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THE ONTOLOGICAL FREEDOM IN JAN PATOČKA'S "NATURAL WORLD AS A PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEM" WITH REGARD TO HUSSERL'S PHENOMENOLOGY

Abstract: In his post-doctoral dissertation *Přirozený svět jako filosofický problém* (*The Natural World as a Philosophical Problem*; orig. publ. 1936) Jan Patočka critically deals with modern metaphysics of subjectivity, at the same time introducing phenomenology with its phenomenological reduction. I would like to investigate this issue in the text just mentioned and briefly compare the similarities and differences in Edmund Husserl's phenomenology. Patočka provides a deepening of phenomenology by approaching the ontological conditions for the phenomenological reduction in the negativity of freedom in which the spontaneity of 'having-the-world' originates.

Keywords: phenomenology; phenomenological reduction; ontology; education; intersubjectivity; language; world.

Introduction

Jan Patočka for me and many of my colleagues is not a philosopher we know or read among many other philosophers, but his thought constitutes a complete noetic condition of our own philosophical search. If phenomenology consists in learning to see anew, I dare to say, we have learned from Patočka to see in Czech. His texts create the texture, "genetic code" of phenomenology in Czech language. One needs an additional reflection to find out that we hear Patočka's language, when we study Husserl, German phenomenology and phenomenology in general.

The state of things just described constitutes also a specific problem for us. In contrast to some constructivist theories, I think that the heritage cannot be removed because it belongs to our essential history. However, what seems to be possible in our situation is to shed light on some conditions of Patočka's own thinking. This paper represents a **preliminary** study of Patočka's phenomenology

and it consists mostly in the analyses from his post-doctoral dissertation *Natural World as a Philosophical Problem* (1936). Some differences between Husserl's and Patočka's phenomenological approach in Patočka's original text of *Natural World as a Philosophical Problem* will be elucidated.

The phenomenological reduction

In *Přirozený svět jako filosofický problém (The Natural World as a Philosophical Problem)*,¹ Patočka's analyses are taking place within the frame of Husserl's phenomenology of constitution. It is phenomenological reduction that provides the resolution for the unanswered issues from modern metaphysics of subjectivity (Patočka, 2016, p. 40–41). And again, it is phenomenological reduction that provides the general ground for destructing the naïve belief in empirical beings and opening them in the more original givenness as the 'appearances of existence': "The phenomenological reduction makes clear that what I held, in the natural, empirical attitude for existent things are, in the transcendental attitude, **appearances of the existent**; what appeared in the natural attitude to be ordinary, finished givenness in itself, the legitimacy of which was not questioned, is seen in the transcendental attitude as a crystallization in the lawful processes of verifying experience." (Patočka, 2016, p. 40)

And yet, the main part of analyses of the 'natural world' undertaken by Patočka is not situated in the immanence of transcendental subjectivity, but on a higher level of relationship of human being to his world. This state of things is reflected also on a terminological level. Patočka uses the term 'přirozený svět' (*natural world*; *natürliche Welt*) instead of Husserl's *Lebenswelt* (*living world*).² This terminological use seems to indicate that the starting point for Patočka is not so much Husserl's own analysis of *Lebenswelt* in *Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* and texts that followed, as the analysis of the first volume of *Ideas pertaining to Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, where the term '*natürliche Welt*' is used. Natural world (*natürliche Welt*) is a correlate of natural attitude (*natürliche Einstellung*), for which the transcendental subjectivity in its Arch-belief (*Urdoxa*) is constitutive. Instead of analysis of the immanence, Patočka stresses the negativity constitutive for being-human. We will return to this issue of negativity later.

As I have said already, in Patočka's analyses, instead of recurring to the transcendental immanence, the subject of the world is human being. The constitutive

1 We use here the English edition of Patočka's post-doctoral dissertation: *The Natural World as a Philosophical Problem*, edited with an introduction by Ivan Chvatík & Eubica Učník. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press 2016.

2 To be precise, this term is not originally Husserl's, but is used by George Simmel in his book *Die Religion* (1912). See Welter (1986, p. 13).

co-relation is not taking shape of vertical foundation in transcendental constitutive acts. Rather the horizontal one between man and world is studied. One might object here that Patočka obviously uses Husserl's analyses from *Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* and other texts devoted to *Lebenswelt*. That is definitely the case. But the point here is that in the centre of Patočka's analysis is not transcendental subjectivity, but human being, or rather the co-relation between man and world with its specific negativity of 'having the world'. This is indicated also in Patočka's programmatic thesis, that "the problem of philosophy is the world as a whole." (Patočka, 2016, p. 6)

The shift from concrete analyses of the immanence 'in' transcendental subjectivity to the 'having the world' belonging to being-human also makes possible to connect to previous metaphysics of subjectivity and deal with it. This critical dealing creates the substantial part of the first two sections of *The Natural World as a Philosophical Problem*. One of the main emphases in these analyses consists in revealing that the modern philosophy of subjectivity needs the ontological deepening that is provided by the phenomenological reduction. According to Patočka, since Descartes, modern metaphysics has tended to achieve the ground of subjectivity, but this subjectivity has always been confused with some ontic entity. "Descartes, with his methodical doubt, was on the way toward a similar purification of experience but went astray when his search for the unconditional became a search for the first certainties, his ontological skepticism an ontic one." (Patočka 2016, pp. 35–36)

In contrast, the phenomenological reduction with its explicit differentiation of an ontological (and phenomenological) and ontical attitudes makes possible to achieve the transcendental subjectivity, which any ontic entity refers to. But this type of relationship is not an inferential one within the horizon of reality and causality. The phenomenological reduction opens up the way to ask about the ontic being in its ontological dimension, that is in its 'mode of being' (*Seinsweise*) and 'sense of being' (*Seinssinn*).

Entities in phenomenological analysis are not modes of some super-entity, i.e. substance. That would mean remaining within the ontical attitude. We can suspend the thesis of the world with its ontical correlate and ask about its constitution:

It is true that in phenomenologizing, in a way, we posit, judge, etc. However, the character of our positings is different here than that of positings in the sphere of the natural attitude. The naive belief of the natural attitude is receptive, it believes in objects as independent from our turning our attention to them. The 'belief' of the phenomenological observer is not reception; rather, transcendental life first **arises** and **holds good for him** in his view. The same holds for natural and transcendental being. Natural being exists always **prior** to the grasping view of the finite subject, which merely **acknowledges** it. Transcendental being arises first through reduction; it is, in its 'ontic' character, **dependent** on the transcendental

subject, whereas in the natural attitude it is always the subject who is dependent on being (Patočka, 2016, p. 40).

‘Having the world’

In his analyses, Patočka stresses the essential structure constitutive for human being not only located **within the world** but also **having the world**. And this ‘having the world’ means that man **knows** that he is in the world, “man is not only a finite being, part of the world, but also a being which has the world, which has knowledge of the world.” (Patočka, 2016, pp. 54–55) One needs to catch the point here: this ‘knowing’ is not something added or secondary (for instance, as a subsequent reflection), it is not a predicate of human being, but it belongs to the very structure of being-human, to the mode of being human. And into this structure of being-human also belongs the ability to understand the other living beings (Patočka, 2016, p. 55).

And again, the ability just mentioned participates and enriches the character of ‘having the world’. That means, we do not live in the world *in abstracto*, but in the world constituted through the co-constitutive acts of respective society, the living and lived society into which one is being born (Patočka, 2016, pp. 56–57). Here belongs also the centering character of ‘being-home’ (ibid). Through this centering the specific orientation within the world is constitutive-constituted, granting the teleological dimension into its topology. ‘Mine’, or ‘ours’ ‘back and forth’, the ‘where-from’ and the ‘where-to’ is centered in ‘our’ acquaintance, familiarity in contrast to the distant and more or less dark ring of ‘undisclosed, yet being in the world’. Through these teleological structures goes the main topological structure of center and periphery.

We can add, that there is no geometrical exactness in this topology (it is a topology **within our understanding**, not topology of an ontic space on a map). There is no visible boundary in the physical-geometrical space, when we are in ‘our’ territory or in ‘hostile’ territory. Within the natural attitude, our space is thus structured that we stay in the present, enlighten field of givenness surrounded by an unclear, not given sphere. This unclear sphere is not directly visible for us, but is co-present in our apperception, as for instance the back side of the table. This unclear sphere expands to infinity. We do not see this expanding, but from our visible field we have the consciousness ‘from here, I can go on and on’. Finally, even this apperceived sphere is located in the total-horizon: the world.

What is almost missing in Husserl’s *Lebenswelt*-analyses as well as in his analyses of constitution of intersubjectivity is the role of language in constitution of the intersubjective ‘we’. In contrast, this constitutive part of language creates the core of Patočka’s own analysis in his post-doctoral dissertation. Language for Patočka presupposes already constituted apperception of the other self: “The first presupposition of the constitution of language and speech is the apperception

of the other, our fellow man.” (Patočka, 2016, p. 94) In this sense, we can say, the fourth part of *The Natural World* is not so much a confrontation with Husserl. More likely, Patočka’s starting point is precisely where Husserl’s constitutive analysis has stopped.

The linear relation active in Patočka’s just cited statement that first, there is a constitution of the other subject and only then the language, or communication in general can take place, also confirms our thesis that the possible confrontation with Husserl in Patočka’s text is more latent than explicit in the choice of problem-themes. In particular analyses and points we can sense the impact of other representatives of phenomenology like Martin Heidegger, Max Scheler and, when it comes to the issue of language, Anton Marty and Ludwig Langrebe.³ But the relation to Husserl’s phenomenology is still presented as more or less non-problematic.

Language, thinking and intersubjectivity

The use of more approaches from various philosophers and theoreticians makes possible for Patočka’s analyses that the inner relation among language, thinking and intersubjectivity comes to light. We can say that this part creates the main theme of the book. Because there is no space for a full analysis in this paper, we can only present a brief sketch of the interweaving of these layers.

The non-problematic parallelism between thinking and its expression is presupposed here. Unlike in Husserl’s own analyses (*Ideas I*, §§ 124ff.), the fact that the expression has its own intentionality does not become an issue. We can see another difference between Husserl’s and Patočka’s phenomenological approach. Husserl begins by the phenomenological reduction to the pure immanence of consciousness. Patočka’s method consists in exploring the relationships among different levels of thinking, language and intersubjectivity as constitutive for the fundamental structure of ‘having the world’, which we touched on above. We can say that in this respect Patočka’s approach is more similar to the one elaborated by Heidegger in his analysis of *Dasein* than to Husserl’s phenomenological reductions. But again, Patočka’s approach proceeds explicitly within the frame of Husserl’s phenomenology.

The analysis of language is not done for itself, it serves another purpose. And this purpose is to shed light on the constitution of intersubjectivity. One can argue, that we have already claimed that in *The Natural World* the constitutive relation between constitution of intersubjectivity and language is more or less linear. This claim still holds true. But Patočka’s observations regarding the **ability** of the child to learn language want to explicate some essential structures of being-human. According to Patočka, the thinking is an explicating of our spontaneity, “thinking is the development of spontaneity” (Patočka, 2016, p. 98). This statement needs

³ Patočka’s review of Landgrebe’s: *Nennfunktion und Wortbedeutung* was published in 1934. In: Patočka, 2008, pp. 352–355.

to be understood within the frame of the structure ‘having the world’ as one of its explicating characteristics.

As we have seen, according to Patočka human being is not only in the world but also has the world. And consequently, thinking is not located in the world, but belongs to this ‘having the world’-structure. Thinking is a development of the **distance** residing in ‘having the world’. And this distance alone is nothing but the **original freedom that characterizes being-human**. And again, this freedom is not something added to human being, but it is the **being-human** itself in the verbal, active sense. So ‘spontaneity’ mentioned by Patočka needs to be understood in this ontological frame.

At first sight, what seems to be missing in this ‘spontaneity’, or rather is not elaborated in the text, is its temporal foundation, at least in Husserlian sense. Or, to be more precise, if we consider that phenomenology discovers the temporal ground of experience and existence, the question arises if this ‘spontaneity’ and consequently the ‘having the world’-structure something temporal or is the temporality something that stems from this structure? Instead of talking in temporal terms, Patočka speaks about human **finitude** that belongs to being-human: “man is not merely a thing among other things, as can still be said of animals (except perhaps for the highest primates); man is above all aware of his situation, he understands his own finitude. Finitude grounded in interaction is a set situation, though its actual face keeps changing; man as man cannot step out of it.” (Patočka, 2016, p. 54)

But again, this finitude is not approached as something constitutive for being-human, as it happens in Heidegger’s analysis of *Dasein*. Rather, this finitude must be completed by the ‘having-the-world’-structure. Let us remember that “man is not only a finite being, part of the world, but also a being which has the world, which has knowledge of the world” (Patočka, 2016, pp. 54–55). And another question that might arise is how to understand Patočka’s statements regarding ‘spontaneity’. Is not this spontaneity a category belonging to metaphysics of consciousness that phenomenology tries to reduce?

Sidestep: Supplement

One way to elucidate the questions just posed is to turn to the later text, the supplement to the Second Czech Edition entitled ‘*The Natural World’ Reditated Thirty-Three Years Later* (1970). Here we learn that we need to understand this finitude as belonging intrinsically to our being. According to Patočka, Cartesian subjectivity stems from an absolute reflection. But this reflection means “a reduction to the object of a certain grasping” (Patočka, 2016, p. 121). In this reduction, the subject as a stream of *cogitationes* is uncovered. But the reduction also means losing sight of “our self in its selfhood” (ibid), its “essential historicity, and its essential **possibility and responsibility**” (ibid).

We can see in these statements that Patočka criticizes Husserl's way of reduction on immanence as the remainder of Cartesianism. Instead, he uses more Heideggerian approach: it is not the infinite transcendental subjectivity uncovered by the phenomenological reduction (and reflection) that provides the ground for understanding our mode of being. It is our finite self, our living 'being-in-the-world' in his "essential historicity" (ibid.), in his possibilities, shortly, in his living temporality. If this consideration hits the point, then the 'spontaneity' mentioned earlier needs to be understood within the ontological structure of finitude. The finitude of our being would then provide the ground for explicating the essential temporal characteristics.

But the text in *Supplement* was written thirty-three years after the original text and that means a substantial shift from the original text of *The Natural World*. So this way of interpreting the question about temporality, although it provides a consistent answer, seems to be quite anachronistic and more importantly, in contrast with Husserlian perspective, present in the original text. We shall try to reconcile the talking about the finitude with Husserlian phenomenology of principally infinite transcendental subjectivity without any *ex machina* aids.

'Having-the-world' again

Let me expand Patočka's thesis: "Thought begins with our explicit mastering of what has developed in our pre-thought experience practically without our active participation; thinking is the development of spontaneity. No earlier form of experience can explain it – it rests only on freedom as the fundamental form of human existence." (Patočka, 2016, pp. 98–99)

We have here a trifold foundation. There is a source of our thinking in us that cannot be reduced to any other modes of experience. And this thinking alone is "the development of spontaneity". And again, this spontaneity is founded on the "freedom as the fundamental form of human existence". We have already identified this freedom within the 'having the world'-structure: we not only are in the world, we do not coincide in our life with entities we encounter, but we also have the world. And that involves the moment that there is a distance between ourselves and the world and also between ourselves and ourselves-as-engaged-in-things-in-the-world. From the methodological point of view, this ground is achieved through the phenomenological reduction. But this reduction would not be possible without the original freedom. So in this regard, we can interpret Patočka's analyses as a direct approach to this ontological freedom which makes the phenomenological reduction and phenomenology itself⁴ possible.

4 In his lectures from 1968–1969, Patočka asks about the possibility of phenomenological reduction and reflection: "what is reflection, and how is it possible?" And his preliminary response in: "Being

That brings us to another question, how to think of this ontological freedom alone as the source of thinking? The freedom of distancing that we talked about in the previous paragraph is not an objective one. It should not be understood as a distance within the objective space. And as we already know, it is not something in the world, but it concerns the “relation” to the world in which the world *is* encountered as the world. But it is also true that the world is not created or produced by us. So what does this ‘having’ in ‘having the world’ mean?

As paradoxically as it may sound we have here the ‘receptive spontaneity’ in which ‘myself’ and ‘the world’ are originating. The negativity of this freedom is more original than these two positives (the ‘I’ and the ‘world’). – Following Patočka’s line of thought thinking is not some system of representations, but the very freedom that further articulates our presence, our being-*in*-the-world. Thinking does not reside on itself as *res cogitans* but brings the original negativity in its very core. That makes possible for us to be freed from anythetic and correlatively ontic belief.

And this negativity is happening as our temporality: “It is the fact that man has an original clarity concerning the whole of being, that he possesses the original world-phenomenon analyzed in the preceding chapter. We have seen there what this original clarity means: it is a function that makes possible the consciousness of reality as a unified whole, forming, in protention, presentation, and retention, the unity of the most multifarious particulars.” (Patočka, 2016, p. 95)

In this citation we can see the inner linking of existence and temporality. The ontological freedom (the structure of ‘having the world’ in the core of our existence) opens up the world as a temporal whole and interplay between presence and absence. We would not be able to understand this interplay without timing the negativity of absent presence and present absence founded in ‘our’ original freedom. This original freedom is not something we have, rather something we *are* in the ‘receptive spontaneity’, ‘ourselves-world’.

Some remarks regarding pedagogical consequences of Patočka’s analysis of being-human

As this text is more like a preliminary and open study, instead of a definitive conclusion, let me add some remarks that relate to what is called ‘philosophy of education’. This issue of education plays an important role in Patočka’s philosophy with regard to Plato’s discovery of ideas. Patočka (1996, pp. 303–337) explains this matter in his text *Negative Platonism* from the early 1950s. We cannot go into this matter in detail here, but we can only point out some further directions for deeper understanding of Patočka’s thoughts. According to Patočka (1996, p. 328), the essential structure of *chorism* belongs to both philosophy and education. This Platonic

that relates to its own being is at the same time unlocked for itself in some sense. The possibility of reflection is rooted in this openness.” Patočka (1998, p. 101)

motif of Patočka's philosophy could provide the **ontological dimension to our understanding of education**, mostly reduced to ontic systems and incorporated into the systems of efficiency (regardless the absurdity of it). The above cited thought that "man is not merely a thing among other things" (Patočka, 2016, p. 54) makes us aware that we need to understand human being and his education ontologically, not only ontically. That means, not only as a thing in the world, but also as being that 'has the world'. And from this 'having the world' the educational effort must originate. In his lectures for teachers, Patočka (1996, p. 367) says, "the pupil should not only learn at school certain competences for certain purposes but should learn something higher to want." If we understand the 'highest' as the ontological freedom from Patočka's analyses of being-human, then education and philosophy have the selfsame goal of 'bringing up' man to his own freedom, thus transforming himself in his 'having the world'.

We can understand the text of *Negative Platonism* as an explication of the question of negativity and freedom, which remained latent in Patočka's post-doctoral dissertation. Or, to put it in other words, we can read some key texts from Patočka, including the additional texts to *The Natural World*, as an elaboration of answers to this latent question of negativity, thus understand more fully his post-*The Natural World*-philosophy and shed light on Patočka's further development in its continuity and discontinuity.

Indeed, from the point of view of Husserl's phenomenology, there is a question left unanswered in our text, whether Patočka's ontological deepening of phenomenological reduction does or does not mean an abandonment of Husserl's claim for intuition of essences and consequently, phenomenology as such.

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WOLNOŚĆ ONTOLOGICZNA W JANA PATOČKI „ŚWIECIE NATURALNYM JAKO PROBLEMIE FILOZOFICZNYM” W ODNIESIENIU DO FENOMENOLOGII HUSSERLA

Streszczenie: W rozprawie habilitacyjnej *Přirozený svět jako filosofický problém* (*Świat naturalny jako problem filozoficzny*, 1936) Jan Patočka krytycznie rozprawia się ze współczesną metafizyką podmiotowości, wprowadzając jednocześnie w czeski dyskurs filozoficzny fenomenologię razem ze stosowaną w niej redukcją fenomenologiczną. W prezentowanym tekście autor podejmuje próbę zbadania i porównania podobieństw i różnic zachodzących między ujęciem J. Patočky a fenomenologią Edmunda Husserla. J. Patočka zapewnia pogłębienie fenomenologii, podchodząc do warunków ontologicznych redukcji fenomenologicznej z punktu widzenia negocjowania wolności, z której pochodzi spontaniczność „posiadania świata”.

Słowa kluczowe: fenomenologia; redukcja fenomenologiczna; ontologia; wychowanie; intersubiektywność; język, świat.

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