's "ontological turn"¹ which occasioned Patočka's endeavor to enlarge the ontology of life to the ontology of the world. Patočka's aim became to radically change Aristotle's concept of movement (movement as the accomplished *dynamis*) into the movement of the original life – which will "create its own unity, as well as that of moving things."²

Man's natural world does not have to be and indeed cannot be phenomenologically described. But it must be opened and must be experienced. This opening is made possible only by human practice, that is, a practice which completes itself, and is at the same time temporality and movement. Patočka's asubjective phenomenology is directed to precisely this opening.

¹ Patočka calls Heidegger's view an "ontological turn" because in his opinion Heidegger perceives existence as a notion of an ontological importance, and the level of phenomenology not as our exteriorization, but as a "field" which must be presupposed as the basis of any clarity. Cf. Patočka: "Mi az egzisztencia?" (What is existence?), *Gond* 13-14 (1997): 81-100.

² *ibid.*, 160.

The ontology of movement

The natural world which has to be opened is the world of movement, or more exactly the movement of a being within the world. However, this movement is not a human work, but a preceding way of openness, which is human existence itself. One of Patočka's most important conclusions is that existence as movement is essentially physical, that is, it is always situated. This situatedness, or in other words, directedness enables us to be open to things. Situatedness is not the object of experience, but neither is it nothing, because it contains a horizon. Being directed therefore is the same thing as existing, being open to the whole, which is not some sort of substantiality, but movement.

Directedness also means that our world carries the marks of the relations by which we meet it. Therefore any knowledge formed *about the world* (whether practical or theoretical) is at the same time a knowledge formed *in the world*, so it is connected to the circumstances in which it was acquired.

Openness means that existence must be allowed to appear in its movement and finiteness. It cannot be discovered or defined what 'I am' (*sum*), because this would be the same kind of objectification that natural sciences use. But man is real, he accomplishes and fulfills himself.

There has already been reference to the fact that Patočka's concept of movement was influenced by Aristotle's concept of movement. For Aristotle, movement is a transition from possibility to reality. This is why Patočka says that movement is the realm of the possible, and existence is being present in the possibilities. In this sense existence is not substance, as to be does not mean to be given, but to choose ourselves and our possibilities. The basic attribute in man's personal being is again not substantiality but movement – this is what Patočka's analysts call the standpoint of phenomenological dynamism,¹ or the ontology of movement.² It is also clear that this approach has been influenced by Heidegger's ontology as well.

The movement of existence is implicitly a temporal movement as well. But temporality is again not something given, but it comes into being in the various modes of movement. The original temporality and historicity of existence defines the three different movements of existence, that is, the three types of movement resulted from the different modes of temporality's "coming into being". He examines these in

¹ Cf. Balázs Mezei, "Patočka és Brentano" (Patočka and Brentano), in idem, *A Lélek és a Másik* (The Soul and the Other), Budapest: Atlantisz, 1998.

² Cf. Cristin, "A világ mint mozgás és egzisztencia".

several places and under several names; the various movements form one of the most original subject of his philosophy.¹ In order to avoid misunderstandings, it must be stated from the very beginning that the differentiation of the three movements does not mean a delimitation of time-intervals or phases, as all the three are original movements of existence.

The first movement can most properly be called **rooting**. Life, before everything else, is necessarily a rooted life, and the rooting happens by other people. This movement creates intimacy and home, protection and warmth, which we passively accept. By this, the essentially inexhaustible totality is revealed, but in such a way that in all our encounters with the Exterior we are dependent on other beings. By them, a certain “external interior” is developed, which protects against all threats of the real exterior by obscuring and concealing the dangers. As a result, we feel completely free and infinite.

Life finds itself in the most intimate line, it is accepted, and it accepts its environment, but this entering and adaptation does not become conscious, man “falls” into the world. It gradually steps into “the active clash with the whole world”, in the world of labor, where it wants to prevail independently and without support. But this settling (anchorage) does not end with the individual’s independence. It is precisely after this that we feel the greatest need (now already consciously) to be accepted, and not to close ourselves up into our solitude.

The second movement is **prolonging**, the work and the struggle. It is created by the changed meaning of this anchorage and the relation to it. The independent individual must secure his own protection and must create the conditions for his survival. This is the relation to the eternal present, when we only see the things, and we even regard other people as means to achieve our goals. Our own goal is the prolonging of ourselves and our mere being. But we only see ourselves as a definite function and role, that is, losing the sight of ourselves, we are dissipated in the things, we only reckon with the givens. We get into a “system”, which mutually consigns, objectifies, and uses us and other as well. Our relationship to things is determined by work, and our relationship to people by struggle. This is the sphere of the eternal present because man lives here from moment to moment, and thus he crushes everything, he produces repetitions and reproductions, which merely serve the continuation of life. Patočka calls this movement “labyrinthic”, also adding that in the modern

¹ See the *A természetes világ és a fenomenológia*, “Utószó”, *Essais herétiques...*, and other writings.

man's world this is the ruling sense of life.¹ It was the achievement and functioning of this movement which led to the scientific worldview and its dominance. But this also means that it was not necessary for man to arrive at this point, but his existence contained this possibility, and he accomplished it. Still, the outbreak from this nihilism is also a possibility for him.

Any role can only be shattered if faced with the future, with our death and finiteness. This is a **rupture** into the third movement. Patočka repeatedly emphasizes this rupture, which balances the other two movements, and keeps them running as mere possibilities of human existence, and not as its complete reality. Facing finiteness means an open relation to existence and to the universe. Distancing ourselves from the things and accepting ourselves does not mean the losing of the world, but it leads exactly to its true discovery – we recognize also its problematic nature, its infinity and mysteriousness. It is easy thus to draw the conclusion that the third movement is manifestation and emergence of openness itself. By the achievement of this possibility life becomes infinite in the sense that it lives beyond itself, in the search for the truth.

The nature of the third movement also reveals that in fact this is the dimension of open metaphysics. And the so often emphasized negative enlightening power of this metaphysics – which derives from the negativity of the experience which grounds it – hinders us to accept the mystical interpretation of this third movement,² because, when Patočka defines the third movement as “rupture”, this does not mean a rupture into another sphere of existence, nor unifying with the truth, nor the end of thinking, nor anything else that would be mysticism. The rupture goes from the unproblematized world towards the search for the truth. But it is not a space where a man reaches or in which he finds himself. It means existence on our own limits, oriented beyond them, and not their transgression. A mystical reading would deprive the third movement precisely of its openness, and by this also the philosophy born in this dimension, because if one thinks to have found the truth in a mystical experience, then one will give up searching for it. A further argument is that Patočka himself rejected mysticism, and, although he did not justify his rejection in details, he referred to the fact that he considered the appeal for mysticism a solution too easy and closed, actually a kind of escape, which cannot be reconciled with a brave acceptance of sacrifice

¹ Patočka, “Utószó”, 174.

² See Mezei, “A három mozgás és a jó ideája” (The three movements and the idea of good), in *A Lélek és a Másik*.

(as an ethical dimension of the third movement). It also proves Patočka's reservations connected to mysticism that in the *Heretical essays* he considers the mysticism of demonic ecstasy as the avoidance of responsibility, and at the same time the rejection of freedom.

It is a motif defining Patočka's entire philosophy that he also sheds light on the ethical dimension of the third movement. Because in this movement we do not simply accept ourselves, but also accept openness and devotion. Existence can only lend itself to the Other – we become ourselves in an unconditioned love in such a way that meanwhile we do not deprive the Other of his own self. That what Patočka has called the love of transcendence at the birth of metaphysics, now reveals an ethical dimension in a new meaning of transcendence. The result of the open relationship and communication of existences will be a community which grows beyond individual things, that is, transcendence.¹ And only this can be the basis of any acceptance of sacrifice, of the possibility of a universal life.

From this short presentation of the movements the conclusion can be drawn that our life always moves in the whole, and thus it relates to the whole. This is of course not an absolute movement, but the movement of the perspective by orientation. The whole we are speaking about is in fact nothing else than the continuity of perspectives. Here it is again emphasized that we always reach from one perspective to the other, but never outside them. Patočka's ontology of movement can be summarized by the formulation that the world and man are in a mutual movement in relation to each other.

The character of the third movement decisively defines Patočka's whole philosophy. This is where a way is opened to man, more precisely this means openness itself. Openness in Patočka's eyes (also) has a moral core, thus can it become the guideline of an actually experienced life. The life experienced in openness expresses that life is risk and sacrifice, by the acceptance of our finite freedom. This is expressed in its entirety by a typically Patočkian idea, the "care for the soul", which offers a possibility to not only guard the authentic roots of metaphysics, but also develop it further towards a practical philosophy.

However, Heidegger's "existentialism" has given an impulse to the practical and ethical dimensions of Patočka's thought as well. In the *Utószó* he says that only the *Dasein* described by Heidegger is a reality which is really active, because only the activity of the *Dasein* is such that it involves all beings not only in their reality, but also reveals their

¹ *Utószó*, 178.

existence. And the revelation of the being as such means the transgression of its own limits. Consequently all human activities are open with reference to the being and his existence, and as such, activity according to Patočka can be defined as responsible movement.¹

The care for the soul and the principle of open activity

In order for open metaphysics and the ontology of movement to be able to work as a practical philosophy by the care of the soul, it is necessary to recognize and productively follow the idea that the experience of transcendence is at the same time the experience of freedom. In this stands the relation of metaphysics and a free human community in Patočka's philosophy. This meant the roots of open metaphysics, and also the realization of the movement of "rupture". Furthermore, it is only freedom which can ground man's responsibility and active participation in the world by his activity. The experience of freedom will become the basis of the care for the soul, which has not only a personal, but also a community dimension as well.

Openness as freedom and responsibility

One of the basic abilities of man is linguistic and empirical anticipation, which are the expressions of the fact that man is not strongly bound to that what is materially given, but can keep a distance from it. This is his openness going beyond sensory data, and the experience of this openness means the experience of freedom. However, the experience of freedom is an essentially negative experience, because by the distance it maintains from things, it is beyond any real being. That is, it is nothing else than the experience of transcendence.²

One can see thus that the common root of "metaphysical disposition" and human freedom is precisely this negative experience. So everything that Patočka has already stated about the negative experience of transcendence is also valid for the experience of freedom. For Patočka, Socrates was the symbol of openness, and he will also be the symbol of complete freedom.

The experience of freedom is basically made up of negative experiences, the collisions with our own limits. The open relation to the world as a whole can only be the result of a perspective which is not achieved by reason, but by life, when "it collides with the hard cornerstones of its limits" and is overwhelmed by these limits. But most people

¹ *ibid.*, 161.

² Cf. Patočka, "Negativ platonizmus".

do not experience (thus) this negative experience, so the question rises whether such an interpretation of freedom is not too aristocratic. Or another question, that perhaps it is not even a general human attribute, but only refers to those who do not have to directly struggle for subsistence. Patočka's answer to this is that the possibility of freedom refers to man as such, because everybody has "some kind of experience" of freedom.¹ The distance kept from things, the anticipation of language and experience, or even scientific explanation can only derive from the possibility of freedom, as also any human creation.

Freedom is thus a possibility which can be either achieved or not, and depending on it, Patočka examines in his various writings and in various notional contexts what the understanding of the experience of freedom means from the perspective of human life. This is the context also of the first two movements, of balance and amplitude, of daytime and night-time relating, of the differentiation between closed and open soul.

Closed metaphysics created the idea of man living a balanced life. This image claims that man is a being with a consistent form of life. This concept is a "daytime" one, optimistic, rationalizing, and if the promised harmony does not come to life, then it will be considered not the fault of the idea, but that of reality. All this happens because the real heights of his existence are actually concealed from man, he is turned away from his finiteness, and is offered an artificial, deceiving shelter.

The open man living in amplitude has to recognize first of all that he is free, that he has the possibility to be more or less that what he seems. This is also the recognition of the fact that he only got into a closed state by falling. The philosophy of amplitude escapes from timid mediocrity,² experiences freedom, collides with his own limits, and tries not to escape from them, but boldly goes towards them. Man becomes free in the deepest sense of the word if he accepts his limits, because thus he accepts danger and risk.

Patočka's asubjectivity comes to life here too, when he calls attention to the fact that man is merely the "place" of the experience of freedom, but only man is not enough for this experience. As the experience of the senses is a witness for the universe of the material being, the experience of freedom also witnesses something, only negatively – something which is past all materiality and being, that is, concealment. In this sense the experience of freedom is the call of

¹ *ibid.*, 59.

² Cf. Patočka, "Az élet egyensúlya és amplitudója", 32.

transcendence to man for the transgression of mere materialities. This is why he would like to turn the Idea, which he understands negatively, into the symbol of freedom, in order to avoid subjectivism.¹ This freedom manifests itself in distancing, but this distancing does not mean the rejection of reality, neither the withdrawal from it, but it is exactly the experience of our freedom which brings the possibility of a responsible relation to reality.²

Elsewhere Patočka expresses the life in amplitude by the notion of the open soul. The first, self-creating act of the open soul is for its own finiteness the discovery and acceptance of the “abyss of nothing”. Self-rendition can only be the attribute of the open soul, in which it finds its own self (the third movement). The soul is thus open inasmuch as its center will be outside itself after the opening: it will actually find itself when it transcends and conveys itself, that is, when it gives up closure into itself.³ The closed soul marks man’s infatuation when, although being aware of the world and of himself from the beginning, sees neither of them as they are, but as he wishes or considers them necessary to be. This kind of relation covers a superficial interest, and leads to closedness.

Richard Rorty characterizes the experience of freedom described by Patočka as a “jump into darkness”.⁴ Perhaps it would be more accurate to say: “a jump from behind cover”. Its result is an animated, initiatory and responsible life. Responsibility means that we accept that what we must always do for ourselves: confrontation with our own death. We do not expect or accept that some external force or explanation would “free” us. We opened up our own possibilities by our freedom, but at the same time we opened up the world for ourselves, and so we are responsible for it.⁵

It is true that the basis of the openness was the concealment of the being, but the discovery of something transcendent in a negative experience means not only the discovery of otherness, but by it man can become a being who takes over the responsibility for that of which he was not the cause, his life. Refusing this responsibility would mean refusing freedom. Because the experience of freedom does not aim at

¹ Patočka, “Negatív platonizmus”, 67.

² Patočka, *Európa és az Európa utáni kor* (Europe and the age after Europe), Pozsony: Kalligram, 2001, 16.

³ Patočka, “Comenius és a nyitott lélek” (Comenius and the open soul), in *Mi a cseh?*, 153.

⁴ Rorty, “Jan Patočka”.

⁵ *Essais herétiques...*, 284.

facilitating life, but calls our attention that we cannot free ourselves from responsibility.

Freedom is not a thing to be possessed or to be acquired, but a permanent struggle and openness. A being which is free in this sense always stands at the borderline of being and non-being, a permanent “being-on-the-border”. Manifestation of freedom is thus man’s “eternal metaphysical struggle” for the meaning of the totality of the world, that is, open metaphysics, but at the same time also politics. By these two manifestations of his freedom does man create history.¹

In the so much quoted *Afterword*, Patočka calls the motif of natural world “ontologically weightier” than the world of natural sciences, because it is in this that the primacy of praxis, freedom and responsibility are realized. In the light of those discussed above a conclusion may be drawn, that it is only possible to speak about a free and responsible human activity, that is, active life, if we transcend the subjective center marked by Husserl, if we draw the “I” into the world, and the world into the “I”, as this is the basis of both our freedom and responsibility.

The care of the soul

The previous chapter concluded that for Patočka the movement of rupture is possible in fact as manifestation of our freedom. But the presentation of the movements also revealed that the third movement has an ethical dimension as well. Eliminating his dispersion in things, man regards the other not as an object, but as a possible “I”. He steps outside himself and becomes an open soul by giving himself over to the other in a free decision. The “closed soul” opens up thus not only by himself, but rather by the other, and this opening will be the basis of all moral activity. The ethical expression of the third movement in Patočka’s thought is the care for the soul, or in other words, the attendance of the soul. The presentation of Patočka’s thought has already shown that the care for the soul cannot only mean self-orientation, since there is no self-orientation which would not be oriented at the world, and beyond its own self at the same time.²

¹ Patočka, “A cseh nemzet filozófia megteremtésének kísérlete és sikertelensége” (The attempt and unsuccessfulness of the creation of Czech national philosophy), in *Mi a cseh?*, 226.

² Patočka, “Az értelmiségi és az ellenzéki” (The intellectual and the maverick), in *A jelenkor értelme*, 24.

The care of the soul is a much re-interpreted Patočkian idea derived from Greek tradition.¹ Despite the terminological similarity, it is not connected to Heidegger's concept of care (*Sorge*)—caring—taking care, as the attendance of the soul expresses rather that the truth is not something given and fixed, but an examination spreading over a lifetime, a self-controlling thinking and praxis.² The soul in Patočka's concept is not understood by the classical dichotomy of body and soul, but it is rather a symbol. It is the expression of that which is related with the immortal, infinite part of the world – this does not mean that the soul should be immortal or infinite since its connection to transcendence happens by negative experiences.

However, the care of the soul is not an abstract formula, but it refers back to concrete life, in which man reclines upon something radically foreign, and depends on the Other about both his rooting in the world, and in his finding itself. In his lifetime, thus, man is in “a basically eccentric relation with himself”.³ The care for the soul can express this because it does not only mean man's attention towards himself. Perhaps the hypothesis can be launched that Patočka has chosen this formula because its very rich field of meaning leads back to Greek traditions, when man could imagine a harmonious life only within the polis, and when the ideal structure of the republic was conceived on the basis of the structure of the soul, and its rule achieved on the basis of the care of the soul. Therefore the care of the soul has not only a personal, but also a community dimension. And for Patočka, it always refers to a Socratic attitude, the essential element of which, besides openness, was also the acceptance of sacrifice.

In Patočka's lifework it is first of all the *Európa és az Európa utáni kor* which can be regarded a writing of “the care for the soul”. The whole work is built upon the idea that Europe was originally created by the care for the soul. Naturally, he is aware that it seems far-fetched to find one single principle behind a historical existence, and all such attempts “will stumble behind reality”, but he accepts this in order to call the attention anew on questions. This warning is needed because of the

¹ László Csák draws the attention on the double origin of the care of the soul: the Aristotelian concept of the soul, and the Platonic care of the soul. See Csák, “Szabadság és egység...”, 164.

² Patočka, “Európa és az európai örökség a XIX. század végéig” (Europe and European tradition until the end of the 19th century), *Vigilia* 5 (1995): 134-179.

³ Philippe Despoix, “Hagyomány és eretnkség” (Tradition and heresy), *Gond* 13-14 (1997): 217-223, 220.

recognition that the care for the soul has now been changed for the cult of possession. And this has resulted in a prevailing nihilism, because it contains no ethical instances. So nihilism for Patočka expresses the unity of any kind of crisis, or that the roots of any political, social, or scientific crises are actually ethical.¹ Ethical concession is part of the relation to totality, because it means an elevation beyond ourselves, by which man “can find more in himself than he has ever hoped for”.²

It is only one dimension of the care for the soul when man’s relationship to the universe is guided by the search for the truth. This relationship means contemplation, and does not yet leave place for activity. Or, what is more, in searching for the truth it may seem right to give up for example the family or politics. But if that were the case, then the soul would not move towards freedom, but towards a new boundary: closing up within itself.

The Athenian polis was needed in order for the care of the soul to be perfected. The traditional standpoint of the Greek polis was to punish those who refused to take a stand in political matters. Such was the context in which the care of the soul could have been formed in a way which led to a community dimension.

Naturally, Patočka refers again to Socrates’ symbolic person when he sees the accomplishment of the unity of life and contemplation in the care for the soul. He also avers that Plato’s *The Republic* could not have been born had Plato not taken Socrates as the “measure of the truth of the polis”. Socrates fights against blindness by continuous questioning, discussion, “midwifery” (*maieutike*). The care of his soul is thus at the same time the care of the community’s soul, and the two are inseparable. Socrates does not meditate but he talks instead, and that his discussions have had an effect over the community is proved also by the naïve accusations brought against him.³ These imply the recognition that Socrates’ “cared-for soul” must live in a different community than that which exists. But of course they understand his criticism not as assistance, but as abuse.

Socrates’ message is in fact that thinking is not a speculative, self-sufficient contemplation, but an activity by which man deals with

¹ See Balázs Mezei, “Thraszümakhosz és Szókratész – Patočka, a lélek gondozása és az etikai antropológia megalapozása” (Trasymachos and Socrates – Patočka, the care for the soul, and the foundation of ethical anthropology), *Gond* 13-14 (1997): 224-250.

² Patočka, *Európa és az Európa utáni kor*, 51.

³ *ibid.*, 83.

himself, and by himself with his community. That is, we care for the soul not in order to acquire knowledge, but we can acquire any kind of knowledge because we care for the soul.¹ The care for the soul is in fact a questioning, examining, reflecting movement of the soul. And movement is reality, therefore the care of the soul must be grasped by deeds.

Socratic questioning is an act in the sense that it shatters that self-confidence and assertiveness on which the functioning of publicity is based. They could not put up with it, this is why they had to execute him. But he left as inheritance the idea of the polis renovated in a Socratic spirit, which Plato tried to apply in his theory of the republic.

If we recognize the openness of thinking as peculiar to the existence in truth, then the openness of the act can be recognized as peculiar to history. Because open activity comes from the recognition that history is not an ended process. It is not contemplation but responsibility, our responsibility, since its openness always depends on us. Open act is that which questions rigid givenness, and thus makes it accessible for political activity. So it is not thinking to which Patočka opposes activity, but barren ideas void of problems or commitments, that is, such a thinking which is not an act at the same time. To take care of the human soul means for Patočka also to “confess to history”.²

Open activity also means political activity, but Socrates’ negation and doubt in themselves would have only led to denial and not change, had it not been coupled with sacrifice. It was the exemplary power of his deed that changed the previous state of mind. It was the sacrifice that changed the care of his soul into an ethical and political act. This is in fact a sacrifice made for something superior, for transcendence which Patočka has defined as a community based on solidarity and communication.

Several people have questioned whether such a “political Socratism” would be a real solution for the existential and ethical crisis revealed by Patočka.³ Patočka, just like Socrates, has doubtlessly confessed to his conviction, but his sacrifice has remained too isolated nonetheless, and has proved too little as compared to the depth of nihilism he has diagnosed. But his message should probably not be understood as expecting everybody to sacrifice their lives for their communities, and he never says any such thing indeed. He argues for an active, complete life, not for death, even when speaking about sacrifice. It

¹ *ibid.*, 86.

² Scruton, “Masaryk, Patočka, és a lélek gondozása”, 260.

³ This is how Paul Ricoeur calls Patočka’s ideas about political activity.

is not a martyr's death that he considers the cure of nihilism, but a life that answers reality and its problems by activity. Patočka calls such a man man of spirit, who transcends nihilism by always finding a solution due to his openness, and he is unwilling to regard himself and others as screws in a huge machine.¹

The chances of an open metaphysics

The significance of Patočka's thought is thus not confined merely to his being one of the most original interpreters of Husserl and Heidegger. His interest is the way in which the openness of human existence can transform or be transformed into a many-sided life. He does not content himself with a well thought-out philosophical theory, which would mean nothing for the practice of life. He wanted a philosophy that one can live by. His life and death proves that his ambitions were not useless; he succeeded in finding such a philosophy.

Patočka repeatedly stressed that today's philosophy must begin (or continue) with a turn; a *metanoia* is needed for the transgression of European nihilism. One must "return" to the spiritual context that preceded nihilism and all the causes that brought about it. This means the discovery and acceptance of that authentic openness which once compelled man to metaphysical questioning. It is open metaphysics that should be guarded, the meaning of the universe as a question.

The freedom of the never-ending search, the ability to permanently reintegrate his own limits without ever stiffening into any delimitation belongs to the essence of man. It is his own limits that shape man, he becomes what he is by these, but he always has to keep in mind that the shape cannot be rigid if he permanently orientates himself beyond his limits.

The philosophy that guards complete openness can only be metaphysics because it always has to ask beyond any actual being, and perhaps even beyond "his actual self". But it is a mistake to believe that questioning will directly lead man to something eternal and divine. The questioning of open metaphysics will show us the way only negatively and indirectly. In fact, we must step on the way of questioning and remain on it in such a way that we instantly subject all answers and results to further questioning. Questioning must happen with a repeated severity.²

¹ In his "Az értelmiségi és az ellenzéki" (The intellectual and the maverick) Patočka sets it as a task for an intellectual to become a man of spirit.

² Cf. Patočka, *Európa és az Európa utáni kor*, 85.

In order for openness not to become a mere niggling, permanent questioning must not be understood as an unproductive negation; instead it must be a responsible activity. By questioning, something must be searched, and the search is not based on the negation of the given existence, but on the possibility of a different existence, otherwise it will only seemingly be a search. That is, the search cannot be aimless, but the aim should not be the arrival, but the permanent being-on-the-way. Patočka expresses this by saying that in the searching soul the aim is present in the form of a spark, as a light urging itself.¹

Therefore a peculiar feature of open philosophy is renouncement. It renounces to claim the truth to itself, because it recognizes that man is not equal with existence and he cannot fully comprehend it. But he can be on his way to the truth, and the possibility of glimpsing the existence as a human can only open to him while remaining on the way. One of Patočka's analysts understood from Patočka's philosophy the crisis nature of the being-in-the-world, that is, the necessity of the crisis.² But it must be emphasized that the necessity of the crisis does not mean to remain in the crisis, but the necessity of remaining open. Openness rejects comfortable answers because it does not let himself be deceived by them. It does not accept the explanations promising to ease life and thus it means a life in constant danger, this is what crisis refers to. As a condition of openness, one must be aware of what the philosophy of movements refers to, that the possible and the real are interdependent, because any reality contains the possibility of "in a different way", and any possibility means exactly the possibility of its own accomplishment.

However, open metaphysics will not only have a theoretical significance, but in the spirit of Patočka it must turn into a practical philosophy. Open metaphysics must be transformed into a basic human way of life, a philosophy of life for the "man of spirit". This is possible if thinking, putting its openness into application, breaks out of nihilism, and will manifest itself in activity, in the search for solutions, and in sacrifice, that is, if it cares for its soul, but not as an end in itself and not merely inwardly, but in the community in which it exists.

Closed forms of metaphysics has meant the easier way for man as they sought the truth in a world created by themselves, and frozen into silent forms. But in opposition to this the frightening movement of life is

¹ Cf. *ibid.*, 88.

² See Pavel Kouba, "A krízis szükségességéről" (On the necessity of the crisis), *Kellék* 22 (2002): 43-54.

difficult, it is hard to genuinely know ourselves and our fellow humans, and it is hard to adequately relate to them. Still, we must search the truth here, in this movement of life, and not merely by contemplation and meditation, but actively and responsibly.

Furthermore, sciences also need an open philosophy that respects them but also reveals their limits. It must mark the particularity, temporariness, and pragmatics of scientific results; it must show that knowledge as power cannot be applied to the universe. It calls attention to the fact that any kind of revelation can reveal itself only with the Nothing as background, and thus any light given or hoped to be given by the sciences is at the same time a reference to that what is the necessary correlation of any light: concealment. To point out the limits of sciences is again not an end in itself, instead it intends to increase the flexibility of sciences, so that by this the sciences may transform into responsible “disputing sciences”,¹ as Patočka calls it.

Others have also recognized that Patočka’s thinking is not only a philosophy of praxis, but it comes up precisely “with the promise of practice in the world”, and this is the emphasis that lends its humanism, and distinguishes it from its masters.²

And precisely this has been the task of the present paper by the revision of the various manifestations of openness: from the openness of existence through the openness of the soul to the openness of the actual life, that is, interpreting open metaphysics in such a way that the ontology of movement, asubjective phenomenology, and the philosophy of a rich and active life may equally find a productive ground in it.

¹ Patočka, “Az általános erkölcs és a tudós erkölce” (General morals and the morals of the scientist), in *A jelenkor értelme*, 47.

² Cf. Srubar, “A szubjektív fenomenológia...”, 271.