

Movement and Human Existence: *Mysterium of Mundanity – Whence to Where*

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This work develops a few simple ideas demanding a rather complex manner of exposition and demonstration.¹

‘This – is now *my* way: where is yours?’ Thus I answered those who asked me ‘the way.’ For *the* way – does not exist!²

Jan Patočka’s reflections on movement begin with his analysis of the changes in our understanding of the world and nature. Difficult as it is to grasp today, our present understanding is a consequence of the Galilean reconceptualisation of movement, whereby the explanation of the Ancient Kosmos and the place of humans in it was radically changed. We still live under the shadow of a new scientific understanding that was first given its theoretical exactitude by René Descartes.³ Descartes based his system on the split of the world into *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, thereby instituting a new conceptual understanding of nature and our possibility to know it, which was supposed to eliminate mystery from the world by explaining it scientifically. Patočka’s synchronic and diachronic conversation with the Western philosophical tradition, and, in particular, Aristotle, leads him to wrestle the idea of movement from the encrustation of its subsequent, scientific, reconfiguration. He explores movement within a different conceptual framework, namely, his conception of the three movements of human existence.⁴ In this paper, I will consider his reflections on movement and human existence by using his earlier article on Josef Čapek, “Limping Pilgrim” [“Kulhavý Poutník Josef Čapek”].⁵ I will also take into account Patočka’s invocation of the mystery of the mundanity [*mysterium samozřejmosti*] that we habitually overlook.⁶

Patočka’s question concerning human existence is set against the background of modern scientific objectivism. How can we rethink the modern problematic split of the world into subject and object?

¹ Patočka, "Přirozený Svět Jako Filosofický Problém", *Fenomenologické Spisy I: Přirozený Svět. Texty z Let 1931 - 1949* (Praha: Oikoymenh, Filosofia, 2008 [1936]), 127-260, 129, trans. Erika Abrams.

² Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), Part 3, 11, Of the Spirit of Gravity, italics in original

³ See, for example, Burt, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Physical Science: A Historical and Critical Essay* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd [Bibliolife], 1925).

⁴ See, for example, Patočka, "Přirozený Svet a Fenomenológia", ed. Bodnár, *Existencializmus a Fenomenológia* (Bratislava: Obzor, 1967), 27-71; Patočka, "Co je Existence?", *Filosofický Časopis* 1969, 682-70; Patočka, "Celeg Světa a Svět Člověka: (Poznámky k Jednomu Současnému Náběhu ke Kosmologii)", *Filosofický Časopis* 1990, 729-3; Patočka, "Přirozený Svět' v Meditaci Svěho Autora po Třiatřiceti Letech", *Přirozený Svět Jako Filosofický Problém* (Praha: Československý Spisovatel, 1992), 167-25; Patočka, *Tělo, Společenství, Jazyk, Svět* (Praha: ISE, Oikoymenh, Edice Oikúmené, ve spolupráci s Archivem Jana Patočky, 1995). See also Kouba, *Problém Třetího Pohybu: Na Okraj Patočkova Pojetí Existence* (Praha: Center for Theoretical Study, 2003).

⁵ Patočka, "Kulhavý Poutník Josef Čapek", eds. Vojtěch and Chvatík, *Umění a Čas: Soubor Statí, Přednášek a Poznámek k Problému Umění. Publikované Studie* (Praha: Oikoymenh, 2004), 137-58

⁶ See Patočka, "K Prehistorii Vědy o Pohybu: Svět, Země, Nebe a Pohyb Lidského Života", *Fenomenologické Spisy II: Co je Existence. Publikované Texty z Let 1965 - 1977* (Praha: Oikoymenh, Filosofia, 2009 [1965]), 192-201.

For him, this is a question concerning meaning. Only by reflecting on the way we constitute meaning, do we realise that our everyday understanding ‘hides’ mysteries that are not naive or simple, but require much work to unravel.

Mysterium of Mundanity

Patočka’s reflections on what he calls a “mystery of the commonplace”⁷ move (at least) in three directions. First, he considers the way we constitute meaning, reminding us that we simply take for granted non-sensual experience as if it was experience of things in the world. Things are not out there, simply lying in front of us, open to our gaze. Neither do they cause, or rather create, a mirror image, so to speak, in our minds. We do not realize our unquestioned acceptance of the Cartesian conception of the world, whereby our thinking is in our ‘head’ and the world is out-there, standing opposite us. We are accustomed to this understanding because we have grown up in a world that is already structured according to the Cartesian split between *res extensa* and *res cogitans*, which was further transformed by the Lockean extension of it, according to which our mind is *tabula rasa* on which experiences of things imprint themselves in the form of simple ideas. Originally, we accept the world as mundane and obvious, populated by things that ‘exist’ separately from us that, eventually, we encounter. Yet, what is obvious at first glance hides mysteries of meaning that Edmund Husserl calls empty and fulfilled intuitions. Things are neither simply there, waiting for us to experience them, nor are they ideas imprinted on our mind. The reflection on the structure of our experience reveals that we do not see things as if they were, supposedly, beings outside of us. Husserl shows that we are ignorant of our participation in the constitution of meaning, unaware that we always see more than what we are actually presented with, given the movement of our bodies among things.

One of the ways Patočka thinks about meaning constitution is through movement. Things reveal and conceal themselves depending on our bodily position in relation to them. We move near a thing or far away from it, thereby seeing it differently. Things are given to us in a perspective that depends on the position of our bodies.⁸ The empty intuition of a thing far away can be fulfilled by confirming our initial impression if we move closer, or it could be frustrated if what we thought

⁷ Patočka, "K Prehistorii Vědy o Pohybu: Svět, Země, Nebe a Pohyb Lidského Života", *Fenomenologické Spisy II: Co je Existence. Publikované Texty z Let 1965 - 1977* (Praha: Oikoymenh, Filosofie, 2009 [1965]), 192-201, 194

⁸ “Domnívám se však, že existuje mezi pohybem objektivizovaným a pohybem našeho života jisté společenství, které právě dovoluje, abychom o obojím užívali téhož výrazu: obojí skutečně probíhá mezi věcmi, obojí je *tělesné*. Pohyb našeho života je ve svých nejnápadnějších složkách tělesný pohyb. Jedině na základě pohybu svého těla a v jeho souvislosti můžeme pochopit vněmový styk s věcmi – nikdy to není pasivní zrcadlení předmětů, nýbrž odpověď činně se orientujícímu já, kterému tuto akci umožňuje vláda tělem, které je si každý subjekt bezprostředně vědom. Jedním z velkých nedostatků empiristické psychologie v starší době bylo nepřihlížení k tomu, že vněm není jen *doprovázen* pohybu, nýbrž že je jejich součástí, ba sám že je pohyb – je to prostě objektivistický, mechanistický pojem pohybu, kterého se tato psychologie nedovedla zbavit” (Patočka, "K Prehistorii Vědy o Pohybu", 194, italics in original).

from afar turns out to be something else on closer inspection. We continually need to rethink what we thought we saw. All the time, we modify our meaningful understanding of things. Yet, we do not think about our involvement in meaning constitution, we simply accept this mystery of the commonplace because we are unquestioningly accustomed to it, precisely because it is commonplace.

Patočka's second approach is to think about the whole that is the background to all our understanding. Eugen Fink points out that "we take the world as the totality of entities in an utterly questionless way and as altogether obvious".⁹ Accordingly, Patočka notes that the world is not a super-container holding within itself earthly things. But neither is it a super object. We simply cannot experience the world as a whole, because it is not a thing among other things. Instead, the world as a whole is an overall horizon that informs our understanding of things. It is the historically saturated horizon, within which we experience things and which we presuppose, oblivious to the mystery of our historically informed sense. We take for granted that lightning during a thunderstorm is an electrical discharge and not a display of Zeus' anger. Our understanding is shaped by ideas we have grown up with.

So, another mystery is our forgetfulness of the historical sedimentation of ideas. We accept them unquestioningly, forgetting another mystery that we need to unravel. Patočka notes, for example, Johann Gottfried von Herder's intellectual exchange with Immanuel Kant on the notion of reason. He points out that Herder's critique is more complicated than a simple misunderstanding of Kant, of which Herder is accused. Herder and Kant speak of reason, but their ideas of what reason is differ. In fact, as Patočka points out, they are not compatible. Herder speaks of the old idea of divine reason that the modern conception of nature made untenable, while Kant answers the challenge revealed by Hume's critique. Kant realises that modern scientific reason – without the divine ground – can throw humans into the quagmire of scepticism and relativism. Kant's project is to recast modern reason in line with the modern scientific understanding, while securing human reasoning.¹⁰ Similarly, Patočka shows how Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk's idea of 'bad subjectivism' is incompatible with his praise for scientific objectivism. Accepting Brentano's critique of Kant, Masaryk misunderstands Kant's anti-Humean intervention. Instead of criticizing Kant's concept of subjectivity, as Masaryk assumes he is doing, Masaryk's rejection of subjectivity harks back to the Lockean conceptual understanding of subjectivity that Hume pushed to the limit, thereby revealing its presuppositions. Bad subjectivism, as Masaryk calls it, is the outcome of Locke's project, laid

⁹ Fink, "What Does the Phenomenology of Edmund Husserl Want to Accomplish? (The Phenomenological Idea of Laying-a-Ground)", *Research in Phenomenology* 1972 [1934], 5-27, 8

¹⁰ See Patočka, "Two Senses of Reason and Nature in the German Enlightenment: A Herderian Study", ed. Kohák, *Jan Patočka. Philosophy and Selected Writings* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989 [1942]), 157-74.

bare by Hume. Masaryk fails to appreciate the Kantian critique and its different conception of subjectivity. For Kant, subjectivity is not a Lockean passive mirror closed upon itself. Kant presents an account that takes into consideration our human participation in meaning constitution.¹¹

Patočka's third approach to the mystery of the commonplace is his appropriation and reconfiguration of the Aristotelian idea of motion in order to rethink human existence and its double movement, as a body and as existence. The point of departure for him is Aristotle's insistence that motion is inherent in all natural things, while also taking into account its modern transformation. Patočka speaks of the human body's movement, without which we cannot grasp the perspectival understanding of things.¹² These two accounts are important because they show that we are not an object among other objects, ruled by the law of inertia, as we supposedly should be if the modern account of movement related to our *objective bodies*. We can move and we are aware of our ability to move, which is problematic to account for from the modern scientific conception of movement.

Rethinking the Aristotelian conception of motion, Patočka points out that for Aristotle, motion and change are coterminous. Yet change is motion only if there is a beginning and an end to the process according to the nature of a thing. "Organisms mature and die, a sick person becomes healthy again, iron rusts, a beast leaps at its prey."¹³ All earthly things will come to be and then pass away. Every acorn is potentially a tree in itself, because the innate impulse to change belongs to its nature. Each natural thing "has within itself a principle of motion and of stationariness".¹⁴ Hence, an object falls from high until it hits the earth, resuming its natural state of rest, while water, if it turns into vapour, moves up into clouds.¹⁵ For Aristotle, "nature is a principle or cause of being moved and of being at rest in that to which it belongs primarily, in virtue of itself and not accidentally".¹⁶

This explanation of motion as belonging to the nature of things is abandoned under the influence of Galileo, who mathematizes motion. His novel approach is to rethink the Aristotelian qualitative motion, according to which a motion is a "*change inherent in things*".¹⁷ The movement ceases to be defined by the beginning and the end of the natural process central to the nature of a thing. Galileo takes motion out of things and transforms it into a movement *of* things. He then dissects movement into separate parts: "time, distance, speed and increase of speed." This transformation is an outcome

¹¹ Patočka, *Tři Studie o Masarykovi* (Praha: Mladá Fronta, 1991). See also Patočka, *Věčnost a Dějinnost: Rádliv Poměr k Pojetím Člověka v Minulosti a Současnosti* (Praha: Oikoymenh, 2007), 37-42.

¹² Patočka, "K Prehistorii Vědy o Pohybu", 194-95

¹³ Patočka, "Rozklad Aristotelovy Dynamiky a Předehra Moderního Mechanismu", *Vesmír* 1953, 285-87, 285

¹⁴ Aristotle, "Physics", ed. Barnes, *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), 192b9-23

¹⁵ Patočka, "Rozklad Aristotelovy Dynamiky", 285

¹⁶ Aristotle, "Physics", 192b9-23

¹⁷ Patočka, *Aristoteles, Jeho Předchůdci a Dědicové. (Studie z Dějin Filosofie od Aristotela k Hegelovi)* (Praha: Nakladatelství Československé Akademie Věd, 1964), 307, italics in original

of his insight that he can decompose movement into different constituents on the model of geometry and see them as one sees the geometrical figures, as “relations between the sides and the angles of a triangle”.¹⁸ Once we break down motion into its parts, we can measure the movement of any and every body, based on an understanding of geometrical figures. Bodies become equivalent to each other, moving uniformly if uninterrupted.

Yet, if all bodies are equivalent and movement ceases to be the internal motion of a thing according to its nature, but instead, the modern Galilean movement becomes a movement *of things*, then the human movement is difficult to understand. How can we account for the ‘internal’ movement of our body of which we are, without a doubt, aware? The answer given by the post-Cartesian tradition is that the human body is a machine, if it can move itself by itself. For Hobbes in 1651, a living body is “a motion of limbs, the beginning whereof is in some principal part within”. Bodies are “engines that move themselves by springs and wheels”. The heart and nerves are strings, while joints are “*Wheels*, giving motion to the whole body”.¹⁹ In 1747, La Mettrie simply takes for granted that the “human body is a machine which winds itself up, a living picture of perpetual motion.” Yet, without food, which we “pour into its pipes” and fever,²⁰ which “mechanically stimulates the muscles and the heart,”²¹ the body is “like a candle whose light flares up just as it is going out”.²²

However, if humans are machines moving mechanically, how can we think about human responsibility that raises human beings out of the domain of things? How can we understand meaning constitution? In this mechanical universe, how can we, as machines, understand the world? If we are machines, who does think thoughts about those machines? What is the ‘role’ of subjectivity? If we are machines, what is *res cogitans*, this thinking thing in itself?

Subjectivity/Objectivity

Speculation that modern subjectivism is basically guilty of bringing about the skeptical crisis which deprived European society of faith in eternity [timelessness] is itself questionable to the highest degree.²³

Unsurprisingly, Patočka’s reflection on movement and human existence is tied to his thinking about the problem of subjectivity and objectivity. From the beginning, Patočka tries to rethink the problematic nature of meaning and subjectivity, which is for him an existential question. As he

¹⁸ Patočka, *Aristoteles, Jeho Předchůdci a Dědicové. (Studie z Dějin Filosofie od Aristotela k Hegelovi)* (Praha: Nakladatelství Československé Akademie Věd, 1964), 308

¹⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968 [1651]), I, 1 [81], italics in original

²⁰ Mettrie, "Machine Man", *Machine Man and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996 [1747]), 3-39, 7

²¹ Mettrie, "Machine Man", *Machine Man and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996 [1747]), 3-39, 31

²² Mettrie, "Machine Man", 7

²³ Patočka, "Kolem Masarykovy Filosofie Náboženství", *Tři Studie o Masarykovi* (Praha: Mladá Fronta, 1991 [1976]), 53-119, 98

notes at the beginning of his *Natural World*, we do not have a “unified world-view”. We live in “a double world”, the world of our every-day living, as well, as “a world created...by modern natural science, based on the principle of mathematical laws governing nature”. This disunity is “the true source of our present spiritual crisis”.²⁴ For Patočka, this spiritual crisis is the crisis of meaning, which is a result of the problem of subjectivity and the way we think about it. He suggests that the spectre of subjectivism haunts modern philosophy. Yet, we need to make clear what we mean when we speak of subjectivity; what this idea actually stands for. His many investigations are driven by his attempt to clarify this problem.

According to Patočka, in the present, the motive of bad subjectivism unquestioningly arises out of a fear that human responsibility – an ontological aspect of what it means to be human – is weakened, or even eliminated, as Masaryk claims, by the eclipse of divinity, leading to a spiritual sickness of human societies.²⁵ For Masaryk, the idea of subjectivity is titanism, the attempt of humans to replace God, losing thereby the divine ground that anchors human compassion and responsibility for the world. On a personal level, ‘titanism of modern subjectivism’ leads to increased suicides, and, on the level of society, to the permanent state of war.²⁶

Paradoxically, Masaryk rejects subjectivism, but accepts the positivistic account of objectivism. Modern positivism with its announced spectre of non-scientific, fantastic or arbitrarily created world-views that only positivistic science, supposedly, can keep at bay, enchanted Masaryk.²⁷ Instead of seeing that the claims of positivism are scarecrows, based precisely on the presupposition of bad subjectivism, Masaryk fails to question their sedimented historical nature. He accepts scientific objectivism, while rejecting subjectivism, which for him leads to the loss of faith, culminating in modern egotism.²⁸ Subjectivism is the sick root that needs to be cut off from the body of modern understanding, leading us back to the paradise of responsibility that God guarantees, while accepting science’s claim to objectivity that guarantees the impartiality of science.²⁹ The spell that positivism casts over Masaryk’s thinking prevented him from questioning the seeming obviousness of positivistic claims, hiding their *mysterium* of mundanity.³⁰ In other words, accepting positivism, Masaryk fails to appreciate the double sided modern understanding

²⁴ Patočka, "Přirozený Svět", 129, trans. Erika Abrams

²⁵ Patočka, "Pokus o Českou Národní Filosofii a Jeho Nezdár", *Tři Studie o Masarykovi* (Praha: Mladá Fronta, 1991 [1977]), 21-52, 52

²⁶ Patočka, "Titanism", ed. Kohák, *Jan Patočka. Philosophy and Selected Writings* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989 [1936]), 139-44

²⁷ Patočka, "Pokus o Českou Národní Filosofii a Jeho Nezdár", 52

²⁸ Patočka, "Titanism", 139

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Patočka, "K Prehistorii Vědy o Pohybu", 194

grounded on the subject/object split, which is impossible to separate, but which needs to be confronted. Modern subjectivism and objectivism are interdependent.

Since subjectivity and objectivity are two sides of the same problem, Patočka rejects Masaryk's solution.³¹ Already in 1936, Patočka writes that we must rethink subjectivity. Yet, "not by refusing modern subjectivism but by passing through it to the very end, to the point at which it becomes the source of moral strength".³²

At the time of Masaryk, the split of the world into *res cogitans* and *res extensa* is accepted. It becomes an unquestioned commonplace. The problem of subjectivism leads back to Descartes and his positing of *cogito* as the starting point of modern knowledge. Yet, this starting point is ambiguous, since the Cartesian *cogito* can lead to two, rather incompatible, outcomes. It can lead to either "a radical subjectivism" or to the objectivism of modern science.³³ It is this fulcrum of the Cartesian labyrinth that Patočka returns to repeatedly. From there, different arguments can follow.

One route is to reconsider subjectivity by questioning a bad Humean subjectivism, based on "a naturalistic foundation which is the starting point of positivism",³⁴ because it leads to scepticism and the puzzle of knowing the world. The mystery of the relation between subject and object is, once again, two-sided. If the *ego*-subject is the ground of scientific certainty of knowing objects, it is not clear how an empirical subject can know objects. As Patočka notes, citing Schelling, "from the standpoint of objectivism...we can understand how an object can affect a subject, but we cannot understand how the subject can be aware of it".³⁵ After all, not only are subject and object discrete substances, but the *empirical* subject cannot be the ground of objectivity. As Patočka notes, the Cartesian *cogito* is *quaternio terminorum*. It is the personal 'I think' as well as the impersonal ground of certainty, the thinking thing.³⁶ Descartes equivocates between two different senses of *ego cogito*. For Descartes, *ego cogito* stands for thinking, the only certainty left over after doubting our unreliable senses through which we encounter the world. Descartes – holding a sheet of paper – doubts his thinking experience and reaffirms that if he can doubt, his thinking is secure. Thinking is certainty that is left over after dubitable sensual experience is discarded. Thinking becomes taken in two senses: the ground of knowledge as well as Descartes' personal thinking. However, *ego cogito*

³¹ Patočka returns repeatedly to Husserl, leading him to formulate his notion of a-subjective phenomenology. I will not address Patočka's notion of a-subjective phenomenology in this paper.

³² Patočka, "Titanism", 143

³³ Patočka, "Masaryk and Husserl", 152

³⁴ Patočka, "Masaryk and Husserl", 151

³⁵ Patočka, "Masaryk and Husserl", 153

³⁶ Patočka, "2.3. Fenomenologie Vlastního Těla", *Přirozený Svět a Pohyb Lidské Existence* (Prague: Samizdat, 1980), 1-20, 2.3.14

as the ground of knowledge cannot be an empirical person. So, what is the relation between the empirical and transcendental subject?

The problem of empirical/transcendental puzzle leads to another mystery: how can two *res – res cogitans* and *res extensa* – interact? The problem is exacerbated by the Lockean project. If the Lockean subject is a passive mirror of the world, not only the problem of relation between two substances is acute, but the relation between ideas in the mind becomes mysterious. How could those simple ideas in the mind relate to each other on a relational model to form complex ideas? Presumably, unless we use objectivism, with its mathematical law of causality, we cannot explain subjectivity. This was also Husserl's realisation when he showed the presupposition of logical psychologism in his *Prolegomena to Logical Investigations*.³⁷ On this model, subjectivity becomes an 'object' that objectivity supposedly can account for, leading to the same puzzle as in the first case, a mystery of the relation between the empirical and transcendental experience, later confronted by Kant and Husserl. The ground of objectivity becomes an enigma. Subjectivity is interpreted as the self-enclosed *spatium* with no access to the world, and, yet, mysteriously mirroring it. It is from this understanding of subjectivity – subjectivity as a self-enclosed world – that the claim of egotism is derived.

By contrast to Masaryk who sees subjectivism as the root of spiritual sickness, Husserl accepts the Cartesian solution but deepens it, positing the transcendental subjectivity as the solution that overcomes the problem of empirical meaning constitution.³⁸ Husserl proposes to question the mystery of knowledge with his affirmation of subjectivity, by “distinguishing the transcendental and the empirical subject”;³⁹ while pointing out “the *enigma of subjectivity*”; “the *enigma of psychological subject matter and method*”.⁴⁰ As Husserl notes, the substitution of a method for the world leads to problems, because “we take for *true being* what is actually a *method*”.⁴¹ For positivists, a method of thinking becomes “the true reality itself”.⁴² Objectivity is the only certainty that we can scientifically account for on the model of mathematics.

For Patočka, the challenge for phenomenology in the face of the scientific elimination of subjective experience in favour of an objective scientific account is: “how to procure meaning from this mute, scientifically conjured-up universe, which is indifferent to our lived experience of the world; which

³⁷ Husserl, *Logical Investigations* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001)

³⁸ See Patočka, "Masarykovo a Husserlovo Pojetí Duševní Krize Evropského Lidstva", *Tři Studie o Masarykovi* (Praha: Mladá Fronta, 1991 [1936]), 5-2; Patočka, "Masaryk and Husserl", .

³⁹ Patočka, "Masaryk and Husserl", 152

⁴⁰ Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy* (Evanston: Northwest University Press, 1970), §2, 5, italics in original

⁴¹ Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy* (Evanston: Northwest University Press, 1970), §9h, 51, italics in original

⁴² Patočka, "Masaryk and Husserl", 147

is indifferent to what makes us human”.⁴³ In the end, the question is, “what is more decisive and important? Is a silent and utterly indifferent and meaningless universe the last word for man, or, conversely, is man the key, which can, at least slightly, open the universe?”⁴⁴

Čapek's Limping Pilgrim: Whence to Where

So how can we think about human existence in our modern scientifically defined mathematised universe? How can we unravel the *mysterium* of common acceptance of objective knowledge that cannot account for human subjective experience? For Patočka, one of the answers to the puzzle of human existence is movement in its double aspect: as both, objectivised movement of our bodies and as the movement of human existence. Despite the objectification and mathematisation of movement by modern science, there is a commonality between the two. We move among things, the movement of our bodies enables us to disclose things according to their place in relation to us. Additionally, the idea of movement retained, as he notes, other meanings that live in the subterranean regions of our tradition. We still speak of being moved by a sad story, Homer's *Odyssey* is impossible to understand without invoking the notion of a journey, of being on a way.⁴⁵ After all, even Alice is on the way through Wonderland to find out what really matters.⁴⁶ Nietzsche warns against forgetting one's own way: “You have forgotten the way, now you will also forget how to walk”.⁴⁷ We also speak about “ways of thinking”,⁴⁸ and Heidegger published a collection of essays called *Pathmarks* (*Wegmarken*) to indicate the importance of travelling through different ideas.⁴⁹

Nevertheless, when we speak of movement, we invoke the modern scientific objectified movement, which cannot account for human existence, as noted above. Here, Patočka revisits and substantially changes Aristotle's notion of movement. He rejects the enduring Aristotelian substrate that persists through change.⁵⁰ We are not an acorn, which will become a tree that it always potentially was. We change, depending on the situations we are in, according to possibilities we take up or projects we reject. Human existence is not a motion of an enduring substrate's beginning and end of change.

⁴³ Patočka, “[Poznámky Posluchačů z Přednášky] *Vznik a Konec Evropy*”, eds. Chvatík and Kouba, *Péče o Duši: Soubor Statí a Přednášek o Postavení Člověka ve Světě a v Dějinách* (Praha: Oikoymenth, 2002 [1974]), 424-29, 429

⁴⁴ “Neboť zůstane tu ovšem otázka: co je rozhodnější a významnější? Je němé a na pohled zcela lhostejné a nesmyslné univerzum posledním slovem o člověku, nebo je naopak člověk klíčem, kterým možno alespoň pootevřít univerzum?” (Patočka, *Aristotelés: Přednášky z Antické Filosofie* (Praha: Vyšehrad, spol. s r.o., 1994), p. 85)

⁴⁵ Patočka, “K Prehistorii Vědy o Pohybu”, 194-95

⁴⁶ Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking-Glass* (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 2001)

⁴⁷ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Part 2, 22, The stillest Hour

⁴⁸ Gadamer, *Heidegger's Ways* (Albany: State University of New Press, 1994), vii

⁴⁹ Heidegger, *Pathmarks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)

⁵⁰ See also Barbaras, “Pohyb Existence u Patočky: K Fenomenologii Dění”, *Filosofický Časopis* 2003, 365-82.

There is no unchanging substrate, persisting through qualitative changes. Human existence is nothing else but essentially the movement through which we become who we want to be.

According to Patočka, our life is a movement, which relates to two referents: the earth and the sky, where and when. Our human existence is rooted in a place from where we come from and where we travel. The stable, unmovable earth is a potent power over all elements in its domain, horizontal as well as vertical, it rules over life and death. Earth is also an ever-present sustainer of all as well as a provider for all; earth provides everything that can be defined by ‘where.’ By contrast, the sky gives human life the sense of ‘when’, by providing light and darkness, seasons, day and night.⁵¹ Human movement is defined always by “whence to where”. Yet, for Patočka, ‘whence to where’ characterises not only the movement of our bodies, but also the movement of our existence. Expressed temporally, the ‘whence’ indicates the past which orients our existence and anchors our possibilities; present is constituted by taken up or rejected possibilities that are always structured according to the future ‘where,’ which will give orientation to our existence.⁵²

Whence to where is also a theme of Patočka’s essay on Čapek’s limping pilgrim and his life journey. A pilgrim is always on the road. He travels from unknown to unknown: “I was not – I am – I will not be”. It is a journey of finite human life in the age when the role of Christianity is waning.⁵³ Čapek’s writing is a reflection on the modern “atheistic age”⁵⁴ and the role of humans in the material universe that cannot account for the human soul and, yet, the soul is here.⁵⁵ Čapek’s confrontation with the age, where the place of God remains empty, is a question about the human place in the world. It is the problem of the empirical and transcendental subject: humans are part of nature as well as the ground of knowing it. His thinking might resemble the titanism that Masaryk condemned, but Čapek has managed to avoid the perils of subjectivism.⁵⁶ The pilgrim walks unevenly on the road of life, limping, with one leg firmly attached to the earth. Yet, he sees his ‘bad leg,’ his limping as the *positivum*. Human existence is not only harmony and power but it is also constitutively weakness and flaws.⁵⁷ The limping keeps him forever in touch with the earth, not allowing him to forget that he is a finite creature, forever in debt to the earth-provider. A human

⁵¹ “Jako je země především dárce všeho ‘kde’, tak nebe je především dárce ‘kdy’ svým střídáním noci a dne, světla-tmy se všemi jejich cykly, příchody a přechody. A s tím je zároveň dárce vši jasnosti, tím vši vědomosti o blízkém, která je v podstatném vztahu k vzdálenému – ve světle hraje i země v barvách, které odhalují věci podstatně, nikoli jen v blízkosti, nýbrž na distance” (Patočka, “K Prehistorii Vědy o Pohybu”, 196).

⁵² Patočka, “K Prehistorii Vědy o Pohybu”, 197

⁵³ Patočka, “Kulhavý Poutník”, 141

⁵⁴ Patočka, “Kulhavý Poutník”, 139

⁵⁵ Patočka, “Kulhavý Poutník”, 145

⁵⁶ Patočka, “Kulhavý Poutník”, 139

⁵⁷ Patočka, “Kulhavý Poutník”, 142-43

cannot be a ruler and possessor of the earth and sky. He is finite and yet a meaning constituting creature.⁵⁸

The journey of the limping pilgrim is the journey of human time.⁵⁹ To reflect on human existence and our ability to procure meaning that is never final but depends on our human situation is to become aware of our finitude, to become aware of the question ‘whence we come from – where are we going?’. This question is both all-embracing and negating. We must accept that we can never know all. We must acknowledge *docta ignorantia*, learned ignorance; a knowing of not-knowing as Socrates professed at the beginning of philosophy. Humans simply cannot know where they came from and what happens when they die. This realisation is the acknowledgment of the impossibility of knowing everything. Yet, to gain the insight of our limitations is simultaneously humble and immense. We become aware that science with its objectivism, although very successful in its own domain, cannot answer questions that are decisive for the humanity of humans.⁶⁰ The magnitude of this awareness, this realisation of never being able to know all there-is allows us to realise that we have to start from ourselves by gaining a new relation between the world and the finite human life – from the perspective of incalculability and infinity.⁶¹ As Patočka writes, “humans are a relation that relates to itself, a relation between eternity and time, individuality and universality, contingency and necessity”.⁶² We are not a stone or a tree belonging to the species that always will be as it is, perpetually renewing itself through ever-vanishing members. Neither are we Gods who can understand all. We are different because “we are not initially given to ourselves but rather must seek ourselves”.⁶³ Our existence is movement. Our life is a quest that *might* end up badly.

For Patočka, human life has three dimensions; it is related to the beginning, the end and to life necessities in the form of the never-ending cycle of consumption.⁶⁴ Birth is related to the past, to the community into which we are born and which takes care of us in the remembrance of the past and future of the family. Self-sustenance and work is our present, while the future reveals to us that we are finite human beings who will die. Yet, this realisation also bring to the forefront that we are free. We can shake up our everydayness, our reliance on the public anonym if we confront our finitude. We can realise that the mundanity we accept hides mysteries that are hard to discover. Only by shaking up our initial acceptance of the tradition, the others, the world, *might* we realise that it is we who must define the meaning of all we encounter. The human task is to question the

⁵⁸ Patočka, "Kulhavý Poutník", 143

⁵⁹ Patočka, "Kulhavý Poutník", 144

⁶⁰ Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences*, § 2

⁶¹ Patočka, "Kulhavý Poutník", 145

⁶² Patočka, *Body, Community, Language, World* (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1996), 111

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ “Život člověka má vždycky tyto tři velké dimenze: vztah k začátku, vztah ke konci a vztah k životu jakožto propadlému této nutnosti” (Patočka, "Diskuse", 300).

meaning we have inherited, not accepting it unquestioningly. In order to question, we must provide reasons for our beliefs. Yet, our reasons can only be finite, without the assurance of a transcendent ground.

For Patočka, we have to question and confront the shaken confidence in our beliefs, the shaken certitude of overall meaning. Without questioning, we might not realise that meaning is empty, turned into dogmatism of old beliefs that permeates our relation to the world. We might become homeless without even being aware of it. The homelessness of meaning, “human unclarity, that refuge of our life’s routines,” is not nothing. It informs our whole being.⁶⁵ It is the source of our relation to ourselves, others and to the world. By questioning the inherited meaning, we assume personal responsibility for the world into which we are thrown by birth, although the world is not of our doing. The world is here before we were born and it will be here when we die. As Patočka writes, “we did not personally bring about the adversity of our age and the present situation, we inherited it. Nonetheless, we are responsible for it”.⁶⁶

We must confront the present day crisis of meaning in order to shape the future. We must attempt to unravel the mystery that commonality hides and to which we are always blind. As Patočka sees it, there is a precedence to the crisis of meaning that we are confronting today. To be sure, the problems are different but the space of questioning that was opened up in Ancient Greece is important for us to revisit. Socrates is the only figure, according to Patočka, who tries to leap into the unknown without the support of the tradition by trying to rethink the mystery hidden in mundanity, to rethink the inherited meaning that has become obsolete, turned into dogmatism of a dead tradition.

Conclusion

As elsewhere in history...the real way forward is going back to beginning.⁶⁷

Patočka rejects Husserl’s solution of the transcendental subject, although he never abandons the problem of meaning constitution. Under the influence of Heidegger, in “What is Phenomenology”, Patočka critically reflects on Husserl’s conception of human subjectivity as well as Heidegger’s notion of human existence. Husserl’s never-ending struggle against psychologism defines his phenomenology, with his continuous attempt to clarify – against the reduction of human psychic life to empirical psychology – the problems of the subjective life aiming towards universality of

⁶⁵ Patočka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History* (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1996), 102

⁶⁶ Patočka, "Zpěv Výsostnosti", eds. Vojtěch and Chvatík, *Umění a Čas: Soubor Statí, Přednášek a Poznámek k Problému Umění. Publikované Studie* (Praha: Oikoyomenh, 2004 [1969]), 416-32, 418

⁶⁷ “Ako inde v histórii, aj tu sa možno ukazuje, že skutočná cesta vpred je cesta naspäť k začiatkom” (Patočka, "Motto", *Kapitoly z Dejín Slovenského Myslenia* (Bratislava: Polygrafia SAV, 1995), 7, 7).

sense and meaning.⁶⁸ Patočka questions the reduction of all meaning to the space of transcendental subjectivity. Instead, he accepts Heidegger's notion of human existence. Yet, he objects to the late Heidegger's withdrawal of human questions in preference to Being, because it means a disappearance of historical humans from Heidegger's ontological inquiries.⁶⁹ Patočka's work navigates between the Scylla of transcendental subjectivity and the Charybdis of no subjectivity at all. He realises that only a human being can be responsible for her deeds and words.

Patočka continuously rethinks the idea of subjectivity. The Cartesian *res cogitans* does not have to lead to the subject devoid of the external world or to an elimination of the subject altogether. His last attempts were to think human existence as movement as well as to propose an asubjective phenomenology. However, his proposal of asubjective phenomenology cannot be addressed in this paper.

⁶⁸ Patočka, *Věčnost a Dějinnost*, 64. For a similar claim, see also Crowell, "Husserl, Heidegger, and Transcendental Philosophy: Another Look at the Encyclopaedia Britannica Article", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* March 1990, 501-18.

⁶⁹ See Šrubař, "Asubjektivní Fenomenologie, Přirozený Svět a Humanismus: Patočkovo Myšlení Mezi Husserlem a Heideggerem", *Filosofický Časopis* 1991, 406-17.

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