This article was downloaded by: [University of California, San Francisco]
On: 07 October 2014, At: 07:51
Publisher: Routledge
Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK

The European Legacy: Toward New Paradigms
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cele20

Three Movements of Life: Jan Patočka's Philosophy of Personal Being

Evy Varsamopoulou [a]
[a] Dept. of English Studies , University of Cyprus , 75 Kallipoleos Street, PO Box 20537, 1678 Nicosia, Cyprus E-mail:
Published online: 09 Jul 2007.

To cite this article: Evy Varsamopoulou (2007) Three Movements of Life: Jan Patočka's Philosophy of Personal Being, The European Legacy: Toward New Paradigms, 12:5, 577-588, DOI: 10.1080/10848770701443494

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10848770701443494

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the “Content”) contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions

The European Legacy, Vol. 12, No. 5, pp. 577–588, 2007

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Three Movements of Life: Jan Patočka's Philosophy of Personal Being

EVY VARSAMOPOULOU

Downloaded by [University of California, San Francisco] at 07:51 07 October 2014

ABSTRACT *This article offers a critical presentation of Jan Patočka's philosophy by focusing mainly on his lecture series published as* Body, Community, Language, World, *where he outlined his phenomenological project of re-instating the body in philosophy. Taking the body and its invariable situatedness as a starting point and identifying useful precursors in European philosophy, Patočka delineates three movements of human life: an affective movement consisting of creating roots, identified as primarily aesthetic and interested in the past; an ascetic movement consisting of work and self-expansion, identified with the world of production and related to the present; and, a transcendent, philosophical movement peculiar to the realization of human existence and linked to the future. I examine certain ellipses and complications in Patočka's description of these movements, and suggest elaborations that are consistent with his overall project. Finally, turning to Patočka's Plato and Europe, I argue that the third movement is accomplished via both philosophical reflection and artistic practice.*

> On the basis of their corporeity humans are not only the beings of distance but also the beings of proximity, rooted beings, not only inner worldly beings but also beings in the world.[1]

With these words, echoing Heidegger, Jan Patočka ends his twentieth and final lecture. This lecture, recorded by his students in 1968–69, was typed up for private circulation, archived as a collection of Patočkiana in Prague and in Vienna in 1983, and translated into English by Erazim Kohák in 1997, who based his translation on the two versions, the original Czech and the German translation. The year 1997 also marked the twentieth anniversary of the Czech philosopher's death from heart failure in the course of extensive police interrogations for his involvement in drafting the famous human rights Charter of 1977, which united voices of protest against the Communist era regime in Czechoslavakia.

Body, Community, Language, World is thus a book Patočka never wrote but rather a collection of his students' notes of the course he taught at the Philosophy Faculty of Charles University in Prague; yet, arguably, the book may owe its lucidity and

Dept. of English Studies, University of Cyprus, 75 Kallipoleos Street, PO Box 20537, 1678 Nicosia, Cyprus. Email: evyvarsa@ucy.ac.cy

ISSN 1084-8770 print/ISSN 1470-1316 online/07/050577–12 © 2007 International Society for the Study of European Ideas
DOI: 10.1080/10848770701443494

immediacy to this very fact. It was, furthermore, the first university course he was allowed to teach since 1949, when the communist coup took place. Still, Patočka remained an active and well-known thinker and teacher throughout the years of imposed silence, conducting seminars in his apartment and circulating his writings privately, through *samizdat*, and, when conditions allowed, publishing his work in academic journals. Patočka's "underground" existence was made known to the English-speaking world in 1989 through Erazim Kohák's *Jan Patočka: Philosophy and Selected Writings*, which protested against the silence imposed on Patočka from the end of the Second World War, through the Communist coup, the Soviet invasion, the official censorship imposed on his speaking, writing and teaching, and the harassment of his person, which led to his untimely death. Kohák was determined not to let Patočka's death "pass in silence, unnoted by the wider philosophical community."[2]

Kohák's former student, James Dodd, who edited *Body, Community, Language, World*, warns the reader in his introduction that "the conceptual ground has not been prepared enough," so that despite this work containing "Patočka's most original and valuable contribution to phenomenological philosophy" (Kohák himself describes this as his "favourite" volume [181]), "the force of these descriptions of human life rely too much on the commitment of the readers (and, originally, the listeners) to engage faithfully in the effort of 'seeing' what it is that Patočka is endeavoring to put into words" (xxxi). The dependence of the lectures on a sympathetic and imaginative understanding, places upon the audience the kind of ethical responsibility more typical of the reader of autobiography, who—at least since Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions*—is also asked to judge the history of the author's self within the parameters given by the autobiographer. In this way, Patočka gives us his reading of the history of philosophy in the first thirteen lectures, in which he seeks a personal philosophy of being that takes into account the implications of our corporeity and the radical situatedness resulting from it. Our body places us in a primordial situation in the here and now, and every situation, relation or project cannot be fully apprehended and described philosophically without thinking the inescapable and axiomatic nature of this bodily being. As readers of his listeners' class notes, we too are asked to think about this problem and to flesh out, for and with Patočka, the crucial supplement he outlines in the final four lectures—a personal philosophy of being staked out as the three movements of human life. This is how I apprehend the situation of the reader in the philosophical genre of *Body, Community, Language, World*, which, after all, is not alone in the history of philosophy, being preceded by such ancestors as Plato's records of the dialogues of Socrates and Aristotle's *Poetics*, amongst numerous others. Upon the response and evaluation, interpretation and further elaboration of the response, depends the call to a personal history and philosophy of the body, made with a particular sense of urgency, given the political circumstances in which Patočka's lectures took place. To be one such response is the aim of this paper.

Dodd asks: "In what sense is the 'body' of any interest to 'philosophy' at all?", and answers that the body is "essential to a fundamental task of phenomenology": "the task of articulating a self-understanding of humans, one that reveals what humans most truly 'are' and thus achieves a reflective grasp of human 'being'" (xii). Even the most superficial knowledge of the turbulence and horrors of the twentieth century in Europe, through much of which Patočka lived, would allow some suspicion of the need for understanding the urgency of this task. All of Patočka's work reflects the serious terms of his engagement

Downloaded by [University of California, San Francisco] at 07:51 07 October 2014

Downloaded by [University of California, San Francisco] at 07:51 07 October 2014

with this task. In Kohák's words: "Patočka lived his philosophy and philosophized his living. He lived and wrote as radically situated, in a situation" (182). He also lived and wrote in situations of frequent and interconnected crises: personal, communal, national and international. The etymology of the Greek word *krisis* enables us to see how every crisis is also a judgment, in that it demands from us constant thinking and the exercise of our judgment. In a period of crisis, Patočka would probably have easily agreed, most human beings engage with intensity in questioning and reflecting on the terms and conditions of whatever the crisis concerns, in order to find ways to cure, reconstruct, recreate or repair that which has fallen into a state of crisis. Increasingly, in the period of modernity in Europe following the triumph of individualism, the demise of theocracies, the acceleration of capitalist economies and the frenetic degree of industrialisation with its concomitant transformation of agrarian populations into a dispensable and mobile urban workforce, the meanings and roles of "community" have preoccupied anyone given to reflective activity in any form or medium, who has become aware of this crisis. Underlying this reflection is a belief that life as human beings live it is constantly open to change in any direction and that reflection offers transformative possibilities and the path to praxis.

Patočka clearly believed in the crucial task of thinking for the realization of possibilities inherent in human life, and in the transformative power of *existence*, understood as a specifically human awareness of life. *Body, Community, Language, World* takes issue with the history of philosophy, especially phenomenology, which, in Patočka's assessment, has failed to adequately take into consideration that most defining factor of human life: the body. While recognizing the significant contributions of both Husserl and Heidegger, Patočka also identifies and argues against their shortcomings with respect to both the personal and the corporeal dimensions of human life. In insisting on the importance of understanding the corporeal dimension of experience and our proximity to things, Patočka, Dodd notes, "follows the path of Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, and others" (xxv). Patočka makes careful selection of the names against or with which he forges his personal contribution to philosophy. It remains for his readers to undertake a comparative reading of this contribution and its critical pre-history to the work of others. However, my aim is to discuss Patočka's outline of an original philosophy of personal being.

The treatment of the body from the pre-Socratics to contemporary Western philosophy, which history comprises four-fifths of Patočka's lectures, ranges from downright hostility (the body is the enemy of philosophy because it prevents us from apprehending truth) to indifference (philosophy for "spirits," where the body silently disappears). Against the modern (Cartesian) philosophical conclusion that "the truth of the body is in its biological usefulness, not in revealing the true nature of things," Patočka issues at the end of his second lecture the challenge that "we shall later learn to see in what the body tells us a more profound truth without which we can never be" (17).

If the body has predominantly been deemed unworthy of philosophical reflection, Patočka adamantly disagrees and rather than seeing the body as "standing for all of that which lies between us and self-knowledge . . . and of what is 'true,'" raises the issue of human corporeality as the most important "key to the understanding of the 'self' for whom the possibility of philosophy is not only *present* but *its most basic task*"(xv). The nature of the contribution Patočka makes to the history of the concept of the body in

philosophy is not, as Dodd rightly notes, due to its being a detailed account (as it is not) but to its provision of "a conceptual framework in which to *interpret* this history" (xv).

In his survey of the history of philosophy, Patočka finds allies that range from the extant ancient Greek tradition to twentieth-century European philosophy. Taking from Aristotle, in particular from his *Peri Psyches* [*De Anima*], the notion of the purposefulness and inseparability of *aesthesis* and *kinesis*, Patočka comments that "seeing is always linked to movement. Knowing where we are is a necessary foundation and starting point of life" (32). Movement itself is given a wider definition by Patočka than mere locomotion, mere physical movement in space (Galileo, Descartes), but it is also not to be understood in Bergson's terms of a subjective, inner temporal unity due to the overemphasis Bergson gives to the past. Patočka refers instead to what he considers the more profound understanding of movement as described by Aristotle, where movement is also a *dynamis*. What this means is that, for Aristotle, each of the movements of a living being is a realization of possibilities. Patočka stresses "that at which movement aims, the future. Movement unfolds from something that is not yet, something not yet given" (146). Yet Patočka also calls for a radicalisation of the Aristotelian concept in order to suit the peculiarity of human movement. In the case of a human being, there is no "preexisting bearer" of movements, nothing like a *hypokeimenon* as a constant, a static foundation persisting through all movements taking place in and on it; the body "does not function as a substrate, as 'the basis of lived life,'" it "does not have the character of an objective entity. It is a lived, existential corporeity" (147).

Patočka recognizes that Aristotle's philosophy is not a philosophy of impersonal being in the manner of Spinoza. Patočka sees the impersonality of Spinoza's philosophy as arising from the fact that "Universal substance, the ground of all particulars, is fully impersonal" (30), as leading to a "metaphysics of the impersonal . . . something quite extreme" (31). Although not reaching this extreme of impersonality, Aristotle also discusses being "in the third person" and does not actually personalize spatiality.[3] However, for human beings the understanding of their corporeal being, of others, of objects, of the world, of space and of the relation amongst all of these derives from personal experience: "our relating to the world always takes place within a matrix whose fundamental structure is always one of I-Thou-it" (4).

Conducting a foray into modern philosophy, Patočka redeems and synthesizes whatever can contribute towards a philosophy of personal being. From Descartes, Patočka salvages the personal foundation given to modern philosophy (*ego cogito*) in the *Meditations* but indicts the failure to explain the link between body and soul and the denigration of the truth of the body as "biological utility" (17), a kind of life-support apparatus for the personal I. From Maine de Biran's rejection of Kant's method of logical analysis, which must always remain "general and abstract" (24), Patočka takes "the primordial phenomenon of effort" (25), which enabled Maine de Biran to rescue the individual, personal I from Kantian abstraction. Effort proves that the I is able to will and to act freely. Looking next to Husserl, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and Gabriel Marcel, Patočka concludes that there is "a distinctive spatiality of the body, unlike that of other entities, of objects," and whose function is described as "continuously leading, rooting the body among things" (27). Although the centrality of the body in our orientation in the world is too *near* to us to become overtly thematised, that is, to become an object of conscious awareness in our experience, there are circumstances in which this

Downloaded by [University of California, San Francisco] at 07:51 07 October 2014

does occur: as an affective, sensual and kinaesthetic object, we become aware of the body as of no other "object."[4] The living, moving, human body is a body capable of "sensation and affect," and though our life "transcends sensibility and unmediated action," this "layer" of life is the basic and first layer, upon which all others rest, while it itself is modified in turn by the other layers of life (143).

In the seventeenth lecture, Patočka commences the description of his personal philosophy of being, the "Three Movements of Human Life," towards which the lectures have been building up a critical historical basis. Adopting as premise that "the basic structure" or "framework of existence" as elaborated by Heidegger, is "*care*, a *project* in a given *situation* which brings us into *contact* with things, a situation in which the things with which we deal and which we modify are revealed," Patočka asserts "a trinity of movements in which our life unfolds" (143). These "movements" are the formerly named "layers" of life. Patočka chooses the Aristotelian concept of movement over and against the modern/scientific concept of movement as "locomotion," and the Bergsonian concept which "'overemphasizes' passive lingering of what had been" and "cumulation" (144, 145). In contrast, Patočka finds that "Aristotle's conception of movement as transformation" is not only "more profound" but can be harmonized with the Heideggerian view that "our life is a realization of possibilities–of possibility which we do not visualize, in which we transcend what we are at the moment" (145). Yet even this conception is inadequate because it is "still too static and objective," and presupposes the unity of a being that persists through all its changes, which, Patočka argues, is not the case for human beings (146). He therefore radicalizes Aristotle's conception of movement by taking away a "preexisting bearer," or "referent standing statically" at the foundation of the possibilities that ground movement." The body is not an Aristotelian *hypokeimenon* of change because "it is a lived, existential corporeity" and as such "is part of the situation itself in which the movement takes place" (146–47).

To describe the movement of our existence, Patočka turns to the metaphorical potential of a theoretical model from music, that of polyphonic composition. Starting from a description of the movement of our corporeity as akin to that of a melody, "in which every component, tone, is a part of something that transcends it," he stresses the futurity and undecidability of meaning during the performance of the melody. The movement of our existence is, then, like a polyphonic composition since it "unfolds in a series of relatively autonomous sequences which modify each other and affect each other." For Patočka, three sequences make up the polyphonic composition of our life, a triad of movements which "presuppose and interpenetrate each other" and which suffice to explain the "fundamental diversity of movements" which "explain the movement of our existence" (147). Patočka's initial statement of these movements is as follows:

(i) the movement of sinking roots, of anchoring–an instinctive-affective movement of our existence.
(ii) the movement of self-sustenance, of self-projection–the movement of our coming to terms with the reality we handle, a movement carried out in the region of human work;
(iii) the movement of existence in the narrower sense of the word which typically seeks to bestow a global closure and meaning on the regions and rhythms of the first and second movement (148).

Downloaded by [University of California, San Francisco] at 07:51 07 October 2014

It is worth noting how Patočka's use of the metaphor of "sinking roots" to describe the affective movement of human life both recalls Aristotle's discussion of the vegetal psyche, a dimension we share with plant life, and Simone Weil's treatise *Deracinement*, which insists on the affective needs of the human psyche's subsistence and stipulates their description as a prelude to any discourse on human duties.[5] The body's function of "sinking roots" immerses us in the world, into objective space, without our ever entirely transcending the immanence of our personal space, the space of the body, without which no movement would be possible. This leads Patočka to describe the body not as a "thing" but as "a moment of a situation in which we are":

> Because our body is a situational concept, it has also the traits of human situation as such, that is, we cannot speak of it without noticing that it places us in a certain reality which is already present while at the same time lifting us out of it, in a way distancing us from it. Maine de Biran's hyperorganic power actually means that in a certain sense we are entirely body, no more, but in a certain sense also that we *elude facticity* (27).

Thus, becoming aware of our body through its affective, sensual and kinesthetic qualities and as a moment of each situation means that the human way of being is necessarily a "personal being, is not a being like a thing bur rather a self-relation." Consequently, self-relation occurs by virtue of "a relation to the other, to more and more things and ultimately to the universe as such, so locating ourselves in the world" (31). To ignore the significance of the corporeality and personal situatedness of our human being, or to treat the body as a thing amongst things and not a self-relation would prevent us from ever realizing and actualising our existence. In contrast to Heidegger, Patočka affirms our relation to the world as "positive," not a "fall into things" that objectifies us and alienates us "form our original nature–the relation to ourselves"; "it is not a self-loss but the condition of possibility of self-discovery" precisely because "our relation to things is fully analogous to our self-relation . . . a continuation of our life in the body" (49): "Our being thrown into the world is at the same time the movement in which we become embodied in something other than ourselves, become involved, become objective. This becoming involved in what originally we are not but what we become reveals our possibilities to us" (50).

If existence entails both self-relation and relation to other beings (irrespective of whether they are present), it is equally important to make the case that "understanding (understanding itself, its possibilities) takes place in the mode of *co*-being" (135). While insisting on this mode of co-being, without which "Heidegger's delimitation of the world is incomplete," Patočka explores how we are aware that all we see of others "is but a passage to what we do not see and what precisely interests us" (63).[6] Patočka gives the example here of reading, in which "we do not linger over graphic shapes and sound configurations, we overlook them and go on to the meaning behind them" (64–65).

This is a potent analogy which I would like to examine further. As Patočka notes in his discussion of affection and sensibility, all of our impressions affect us and the affect is inextricably bound up with our response to the world; "the affective impressional contact with the world comes before the threshold of presentation of being" (140).[7] Here I would add that our movement—although in more complex and mediated forms—like that of an animal, is *also* a reaction to the way the world looks at us. Moreover, our perception is also inevitably a perception of surfaces, and though the aesthetic focus of our

Downloaded by [University of California, San Francisco] at 07:51 07 October 2014

Downloaded by [University of California, San Francisco] at 07:51 07 October 2014

perception may, in some cases, be usurped to a certain degree (greater or lesser than what we are consciously aware) in favour of the ideational dimension of an object or person, it nevertheless affects our understanding and may indeed either hinder or enhance the perception of "meaning behind them." Interest in others, in what they hide and may reveal with closer attention, may thus be entirely suspended or intensified. The aesthetic dimension helps us economize our energy of care by a process of selection which inevitably affects interpersonal relations and therefore community formation. Existence includes an accumulation of meanings which attach themselves to certain phenomena and qualities of phenomena for practical reasons; this leads to an "automatic" interpretation of signs (acoustic, visual and so on) which paradoxically enables "misreading" as much as "reading" of others, with all their affective effects and determinations on the direction of our threefold movement of life. The other whose "surface meanings" we have no further interest in is seen somewhat reductively as an object in our world; a corporeity whose meaning is limited to its surface. For individuals who consistently or overwhelmingly experience the indifference of others, the first movement, that of sinking roots, is blocked, while their self-relation itself may become modified to the point of self-alienation and insidious self-reification.[8]

In a particularly eloquent passage on the peculiarity of human sensibility Patočka says:

> In human sensibility, life as an empathic harmony with the world is transcended, that is, it is preserved yet modified. Our sensibility is relative to our pilgrim state, ever on the way from somewhere to somewhere. Humans, too, move ever in the realm of attraction and repulsion. The world presses in on us with its physiognomy, it has an appearance, a unified expression in a varied plurality .... We overlook the primordial affectivity of the way reality regards us, we overlook it and set it aside in our practical handling of things. Yet yielding to this sensibility is no less a definite possibility for us. Sensibility is not something changeless, it is a rich realm in which we can submerge deeply or from which we can withdraw; we can live in it profoundly or superficially. Humans endowed with sensibility can draw, out of the stream of our affective sensibility, what others do not see, what they overlook ... it is humans who bring out the endless, the cosmic, in sensibility precisely because sensibility is for them a world, an infinity (139–40).

Patočka presents the affective-instinctual movement, in which we sink roots, as gradually ceding its exclusivity and becoming "modified by other movements, tinted and increasingly articulated by them" (143). Yet this does not mean that we would not suffer if as adults we were to experience a radical uprooting or sudden loss of those on whom "our dependence ... provides us with safety, with warmth, [which] is manifest in attachment, protection, sympathy" and which "is at the same time a compensation for the bodily and spiritual individuation and dispersion among life's individual foci" (149).[9] As Patočka remarks, "the instinctual-affective sphere totally and continuously co-determines life in all further spheres" (148). The first movement persists as a foundation underlying and accompanying the second movement of work, self-sustenance and self-projection, as well as the third movement: a supplemental, reparative, meaning-giving movement that aims towards transcendence and closure, "breaking-free" of the "Earth-bound" first two movements.[10] The term "Earth" as used by Patočka to

distinguish the realm of the first two movements from the third implies an underlying, determining sense of necessity, both enabling and disabling, from which the human being *emerges* into existence.

Each of the three movements is a shared one, each corresponds to a particular temporal dimension (past, present, and future, respectively) and is marked by a distinctive kind of inauthenticity. The inauthenticity arises from our turning away from the "fundamental" or "boundary situations" of each movement: in the sinking of roots it is contingency (the conditions in which we already find ourselves: biology, tradition, milieu, intellectual and other abilities); in work it is conflict, suffering and guilt; and in the third movement of "existence in the true sense," it is "being blinded by finitude" (151). In this manner, the three movements are intertwined in a complementary but antagonistic relation of revelation and concealment,[11] mutually affecting and modifying each other, progressing spirally so that the individual returns to her/himself only via an engagement with the other (beings, things, the world) and, as a result, the individual's life is realized as a human being in and of the world.

All three movements of life strive towards a particular ideal, the guiding principle of our activity in that realm. For the affective life it is the aesthetic ideal, understood as the pursuit of happiness, pleasure and immediacy. For the realm of work and self-extension it is the ascetic ideal, understood as self-denial, the mastery of self-control and overcoming of the instinctual. In a manner similar to Freud's discussion of the two principles of human functioning (the pleasure and the reality principles), Patočka considers that the ascetic ideal "ultimately follows an instinctual goal" (159), and so they could be described as two modes aiming at happiness. In its attention to the immediate situation of pleasure or displeasure, the affective movement is indicted by Patočka for its lack of cohesion and fragmentation of life while in its infinite deferral of pleasure, the ascetic ideal prevents closure. Yet their common fault for Patočka is primarily that they are both "Earth-bound" and not "authentically human" movements (159). Exactly what Patočka means by the term "Earth" is not always clear as it appears to refer to "self" and, in particular, to the corporeal self of human beings (159–61).

In an effort to achieve phenomenological clarity, Patočka's disentangling of the triadic affective/rootedness, ascetic/work, and transcendent/philosophical movements may seem to undermine both their synchronic temporality and their inherent hybridity as movements of human activity. There is the suggestion of a progressive and hierarchical relation from the first to the third. Yet, clearly, Patočka's aim is to insist on the primacy of the affective as a foundational, continuing movement throughout life, and also on the necessity of the self-expansion, the direction of the second movement. Therefore, it would seem that the interrelation of the three movements needs further exploration. Though Patočka speaks of happiness as being the aim of both of the first two movements, we may speak of this happiness as being arrived at via personal fulfillment of two kinds; in the first movement it is achieved through inter-subjective, communal relations, while in the second through what may be called the conquest of space.

In contrast to these two obfuscating movements, the ideal of the third movement can best be described as the pursuit of freedom. As already mentioned, Patočka defines the third movement as oppositional to the first two in terms of its resistance to and rejection of our "earthliness," our being bound to the power of the earth and the necessities of self-sustenance and self-extension in the affective-instinctual

Downloaded by [University of California, San Francisco] at 07:51 07 October 2014

Downloaded by [University of California, San Francisco] at 07:51 07 October 2014

and productive spheres. It is a philosophical movement of ''detachment from particulars'' which ''brings us to a level on which we can integrate finitude, situatedness, earthliness, mortality precisely into existence: what before we did not see . . . now becomes visible'' (151). Casting off the excessive preoccupation with the corporeal self (its sustenance in every immediate sense, its expansion and the prolongation of its life), the third movement enables us to ''gain clarity over our situation, to accept the situation and, by that clarity, to transform'' (160). Clearly, Patočka conceives this authentically human movement of existence as a process of self-liberation and transcendence which makes praxis possible. The question is whether praxis will transform the first two movements so that they will neither be antagonistic to each other nor to the life of ''true existence'' and ''authenticity.'' Yet this is precisely the aim of Patočka's third movement: it is the key to his view of life as a polyphonic composition. The third movement has the transformative capacity to overcome the inauthenticities and limitations of the first two. I would even go as far as to say that it is the movement most crucial to happiness. Although Patočka does not link this movement's ideal of freedom back to the previous two movements' ideal of happiness, there must be such a dialectical relationship, which would also prevent a divisive split between the first two and the third movement. How else could we overcome the ambivalence towards the necessity which binds us to the first two movements if not by this Sisyphean third movement?[12] My argument is that if the personal, corporeal I is to be reinstated in philosophy, then the ultimate ideal of the third movement is the harmonisation of the relation between the three movements.

As happiness and fulfillment in a philosophy of personal being cannot underestimate the significant role of the ''Earth-bound,'' of the corporeity of human life, the third movement should never supersede the first two or be described in such a way as to relegate them to some ''lower'' stage of human development. This is the mistake of much philosophy, and decidedly against Patočka's project for a philosophy of personal being that must needs include an understanding and appreciation of our situated, corporeal reality. Instead, the harmonizing role that emerges from what Patočka envisages for the third movement must also be one of striking and maintaining a balance between the three movements. A *dynamic* balance, suited to the fullest understanding that comes from an ability to reflect on our changing situation. Personal situatedness is assumed in discourse itself: the ''primordial structure of I-Thou-It'' is its starting point (55). Patočka's emphasis on the shared dimension of being is greater than Heidegger's and rejects the Hegelian antagonism between I and Thou.[13] The structure of the individual's involvement in the world is conveyed by a topographical metaphor: ''its center—my own I; the courtyard of my I's involvement—it; the center of that courtyard is the Thou' (53). The main attraction of the I in this schema of its involvement in the world is clearly an other I. *It is from this other I that a transition is made possible both to the it and to the we or you* (*plural*) (53; my emphasis). Therefore, community is primordially based on the interpersonal, I-You, relation. Clearly, the form and degree of relation amongst all the individuals in each community will vary and depend on a number of mutable factors underlying and shaping the interface of unique personal situational structures. Community with others in the affective movement of sinking of roots will have greater need of proximity in the present (the here and now) and greater intensity. In the realm of work and self-expansion, interpersonal relations (of varying degrees) may prevent the reduction of the individual to a role in their own self-perception.[14] In the third, philosophical movement of existence,

communities of individuals may take larger, more general and even abstract ideological form. This particular form of community is not as restricted in space-time as the former two and refers us to a different understanding of rootedness, sharing and co-existence. The final part of Patočka's lecture on "personal situational structures" (lecture seven) provides an apposite reflection on the relation between individuals in such cases:

> In addition to this I-Thou reciprocity, there exists another relation in the subject sphere of the world, a relation in which reciprocity and mutual presence do not matter, more of a relationship of a certain solidarity of various subjectivities, a relation of belonging and mutuality, not excluding reciprocity but not urgently or necessarily presupposing it, parallel but distinct from it—*the relationship of we* (60–61).

The appreciation of the political potential of this kind of community of shared practice is gained by taking into account Patočka's propositions in *Plato and Europe* on the meaning of "situation." His description of what is "the most interesting and most characteristic thing about situations is precisely that we have not given them to ourselves, that we are placed into them and have to reconcile ourselves with them."[15] One's perception of one's situation depends also on one's attitude to it, "whether people who are in a situation of distress give up or do not give up" (2). Furthermore, because "a genuine situation" is one which "has not yet been decided," its futurity is not amenable to description and thus "the situation is not totally an objective reality" (4). As a result of its non-material components, a "situation changes once it becomes self-conscious," from which Patočka concludes that "it is not materially determined entirely, that it depends in large measure upon us" (4). If we take into consideration how each situation affects and is affected by another situation, we become aware of the relation between the particular and the general, one's own situation and the entire situation of humanity as inextricably linked due to the inevitable situatedness of existence: "And so, to reflect upon what we are in–about our situation–ultimately means to reflect how mankind's situation appears today. To philosophise, I think, means to meditate within the entire situation, and to be its reflection" (3).

This conclusion is of primary importance not only for philosophy but for the arts, where situatedness is invariably foregrounded as a condition of possibility for the creative work. Patočka himself is led in this direction when he asks in *Plato and Europe*: "What methodological approach should be employed to get hold of something like the complete situation of contemporary mankind?" In his response, we may glean two further implicit insights: philosophy must study the arts and philosophy must always also be aesthetic; moreover, without this transformation of all philosophy to include/incorporate aesthetics, the former task (the study of the arts) will not succeed.

One must study the arts to reach an understanding which will be "a complete sense of the situation, something like a complete sense of the times" (4), an understanding Patočka believes is possible. Patočka's proposition rests not only on the expressive and contemporary elements of art but also on the degree of reflection of the artist, which comes to the aid of the philosopher:

> I think that this complete sense of the times is expressed urgently by the element of the age regarding expressiveness—art. Expressing the sense of life, that is art . . . I think we can also rely on the fact that the artist, who expresses the temper of his period, is also to

Downloaded by [University of California, San Francisco] at 07:51 07 October 2014

> a certain degree able to reflect upon it. So we can use his own reflections themselves, which have an element of objectivity and generality within them, to tie our own reflections onto something (5).

By returning the body to philosophy in order to reflect the corporeity of human life, Patočka dissolves the disabling barrier erected between the arts and philosophy. The result makes the third movement of human life, that which he considers peculiar to human existence and conducive to freedom, accessible not only through the discourse of philosophy but equally through the study of the arts. The above passage suggests that the third movement requires artistic practice or philosophical reflection, or both. And, as *Body, Community, Language, World* reveals, its success leads to the realization of human freedom and happiness.

Downloaded by [University of California, San Francisco] at 07:51 07 October 2014

Notes

1. Jan Patočka, *Body, Community, Language, World*, trans. Erazim Kohák (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 1998). Kohák's translation is based on volume 4 of the original Czech typescript collection, *Archival Collection of the Works of Jan Patočka* and the Czech edition prepared by Jiří Polívka, *Jan Patočka: Tělo, společentsví, jazyk, svět* (Prague: Oikoumene, 1995); subsequent references are cited in the text.
2. Erazim Kohák, "Translator's Postscript: The Story of an Author and a Text," in *Body, Community, Language, World*, 180. For a brief history of the official and unofficial activities of Jan Patočka's philosophical trajectory, as well as a compelling account of the "elective affinities" between Michel Foucault's work and Patočka's, see Arpad Szakolczai, "Thinking beyond the East-West Divide: Foucault, Patočka, and the Care of the Self," *Social Research* 61 (1994): 297–323.
3. Following Merleau-Ponty's distinction between, in Patočka words, "a being in the third person and being which is in principle impersonal," Patočka comments that the personal aspect of being may be neglected in philosophy in the third person but in impersonal philosophy it becomes "secondary, accompanying the impersonal, devoid of all autonomy and disappearing from view" (29).
4. Patočka defines the affective body as the unique object in which we feel pain and pleasure; the sensual body as that which we 'feel' and 'intuit', an object able to touch itself with itself, as both active and passive; and the kinesthetic body as an object we can move: "a wholly paralysed organism is dead" (27).
5. Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots: Prelude to a Declaration of Duties towards Mankind*, trans. A. F. Wills (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).
6. Patočka here starts off from Husserl's concept of appresentation in his *Cartesian Meditations*: "rendering present something that is not present, rendering it quasi present," as a crucial concept for demonstrating that our perception of other human beings as they appear to us as phenomena means that they "are not accessible to us in their original experiencing, in their stream of living" (63).
7. See "Sixteenth Lecture: Affection and Sensibility," 140–41.
8. There are numerous paradigmatic instances where such a process may take place, not only when we are faced with individuals from contexts, communities or cultures with which we have no familiarity, but also when we are functioning with the bias of over-familiarity.
9. "Spiritual individuation, release into the world of adults . . . is only a reversal of one's situation, a repetition of that movement, though no longer as accepting but as giving" (149).
10. Patočka notes, parenthetically, that his word "Earth" is not to be taken as a synonym for "Nature," because he is "reserving that term for something broader" (157).
11. See also page 158.

12. I am alluding to Albert Camus's interpretation of the myth of Sisyphus in *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), in which he states that we must imagine Sisyphus as happy. In the few moments of respite from the endless, futile task of rolling a huge rock up a hill, when Sisyphus is walking down before resuming his task, Camus locates the opportunity to reflect, to distance himself and transform his relation to his enchainment. In the extremeness of the Sisyphean paradigm, I find the most compelling illustration of the power that Patočka attributes to this third movement, which, though not *necessary*, is most authentically human.
13. Patočka's rejection is based on the assertion, contrary to Hegel, that "the I, an existence projecting itself into the world, into objectivity, is only seeking its meaning and content, so that we cannot say a priori what it is" (52).
14. Patočka calls this movement the "realm of the average, of anonymity, of social roles in which people are not themselves, are not existence in the full sense (an existence which sees itself as existence), are reduced to their roles" (151).
15. Jan Patočka, *Plato and Europe*, trans. Peter Lom (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press), 2; subsequent references are cited in the text.

Downloaded by [University of California, San Francisco] at 07:51 07 October 2014