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Patočka, Nietzsche, and the issue of man

Abstract: In framing the question about the meaning of man and human history, Patočka draws on historical-philosophical and phenomenological sources. By tracking the genesis of the concept of eternity from Kant to the 20th century, he concludes that human meaning cannot be derived from moral postulates which exceed finitness of man. By abandoning the concept of eternity, Patočka concludes, the question of meaning cannot be bound by human targets, because the purpose is already objectified, existing without the horizon of one's being, and in this it takes the form of a relative meaning. The meaning, according to Patočka, is phenomenologically bound to non-objective being, thus implying that the meaning is problematic, unreal, yet constantly perpetuated. Patočka implements this attitude to criticise nihilism and especially to point out the unacceptability of active nihilism, a concept which Nietzsche introduced to philosophy. Patočka is critical of Nietzsche's understanding of realised meaning in terms of overman by rejecting his idea of will to power (he understood it as ruthless animal life in the form of the highest being) and the doubtful idea of eternal recurrence. In his attitude to Nietzsche, Patočka echoes the opinion presented by Heidegger, who called Nietzsche the consummator of modern subjectivity. Present research (Kouba) shows that phenomenology may profit more if it applies both Nietzsche's ideas to its own area and uses them in the analysis of the situational meaning that is constantly (by contradiction) bound to the horizon of the possibility of the situation without sense — a meaningful situation is suppressed, not realised, but its validity and consistency with the horizon of meaning do not disappear. In this view, it appears that Nietzsche's understanding of meaning is also problematic, but this problematic nature is not bound to absolute meaning.

Keywords: Patočka, Nietzsche, human existence, the world as a whole, absolute meaning, ambiguity of the happening, situational meaning

1. Introduction

Patočka's relationship to Nietzsche was markedly inspired by Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy as the consummation of modern *metaphysics of subjectivity*. However, Nietzsche consistently rejected the previous metaphysics; he understood it merely as an organon of the *moral perception of the world*, and Patočka could not agree with his revaluation of moral values. In this dangerous programme, he saw a limitless attack on the *humanity* of man, on everything most valuable, which the ancient Greeks had brought into the European culture, that is philosophy and politics, from which the Greek polis had emerged and in which abided. Where did Patočka see the basic symptoms of the contemporary crisis of European culture, beyond all doubt connected if not with the loss of then with a threat to the universal meaning of man and mankind?

2. The meaning of man and the meaning of history

For Patočka, the meaning of man and history is "*openness*, *liveliness*, *undoneness*, and so a certain *darkness*."[1] This ground after all constituted his notions of three movements of existence and the care for the soul. Patočka considered the care for the soul an epicentre of freedom, standing in the fundament of the historicity of man, in the battle of the acquisition of meaning, in responsibility for his life.[2] We can consider his notion of *natural life*, which he elaborated in his inaugural dissertation "Přirozený svět jako filosofický problém"[3] and in other papers in the initial phase of his philosophical thought as well,[4] as his initial interest and preoccupation with the question of meaning. He eventually returned to this issue in the final phase

[1] R. Stojka: *Patočkova filozofia dejín*. Košice 2013, p. 97.

[2] J. Patočka: *Věčnost a dějinnost*. Praha 2007, p. 86.

[3] J. Patočka: "Přirozený svět jako filosofický problém." In: J. Patočka: *Fenomenologické spisy I.* Sebrané spisy. Sv. 6. Praha 2008.

[4] J. Patočka: "Filosofie dějin." In: J. Patočka: *Péče o duši I.* Sebrané spisy. Sv. 1. Praha 1996.

of his life, namely in the work "Kacířské eseje o filosofii dějin" (in the chapter "Does history have meaning?")[5] and in *Dvě studie o Masarykovi* ("Pokus o českou národní filosofii a jeho nezdar" and "Kolem Masarykovy filosofie náboženství"),[6] in which he attempted to offer a more integrated notion of meaning, especially in relation to the nihilistic decline of Europe and to the possibility of overcoming it.

Nietzsche addressed the question of nihilism, and Patočka himself did not avoid the Nietzschean idea of the will to power, which he understood in terms of the highest being. The idea of the will to power understood in this way — as subjectivity brought to the boil, till harsh animalism — brought Patočka to the point of pronouncing Nietzsche a philosopher of the life of war state, organisational power which *mobilises every drop of energy,*[7] because everything has the will to want, to assert itself, and at all costs. The philosophy of the titanic will, attributed by Patočka to Nietzsche's philosophy, the will that does not want to have *anything above itself*, establishes the only meaning of man as arbitrariness and relativism of values, though these lead to self-destruction and nihilism. For Patočka, Nietzsche remained a nihilist, and not even Nietzsche's titanism changed or could change that. Titanism of modern subjectivism does not lead to the task most peculiar to philosophy; on the contrary, it impoverishes philosophy by taking away the basic ontological feature of human existence, looking for the meaning of human existence *in the world*. As early as in this fundamental protest against Nietzsche regarding the issue considered here, there is hidden an almost ultimate discrepancy between the two aspects and two approaches to this problem.

In order to grasp the *spirit* of Patočka's polemical attitude towards Nietzsche in the context of the question discussed, it will be appropriate to begin with introducing Patočka's notion of meaning *without* Nietzsche.

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[5] J. Patočka: "Kacířské eseje o filosofii dějin." In: J. Patočka: *Péče o duši III*. Sebrané spisy. Sv. 3. Praha 2002.

[6] J. Patočka: "Pokus o českou národní filosofii a jeho nezdar." In: J. Patočka: *Češi I*. Sebrané spisy. Sv. 12. Praha 2006.

[7] Ibid., p. 361.

3. The question of meaning of man and the universe

In order to show that the question of eternity is untenable nowadays and has to be rejected, Patočka in the paper "Kolem Masarykovy filosofie náboženství" presented an outline of the historical-philosophical genesis of the question of meaning from Kant to the 20th century, that is, through the approaches to the question of *eternity*, from which the issue of meaning had emerged and later varied. (He included Nietzsche too in the modern context, because Nietzsche did not attempt to abandon eternity, he just *brought* it *down* from heaven to earth.) We are in a different historical situation compared to Kant, yet he was the one who significantly moved ahead with the question of searching for meaning as far as the *turn* in the understanding of eternity is concerned. Kant in his work *Critique of Pure Reason* clearly shows that man cannot ascertain himself in relation to God as transcendent eternity. The boundaries of reason make it possible to comprehend God as nothing but an a priori condition, which is a condition of reason. The question of eternity needs to be *transferred* into the transcendental subject. Accordingly, Patočka in his paper accentuated and drew attention to "a new doctrine about God, conceived from the aspect of the meaning of human life in the framework of the overall meaning of the universe."[8]

For Patočka, to articulate the question of meaning adequately and meaningfully is possible only on this ground. It was Kant whom Hegel and Schelling, as his successors, superimposed with their own philosophical account, and for this reason, they did not understand in the full sense who had given metaphysics a new *style*.[9] In his work *Critique of Judgement*, Kant mentioned that a righteous God does not exist, and nonetheless, there is *no future life*.[10] Patočka elicited from this an alternative, "either to deny the moral purpose of the world … or to accept this moral purpose with all of its conditions and consequences,"[11] at the same time adding that Kant was inclined to believe that *without absolute and total purpose, if aim*

[8] J. Patočka: "Kolem Masarykovy filosofie náboženství." In: J. Patočka: *Češi I.* Sebrané spisy. Sv. 12. Praha 2006, p. 366.

[9] Ibid., p. 369.

[10] I. Kant.: *Kant's Critique of Judgement.* Trans. with introduction and notes by J. H. Bernard. London 1914, p. 384.

[11] J. Patočka: "Kolem Masarykovy filosofie náboženství," p. 371.

and meaning are the same, life has to be meaningless.[12] Man who negates the highest aim, the moral law, is a nihilist. It applies especially to Nietzsche. By contrast, it is what cannot be lost, namely the possibility of good in human nature for which man can live, that is the only possible the framework for the question of the *meaning of human life* itself.

According to Patočka, Kant — which is often overlooked — took a radical step by his philosophy in that he substituted godly order with human order: with the moral law of humanity. In short, the horizon of meaning of man in the world was brought into this world. Patočka stated it as follows: "just to moral man, acting according to moral law, the conditions and phenomena of moral life are shown, the rational postulates and the emotions that 'eternity' brings with itself."[13]

What bothered Patočka in Kant's notion of meaning of man was not only the issue of *eternity*, but also that he interchanged the question of meaning with aim or, more precisely, with purposefulness in nature. According to Kant, we learn the meaning of a thing when we know its purpose; from this it follows that the purpose and meaning of man is life in the scope of moral law in man, that is, a metaphysical postulate. If we take away the moral goal from man, what remains for him? Nothing.[14] Patočka asked the question of the meaning of man differently not only in relation to Kant, but also in relation to Nietzsche. The true meaning cannot be formulated in terms of creation's purpose. The purposefulness of creation, as Patočka affirmed, is based on a postulate. This needs to be refuted.[15] "The philosophy of postulates is a philosophy of the *purpose of creation*."[16] In this sense, the meaning of man is conceived as purpose, which gives man the certainty that his moral life will not be pointless. Without a priori postulates, the meaning of life vanishes, and nothingness, nihilism comes in.

According to Patočka, nihilism in its basic form, heralding itself in the form of the growing crisis of European culture, rests in that losing the postulate of purpose, man *grasps* relative meaning. European nihilism just confirms that the contemporary man of crisis derives his meaning from the *most manifold selection of relative*

[12] Ibid., p. 373.
[13] Ibid., p. 402.
[14] I. Kant: *Kant's Critique of Judgement*, p. 353.
[15] J. Patočka: "Kolem Masarykovy filosofie náboženství," p. 417.
[16] Ibid., p. 415.

advisabilities,[17] and so protects himself from the question of the meaning of the world as a whole. He protects himself from the threat that every meaning can be — if it is not already — impugnable. For nihilism — and this was confirmed by Nietzsche, too — it is symptomatic that man of relative meaning is not related to the purpose of eternity, but still to a *purpose*, even though to a finite, temporary one. It is essential that in the case of identification of purpose with meaning — absolute or relative — man can achieve them as a *reality*, realise them in the manner of being. In this context, Patočka asked whether it is correct to consider purpose and purposefulness the fundament of all meaning,[18] independently of the fact that things also have meaning. He saw the reasons for his doubts in something deeper: as a result of missing the *purpose of* the world's *creation* and man's inclination to look for relative purposes, the possibility of *shock* continually breaks forth, the possibility of the question of the meaning of the world as a whole, which is not a being. If the world as a whole is not a thing, it is not a being, and so it is not the *purpose* of its realisation, but it is here as a wonder; thus the world approached as a whole is *nothing* (unreal).

In Patočka, the discovery of the meaning of *nothing* in its full-strength derives from Heidegger's fundamental ontology. *Nothing* is the way in which Being shows itself in its difference from beings.[19] This *nothing* does not have to be pure negativity, derived from the positivity of things that exist; on the contrary, it has to be something immensely positive. It is positive, and yet it is not positivity. It is positive in that it lends meaning to things and to man. Meaning defined along this line is no longer a purpose. Patočka finds a difference, an issue, in the point where identity and unproblematicity are posited. The discovery of the positivity of Being, the finding of meaning begins there, in the point where relative meaning ends. What is thus the meaning like, if it does not belong to the relative?

Patočka does not doubt that the primary meaning, the one which is not a purpose and *stands* before every relative meaning, is something ontological, "which means non-existent,"[20] whereby purpose, that which is realised, is something ontic, something existing. Accordingly, the fundament of all meaning, which is the base of understanding of anything, can be only Being, and exactly by that it enables the uncovering of beings, while it steps back into its dark-

[17] Ibid., p. 414.
[18] Ibid., p. 416.
[19] Ibid., p. 414.
[20] Ibid., p. 416.

ness. The positivity of Being rests in that it establishes the understanding of everything that *is*, that exists. For this reason, to understand the problem of meaning, it is necessary to take a *step back*,[21] a step away from all beings, so that the difference between Being and being emerges; toward Being, which is seen here as that which precedes being non-causally and which is *important* to being. This *nothing* is positive in that it points at things, exposing that they are. And this is the way to the things in the light of new meaning.

Being grants meaning to things and to man. That things *are*, that they can show themselves, does not point at them as accidental beings; on the contrary, it shows not only that they exist, but that they are at the same time Being, that they are disposed by Being, and that they *belong* to it. The human experience of *anxiety*, a phenomenon already elaborated by Heidegger, points at the validity of the basic difference between Being and being in the world. Anxiety about nothing does not drive man to eternity, into fear of it, yet it drives him "radically into the position of finiteness."[22] Because of this finiteness, man faces the final possibility — complete non-existence. That non-existence points to *nothing*, thus cancelling the validity of relative meaning but at the same time revealing to man *Dasein in the world*, the meaning which is irrevocable, which remains intact, even though on its own it is un-real (unless converted to a positively given reality).

According to Patočka, revealing the difference between Being and being and uncovering the openness to understanding things from the horizon of *nothing,* by which he means the never-ending future*,* are connected to the impossibility of breaking away from the finiteness of things, into the world of relative meaning. With the distinction between Being and being, Patočka cancelled the question of eternity and in this way attracted attention to the openness of Being, which provides in-finite meaning to every finite being. That in-finite meaning, problematic and in its openness never complete, is no longer a worldly eternity, but it is every finite *Dasein in the world*. We can consider Dasein in the world no longer as a moral postulate but as a *moral accomplishment* of Being, its *love* for the world of beings, its goodness, the fact that it is not conditioned by anything but in its openness gives itself to things. Indeed, Patočka wanted to defend the morality of man — without the demand for moral postulate — from the nature of Being. With regard to Plato's notion of the care for the

[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid., p. 417.

soul, he wrote: "The soul so [by self-movement; Š.J.] not only makes possible the understanding of the universal hierarchy of Being in the sense of good, i.e., teleological understanding, but at the same time, it is the justification of good, it also gives [answer] to the question (first asked expressly by Nietzsche) why to choose good and not evil, why truth and not (possibly more efficient) appearance,"[23] why — we may add — Being and not being.

Patočka correctly came to realise that the concepts good, love, or Heidegger's *message* of being are anthropomorphic metaphors, though he stated (along with Heidegger) that they are not expressed in the form suggesting that their point was a certain *aim* of being, being in the sense of *person*. In the course of these metaphors, "the point is in reality *our* teleology, our ability to understand or not to understand the meaning, to expose ourselves to it, or to try to subordinate it; and *this* whole aim and teleology, even though it is our human aim, has a condition which is neither human, nor an aspect or attribute of man, because it is void of existence, for it is not something existing."[24]

In short, human life acquires meaning by understanding what it is based upon, what its precondition is, by understanding that it is created in a concealed, negative form; and exactly in this implicitness, in its inexhaustible richness, it shows itself in the distress of our finiteness, in man who has built up his provisional life *amongst things*. In this context, Patočka could not omit that Heidegger never asked the question of meaning or values.

Heidegger did not want to hear about values — as about something specifically anthropomorphic. The proof of that, besides others, is his paper "The Anaximander Fragment,"[25] in which instead of *guilt* for our finiteness, he wrote about *departure* from the *order* of the world, but that departure did not have a moral character, which would belong to Being. Despite all this, Patočka concluded that Heidegger's *message of Being*, its embedding into the centre of the world of being, is a deep philosophical message about the meaningful origin even of those most meaningless of the contemporary actions; but in this message there is nothing, not even an indication

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[23] J. Patočka: "Evropa a doba poevropská." In: J. Patočka: *Péče o duši II*. Sebrané spisy. Sv. 2. Praha 1999, p. 131.

[24] J. Patočka: "Kolem Masarykovy filosofie náboženství," p. 419.

[25] M. Heidegger: "The Anaximander Fragment." In: M. Heidegger: *Early Greek Thinking. The Dawn of Western Philosophy*. Trans. D. F. Krell and F. A. Capuzzi. New York 1975, pp. 49—50.

of the possibility of positively defined meaning.[26] At the same time, Patočka acknowledged that a phenomenological analysis of the question of meaning was not sufficiently accomplished yet. His outline of the question of meaning is considered a *prolegomenon* to it,[27] while he clearly emphasised that the relation between meaning and aim, meaning and value, could not be deductible from the aims, from the subject's will. And one who would engage in this task could not neglect the question of meaning and primordial time, because time plays a crucial role here. But how is it possible to reach the primordial time? If it should not be the time of *eternity* or *eternal* time, then only one possibility remains: "Primordial time is not on the side of 'eternity'; we rather find it within the context of final temporality of the human essentially limited Dasein in the world. Time itself does not belong to the side of beings, but it belongs to Being."[28] Primordial time should be time in which all openness happens, without which there cannot be any understanding, not even understanding of meaning as such.

It is evident that Patočka's responsibility for oneself, that is, fairness towards oneself and others, derived from *openness* to the message of Being, from that *step back*, and by this standpoint he wanted to demonstrate that it is no longer a moral responsibility derived from ontotheology of Good or religious theology, or from Kant's postulate of the morality of reason, implied in the aim of creation. It is possible to arrive at the meaningfulness of suffering and at the anti-meaningfulness of egocentrism, which closes itself against openness. The openness of Being and towards Beings — and that is perhaps the essential message of Patočka's search for meaning — means understanding that positive meaning is continually afflicted with negativity, in short, that positive meaning could never arise as something specifically positive, as being, as something which can be grasped. On the contrary, the positivity of meaning rests in understanding the universal responsibility.[29]

It is certain that Patočka developed his reflections on searching for the meaning of man together with the question of the meaning of human history, that is, with the question of the *philosophy of history*. In his work "Kacířske eseje o filosofii dějin," in chapter "Does history have a meaning?" Patočka attempted to articulate the question of the *understanding of meaning* in such a way so as to show

[26] J. Patočka: "Kolem Masarykovy filosofie náboženství," p. 419.
[27] Ibid., p. 420.
[28] Ibid., p. 422.
[29] Ibid.

— by means of the difference between meaning and purposefulness — that meaningfulness of everything is the matter of Being in the world. Phenomenologically expressed: "we achieve the relation to Being only in one way: when things lose for us their meaningness, thus 'losing sense.'"[30] In human history, this turn occurs with the beginning of Greek philosophy and politics, the outcome of which is the rise of *polis*. The establishment and organisation of *polis* should be an indubitable feature of the difference or transition from the pre-historical era to history itself. According to Patočka, pre-historical humanity is *humble* in the evaluation of life; the world is an order for it, and because it is an order, it is excused, as well.[31] Natural catastrophes and social catastrophes do not shock pre-historical people because for them meaningfulness is sufficient — gods are present in their lives, and so is eternity in the sense of immortality.

Pre-historic man thus lived at peace with the world, which is why he did not consider his life meaningless. History differs "from pre-historic humanity by *depolarising this accepted meaning*."[32] Man at the beginning of history is different from man of the mythical period.

He is different, because "he is responsible for himself and for the others."[33] In this relation, Patočka clearly emphasised that the transition of man into history is not possible to clarify by asking about the cause of this shock. It would be the *logical* explanation; however, the transition from myth to *logos* is not a movement of an active, operational reason, but a movement of existence. To elucidate the movement of human existence as a form of shock of the primordial meaning is, according to Patočka, possible only phenomenologically. If we attempted to find the answer to the question of the reason for the *shock*, it would be in vain; likewise, it is futile to ask what causes the transition of man from childhood to adulthood. The possibility of shock bears on the prehistoric man, but it is refuted by him: myth is what protects him against the shock. There is nothing in the life of prehistoric man that would belong only to him, for which he would be responsible; in particular he bears no responsibility for the organisation of a community of people. By contrast, wherever man attempts to create the *world of people*, there he cannot reject the primordial meaning. "By means of taking responsibility for himself and for others, man implicitly asks the question of meaning again

[30] J. Patočka: "Kacířske eseje o filosofii dějin," p. 66.
[31] Ibid., p. 69.
[32] Ibid., p. 70.
[33] Ibid.

and differently."[34] In this case, man is no longer satisfied just with the responsibility for himself. The responsibility for others is becoming for him a question, it is becoming an issue. The birth and organisation of polis proves this. According to Patočka, this shock is not a fall into meaninglessness, into deprivation of meaning, but a discovery or fall into the actual possibility of searching for a new meaning. Finding this possibility, discovering that everything is suddenly new, different, and problematic, is not associated only with the beginning of freedom of political man. This possibility is also associated here with amazement with the whole of the world, with astonishment at the disputableness of Being as such, at the fact that *something* anyhow *is*. According to Patočka, philosophy and politics begin in this way.

Looking for a new meaning brings dynamics into the life of the individual and into the life of the community, making a movement into the field of *change* of meaning, and exactly the movement of this change creates the phenomenal ground of history. The modification of meaning, uncovered by its disputableness in the Greek *polis*, takes place already at the time of its decline and downfall. Philosophy in the era of the downfall of the *polis*, Patočka claims, does not acquire the form of the problematic eternity of Being, astonishment at the fact that anyhow something is, but tries to rationally grasp that eternity. "At the moment when the perish of polis is ruled out, philosophy is transformed into what will be its form for thousands of years, it is transformed into metaphysics of Plato and Democritus, into the metaphysics of dual appearance, the metaphysics from above and below."[35] It is metaphysics of logos and idea and metaphysics of matter-of-factness, both in the attempt to achieve a definite clarity of Being, leaning against this clarity which was achieved by mathematics, "that seed of the future transformation of philosophy to science."[36] Without such metaphysics, science would not have been born. The seeming paradox of dual metaphysics — to which Patočka added a third kind, Aristotle's version — is that the very phenomenon of metaphysics is an issue; in this sense, the problem is also that the attempt to achieve the *real* world in the ideal construction of *real polis* counts as an attempt to sanction the world as such based on this construction.

[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid., p. 72.
[36] Ibid.

The effort of philosophy to give man a higher and positive meaning extends into the middle ages, when the antagonism between the meaning of man and meaning of the world was solved by reference to God and through privation of the practical meaning of human existence. In this context "the place of meaning and Being is God in his relation to the human soul: nature is the place of cold abstract speculation."[37] Nature as an independent being is beyond contemplation; it acquires a formal character, and it is becoming the object of mathematical natural science, a reality without meaning.

Mathematical natural science as a pattern of every science is becoming "one of the main fortifications of modern nihilism."[38] It guides man again into the prehistoric era, it provides him room and a world of rich and convenient support, a horizon of relative meaning, but it does not guide him to the renewed *shock* of the disputableness of Being and of human existence. The loss of absolute meaning, bound to eternity, results in man's fall into relative meaning, from which no gradation, no hierarchy or order of precedence can lead to the whole, to positively defined and universally obligatory meaning. Paradoxically, exactly today, in the *planetary era*, when Europe has become involved in meaninglessness, it is no longer the central point in history.

Is Europe falling into the prehistoric state? According to Patočka, it is not true. Prehistoricality is not marked by nihilism, meaninglessness. Prehistoricality points to absolute meaning, even though humble, to meaning which is exocentric in relation to man, bound to the world powers. Is it possible to get out of the trap of nihilism? Patočka's answer is positive. However, it is necessary for man not to be attached to eternity and to absolute meaning deriving from it, and still to preserve the sense of absolute meaning. Only this can free him from the hopelessness of nihilism. But how is it possible to preserve the sense of absolute meaning — if it cannot be defined positively? Skepticism can always be applied. Skepticism about eternity still makes possible the preservation or recreation of the absolute meaning — simply, man cannot live in the certainty of meaninglessness.[39] What he can do is live *searching for* absolute meaning, though in the context of the disputableness of the world, in the world which is concealed and continually uncovered.

[37] Ibid., p. 76.
[38] Ibid., p. 77.
[39] Ibid., p. 80.

Disputableness, as Patočka understood it, is not a matter of subjective attitude, a matter of the subject. Rather, its manifestation is a matter-of-fact; every single thing, every situation is problematic, because nothing is ever *given*, because behind the measurable givenness, there is a hidden *secret*;[40] nothing subjective, but that which all *clear* (given) makes problematic. Absolute meaning is accessible to man in such a way that it is problematic, it cannot be positively solved. Only in this highest sense can man live and fulfil his finite life, binding it to the meaning of human history as a whole. The openness to problematic Being, expressed by the ontological difference of Being and being, gives man the most extreme possibility of freedom and at the same time responsibility — no longer dedicated to eternity, but a responsibility for the meaning of man in creating the meaning of human history. Nevertheless, that this responsibility is no longer derived from the subject remains essential. Freedom and responsibility in this way are becoming the symptoms and expression of the *good* of Being, giving meaning to everything that exists, including pain and suffering, to everything problematic.

4. Nietzsche, metaphysics of subjectivity, and nihilism

Patočka, as a historian of philosophy and as a phenomenologically oriented philosopher, ranked Nietzsche in the context of modern metaphysics of subjectivity as its consummator, whereby in his acute subjectivity he confirmed his status — of a philosopher of nihilism. According to Patočka, Nietzsche distinguished active nihilism, independent from the subject, which is an outcome of the spiritual tradition of Europe. Roots of the other type (as Patočka saw them) were not connected with the lining up of mathematical natural science, but were already present in the metaphysics of Plato. "Nietzsche sees the nihilistic decay in the duality of two worlds delineated by Plato and by its acceptance by Christianity."[41] According to Patočka, Nietzsche's statement that God is dead was the reason for radical refutation of values derived from the positively defined absolute

[40] Ibid., p. 81.

[41] J. Patočka: "Pokus o českou národní filosofii a jeho nezdar," p. 351.

meaning. The task of Nietzsche's philosophy was to "eliminate the 'felinity' of the Christian duality of worlds, and on the other hand, to give again values, to give again the will to live."[42] According to Patočka, in this way Nietzsche cancelled the transcendent, let us say, a priori concept of eternity; however, he did not abandon *worldly* eternity, which is the eternity of happening without meaning. This was Nietzsche's acceptance of *active nihilism*, which Patočka could not accept: Nietzsche's idea of active nihilism is otherwise derived from a historical aspect, but it has also a biological aspect, an aspect of raw, inconsiderate animal life. Patočka argued that our attempt is to "overcome this kind of perspective regarding being, to eliminate it."[43] Moreover, this is the reason why Nietzsche's idea of the overman cannot represent meaning; it can be, at best, a purpose, and a very arguable one. In his drafts to the paper "Negativní platonismus," Patočka wrote: "Nietzsche foreshadows the need to overcome man as an addition, but does he overcome him?"[44] — does he utterly overcome nihilism?

Patočka did not hesitate to label Nietzsche's notion of nihilism a basic motif of his philosophy of history,[45] namely, the history of *hard morality*. The crisis of modern man does not rest in the transition from one social era to another, in which the question of meaning is solved positively, but it rests in something deeper. Nihilism launched into an open form because its roots were revealed: man from the "beginning of metaphysical interpretation of the world and life (Plato — Christianity) has tried to put his desire to search for the meaning of reality beyond this world, to situate 'good,' 'love,' unity, compromise, simply all values, beyond this reality and in the 'real world,' the ideal, in this way depriving this world of value."[46] The escape to the *real world* (of meaning) had to affirm that this kind of morality fits the weak. Patočka agreed with Nietzsche in that only the real world is capable to get rid of its afflictions; hence, Nietzsche's refutation of the *other world* has far-reaching consequences: if there is no *other world*, if there is no world of a priori postulates, then only the morality of the strong remains, but this has, according to Patočka, its origin in the low, instinctive animal will to want. Patočka believed that Nietzsche's cruel, inconsiderate

[42] Ibid., p. 352.

[43] J. Patočka: "Kolem Masarykovy filosofie náboženství," p. 376.

[44] J. Patočka: "Humanismus, positivismus, nihilismus a jejich překonání." In: J. Patočka: *Péče o duši III.* Sebrané spisy. Sv. 3. Praha 2002, p. 719.

[45] J. Patočka: "Kolem Masarykovy filosofie náboženství," p. 409.

[46] Ibid.

morality, which has to ascend to the throne of the abandoned metaphysics and Christianity, emerged from the *lowlands* of life "and its will to want wants permanently more and higher, shows corporeality and force as the origin and essence of the whole world."[47] This will does not just want to survive or adapt itself, but it wants to overcome, conquer, and rule. This is why Patočka labelled Nietzsche a *materialist of action* (not a materialist of physics), a materialist of lived corporeality, including instincts and urges, which shows that the will to live has become for Nietzsche a metaphysical principle.[48]

Nietzsche found the possibility to handle nihilism, which consisted in looking for meaning in eternal values, in the inclination to this solitary world, so that the fully worldly man would be one who has gone through this type of nihilism and who has overcome it, as well. He would overcome it by means of recognising *deception* offered by eternal values which provided man with meaning, and he would overcome it by identifying with the will to power, defining new values. Patočka labelled the overman a perfectly worldly man who instead of eternal ideals assigns himself the task to "gain control of the earth, subordinate the planet, and the will to will. This goal, however, will not be realised in a peaceful way. What Nietzsche proclaims is the history of two future centuries."[49] It is evident that Patočka saw Nietzsche's project of the overman as a *new political programme of mankind*, as a goal, which can be realised — in the form of ideological wars — "essentially between 'last humans,' who acknowledge just small relative goals … and between a 'new type' of man obeying the order of will."[50] This programme is utopian — in regard to Nietzsche's nondiscrimination between meaning and aim — but politically extremely dangerous as well, since by means of it, this new type of man will not hesitate to make use of all force and possibilities for creation, but also — and this is appalling — for destruction. As a result, Patočka emphasised, *bestially savage animality would rule the world*.[51]

For Patočka, it was significant that Nietzsche *subordinated* the idea of *eternal recurrence* to the will to power, thus understood: the will to power returns eternally, the will wants itself. What consequences could this have? If we discard moral values right now, there remains nothing, just the gratification of governance. Should

[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid., p. 410.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.

this be the source of meaning of man? Indeed, Patočka understood Nietzsche's idea of eternal recurrence as mechanistic metaphysics; however, he considered it as something deeper than scientific technology. Although they are *outwardly* the same; it turns out that from *within* the eternal recurrence represents the metaphysics of the will to power.[52] The reason for Patočka's belief may be that Nietzsche strove to prove eternal recurrence based on the *technical universe*[53] from without, from the objective, mathematically understood universe as a combinatorial game which excludes *freedom*. Because of this, such evidence of eternal recurrence cannot be credible and is not only misleading but (in this case) also no longer compatible with the will to power. "Will is open behaviour; objective periodical process is ordinary occurrence,"[54] something epiphenomenal. According to Patočka, Nietzsche's extreme subjectivity had to attain physicalism, so that it could become *metaphysics of worldliness*. The eternal recurrence of the same is not possible without freedom. Everything could, in the combinatorics of the game, recur, but it could not recur *individually*.[55] Either everything repeats itself, including our lives without the freedom of man, in which case it is a life that we (repeatedly) live only *once*, or nothing recurs and individuality does not have to repeat itself. Nietzsche's metaphysics of worldliness leads the eternal recurrence of the same eventually into the catastrophe of the utterly meaningless, eternally periodical process. "The issue of meaning is resolved in such a way that the entire lack of whatsoever meaning rules."[56]

It is obvious that Nietzsche accepted this risk, especially in that he wanted to prove the idea of eternal recurrence, or more precisely to derive it from empirical knowledge. Many trusted Nietzsche's *inconsistency*, among them Patočka, and that is why they saw in this idea just an unsuccessful attempt to substitute the Platonic or Christian eternity with a *worldly eternity*. Nietzsche did not eliminate the issue of eternity, and exactly for this reason, he was looking for a worldly god in the form of the overman, who co-determines the whole of the world for ages.

Patočka asked about the aim of Nietzsche's polemics with the metaphysics of transcendent eternity. What is the consequence of meaninglessness of the eternal recurrence? Does it confirm only that

[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid., p. 411.
[55] Ibid., p. 412.
[56] Ibid.

it denies the very question of meaning?[57] According to Patočka, forasmuch as the proof of eternal recurrence of the same is not valid (eternal recurrence does not have a purpose), we have to dismiss this idea — as the basic pillar of all the necessity. Consequently, the eternal recurrence cannot be anything else but the *idea* of subject, more precisely: of those people who greedily want to possess the total truth about being. On this understanding, as an idea, it can compete with other concepts. Patočka thus paid greater attention to the idea of eternal recurrence — at the expense of phenomenological inquiry — as a certain way of understanding the world and man's situation in it, compared to its possible consequences as a *subjective idea*, that is, in the historical-philosophical context of the question of meaning from Kant to present times. He saw the terrors of Nietzsche's idea, presumably influenced by Arendt, in the political, external circumstances.

Patočka admitted that Nietzsche's invitation to accept the worldliness of man, even though it is not sufficiently exempt from the question of eternity, is not only a fact of some sort, not only a commitment which cannot be ignored, but rather an *accomplishment* "with which a deeper meaning is paradoxically interconnected."[58] Still, Nietzsche mistook that deeper meaning for the purpose, he closed his eyes to it, and this, according to Patočka, remained *Nietzsche's great mystery*.[59]

From the historical-philosophical perspective, Nietzsche's idea of the overman represents a positively defined, realised *purpose*; Nietzsche's overman, man of uncompromising will to power, has to dispose of the highest value, namely the value of "eternity in a 'moment,'"[60] substantialised not only in his making and destruction, but also in passion and instinct, of the whole body, of everything that advantages the overman in every moment. The overman cannot be anything else but a new *justice* without conscience. Nevertheless, Patočka accepted that Nietzsche's absolute, corporeal subject, expressed by the will to power, is *open* to others and things;[61] but every open behaviour already assumes the difference between Being and being, which Nietzsche *did not work through*. Patočka acknowledged Nietzsche's *half-heartedness* in this: by absolutisation of the body, Nietzsche allowed the difference between Being and being to fade

[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid., p. 413.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid., p. 418.
[61] Ibid.

into the background, and "subjectivity in the form of unconditional, consistent and inconsiderate animality"[62] took its place. Patočka, therefore, exposes Nietzsche's philosophy of meaning as a concept specifically *anthropomorphically teleological*, in which there is not even an indication of distance towards anthropomorphisms of happening, represented by the will to power. In this way, Patočka clearly emphasised that meaning is not an ontological category in which human values, an intention or aim, are not included. In short, Nietzsche arrived at the finiteness of man; however, he did so at the expense of substantialisation of meaning.

5. *The eternal recurrence* and the issue of man

As it turns out, Patočka analysed Nietzsche's essential ideas from the historical-philosophical perspective rather than from the consistently phenomenological vantage point. We assume that if Nietzsche had inquired into the *abysmal* idea of *eternal recurrence* consistently phenomenologically, he might have discovered in it also a different (not only political-moral) dimension. Nietzsche articulated this, inter alia, in the return of man from absolute meaning to the situational meaning. In the parable (or riddle) about the loneliest man biting off the head of a snake that crawled into his throat, Nietzsche asked: „*Who* is the man into whose throat all the heaviest and blackest will thus crawl?"[63] and answered as follows: It was no longer a man, but an overman, light-surrounded and laughing at everything human.[64] Naturally, this parable can be interpreted in different ways; however, if we take into consideration that it is a parable related to the *abysmal* idea of eternal recurrence, it is evident that for the man of *finiteness*, the blackest and hardest is the question of the possibility of happening without meaning, the total absence of meaning. What will happen to man if he bites off the head of the circle of time without meaning, of active nihilism? What will happen to man if he

[62] Ibid.

[63] F. Nietzsche: *Thus Spake Zarathustra.* Trans. T. Common. Adelaide 2016, p. 113. Available online: https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/n/nietzsche/friedrich/n67a/chapter6.html

[64] Ibid.

creates a distance from the meaninglessness of eternal happening without negating it, as Patočka did?

What world will suddenly be exposed to him? It will no longer be the world of first or final causes, the world of absolute meaning. Nietzsche in this turn accentuated the world (the issue) of the eternally recurring *moment*. Man is able to get off the trajectory of ungraspable happening without meaning, and not only this. Riveting attention to the moment enables one to see in it at one point the possibility of nonsense (the moment in itself does not have meaning), and at another the possibility of meaning (in the flow of time it can have a meaning). Both forms of the same phenomenon show themselves as two variable horizons of every concrete situation, in which one gets into the spotlight on one occasion (while the other fades back to the background), and the other one on another. In short, every concrete situation has for man either the form of meaning or the form of absurdity, depending on whether meaning is missing in the given situation; when it is absent, man is searching for it, asking about it; and when he finds it, he does not ask about meaning, he does not have the urge and he does not need it. Meaning is a gift (when we are lucky), or it has to be earned in a fight — against absurdity — in a creative way. Meaning without the concealed presence of absurdity, without its double and ambiguous form, is not possible. Therefore, Nietzsche, like Patočka, understands the question of meaning in all its problematic form; however, he does not tie it to the absolute meaning.

Nietzsche actually hazarded if he wanted to prove the *eternal recurrence logically*, based on final combinatorics in infinite time. In his critique of indefensibility of Nietzsche's idea, Patočka goes further, beyond putting emphasis on the eternal recurrence derived from finite combinatorics,[65] from applying every possibility.

According to Patočka, if Nietzsche's concept of eternity (as worldly eternity) is to remain valid, it cannot not be anything else but the eternity of the *Dionysian god*. Nietzsche preferred *god* over the will to power (in the perspective of meaninglessness); however, according to Patočka, this led to a total *catastrophe of a meaningless, eternal periodical process*[66] of one and only period, in which all others are unrecognisable and identical, and where every individuality recurs. In short, Patočka could not accept that both the will to power and the eternal recurrence (neither identical, nor opposite) are mutually

[65] J. Patočka: "Kolem Masarykovy filosofie nábeženství," p. 411.
[66] Ibid., p. 412.

conditional, and that none of them has absolute validity. In order to acknowledge this, he had to abandon his own standpoint, consisting in the attempt to transfer every duality (of position and opposition) into one, integrating horizon, namely into the horizon of the world in its absolute, although problematic, sense, which is not based upon the aim. In this context and from this standpoint — not only historical-philosophical — it is necessary to see the source of Patočka's criticism of Nietzsche's frequent interchanging of meaning and aim, or more precisely, goal.

Patočka grounded the philosophical concept of the entirety of the world as absolute meaning on the ontology of time, on apparentness, thus on the phenomenon which represents the structure of Being of the world (and therefore is not a being itself), but at the same time is a being — in its apparentness. Today (in a new situation), some experts on Patočka, his heirs and continuators, notice a certain bias in his philosophical aspiration to grasp the issue of apparentness in a consistently phenomenological way — and not only in the *dependence* of being on Being. As P. Kouba points out, Patočka's approach to apparentness already presupposes to *whom* something appears,[67] and even though he attempted to situate the ontological relevance in the asubjective structure of appearing, he could not be completely successful with his project, because — paradoxically — exactly for this reason, he *forsook* phenomenology. More precisely, Patočka did not abandon the basic idea of phenomenology, namely, that Being is appearing, but he attempted to prove it by means of how Being appears to man, "however, it is not clear then, how it has to have a real ontological relevance."[68] Therefore, Patočka did not derive the disputableness of meaning from the entirety of the world, even though he *assumed* that appearing related to man has an ontological validity of the entirety of the world.

If we want to persist in phenomenology, then the disputableness of meaning (of Being) can be addressed only on the ground of phenomenon. Indeed, what makes phenomenon a phenomenon cannot assume the existence of subject and its outreach into asubjectivity, "but it is part of one overall context (for example spatial) and at the same time belongs to another semantic context, to one 'hidden' at the given moment."[69] Appearing is so the meaning of that which shows itself, but also its dependence on that which in the same situ-

[67] P. Kouba: *Smysl konečnosti*. Praha 2001, p. 153.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid., p. 161.

ation does not show itself but which can acquire meaning in another situation. The standpoint presented by Kouba points to the fact that phenomenology is different nowadays — even though it does not abandon its essential idea — namely, in this situation it is not only ready to accept Nietzsche's philosophical ideas, but also to transfer them directly into its own ground.

Kouba did not reject Nietzsche's way of thinking; he found in it what seemed to be fruitful for phenomenology, namely *antagonism* in the very happening, the grounding of the antagonism between meaning and nonsense in every moment, and the disputableness of meaning (no longer of absolute meaning) in every concrete situation. Kouba transferred the idea of eternal recurrence and overman to phenomenological ground through the phenomenological structure of the time of the present, which allows us to look at the entirety of the time of the present in two ways — firstly, in the meaning of *whole time*, in the context of the moment which drags with itself all past and future, even itself;[70] and secondly, in the meaning of the moment, which is the difference between the past and future. "Naturally, both perspectives are inseparable, each one of them in a subordinate form always necessarily takes part in the 'meaning' of the other."[71] The shift of dominance between them changes the perspective, and so the situational meaning too; that which is the meaning in one perspective is meaningless in the other, whereby the opposite applies too. The lack of meaning provides the grounds for the creative force and is the source for the realisation of the situation which would have meaning.

Antagonism in time — as a source of happening — represents the phenomenology of the ambiguity of the concrete, final meaning in its dependency on the presence of that by which it defines itself, which is hidden and without meaning.

That is no longer an antagonism of the absolute meaning of Being in its negative definition and opening up to such a unifying perspective; on the contrary, turning to the phenomenology of the final meaning makes it possible to understand the question of apparentness in a different way from that proposed by Patočka. The disputableness of Being in Nietzsche's interpretation (acquitted of absolute meaning) shows on one occasion the form of Being as Being of being (revelation of meaning), and on another, as the form of being without Being (revelation of the meaningless of being). "Nietzsche therefore

[70] F. Nietzsche: *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, p. 112.

[71] P. Kouba: *Nietzsche. Filosofická interpretace*. Praha 1995, p. 69.

is not looking for 'necessary unity,' rationality, which should be indubitable, or for 'accidental unity,' which would have to be uninteresting, but he is looking for 'necessary dis-unity': he proceeds with his concepts to the point where their meaning breaks and *changes* (emphasis Š.J.), without trying to disguise or overcome this turning point."[72]

If we aim at grasping Patočka's heritage — in our case, his understanding of *meaning* in confrontation with Nietzsche — we have to search for a way of *uncovering* not of that which he wrote, but of that how what he wrote *pulls* us into his philosophical work, of that how we become its participants, which is possible only in a *productive* way, in discovering new meanings of what he wrote. And I do think that besides other Patočka's students and followers (Chvatík,[73] Blecha,[74] and others), Kouba is especially successful in his phenomenological grasping of Nietzsche's philosophy.

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[72] P. Kouba: *Smysl konečnosti*, p. 54.

[73] I. Chvatík: "Kacířství Jana Patočky v úvahách o krizy Evropy." *Reflexe* 19 (1996), pp. 1—12.

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