

# Jan Patočka: From the Concept of Evidence to the Natural World and Beyond

Lubica Učník

**Abstract** In this paper, I call attention to certain themes that are present in Patočka's PhD dissertation of 1931, *The Concept of Evidence and its Significance for Knowledge* [*Pojem Evidence a Jeho Význam pro Noetiku*]; in which he outlines a historical account of the concept of evidence by considering the methodology of modern science based on modern epistemology as inaugurated by René Descartes. For Patočka, Husserl does not offer a finished philosophy but rather provides the best possible philosophical attempt so far at answering the question of evidence inherited from modern epistemology. I argue that certain concerns that are present in his PhD dissertation never leave Patočka's thinking. In Patočka's view, we need to rethink phenomenology, not abandon it.

**Keywords** History of thinking • Concept of evidence • Descartes • Rationalism • Empiricism • Cognition • Scientific reasoning • Truth • Meaning constitution

'Let us not doubt the truth of sense experience,' says [Saint Augustine], 'because we would not be able to know number, magnitude (size) and givenness of things if we did not perceive them with our senses' (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 63).<sup>1</sup>

In the school year 1928–1929, Jan Patočka received a graduate scholarship to study in Paris. In 1929, he attended Edmund Husserl's *Paris Lectures* (Husserl 1998).<sup>2</sup> At the time, Patočka was already familiar with Husserl's work, but the lecture made a lasting impression on him.<sup>3</sup> Patočka's fight against positivism in philosophy and science was invigorated by Husserl's lecture. Husserl's phenomenology, his critique of positive science as "science lost in the world" (Husserl 1998:

---

<sup>1</sup> "Budiž nás vzdálena pochybnost o pravdě smyslové zkušenosti,' praví, 'neznali bychom číslo, velikost a určenost věcí, kdybychom je nevnímali smysly'". Unless indicated, translations are my own.

<sup>2</sup> Later expanded into *Cartesian Meditations* (Husserl 1960).

<sup>3</sup> At the lecture, his teacher Alexandre Koyré introduced Patočka to Husserl (Blecha 1997: 19–21).

L. Učník (✉)

Philosophy, School of Arts, Murdoch University, Perth, Australia

e-mail: [l.ucnik@murdoch.edu.au](mailto:l.ucnik@murdoch.edu.au)

39), which forgets its own foundation and relies on the unreflected “naivetés of a higher order” (Husserl 1998: 36), and his call to self-responsibility, (Husserl 1998: 4) resonated with Patočka’s thinking and deeply influenced him (see also Tholt 2003: 20ff).

In 1933, equipped with a Humboldt scholarship, Patočka studied in Berlin, attending lectures by Nicolai Hartmann, Werner Jaeger and Jacob Klein; only to move to Freiburg im Breisgau, to study with Husserl. In a letter dated 12 May 1933, Husserl responded to Patočka’s request to study with him: “If you really want to learn understanding and if you do not bring with yourself ready-made philosophical convictions (those intellectual blinkers grown on eyes), then you are warmly welcome. I am happy to help and entrust you to the care of my assistant Eugen Fink” (Blecha 1997: 25; Schuhmann 1987: 34). Patočka and Fink formed a lifelong friendship. Moreover, Fink’s critical stance towards Husserl’s and Heidegger’s phenomenology was important for Patočka’s later thinking (Blecha 1997: 27–30). During his Freiburg visit, Patočka also attended Heidegger’s seminars (see Blecha 1997: 26–27; Tholt 2003: 25ff).

It is in this historical context that I propose to revisit Patočka’s 1931 PhD dissertation, *The Concept of Evidence and its Significance for Noetics* (*Pojem Evidence a Jeho Význam pro Noetiku*) (Patočka 2008 [1931]).<sup>4</sup> Patočka’s 1933 encounter with Husserl was also an encounter with Klein and Fink, who both encouraged him to attend Heidegger’s seminars. These intellectual contacts took place after Patočka wrote his *The Concept of Evidence*. Hence, revisiting his PhD dissertation may provide us with a new perspective from which to assess Patočka’s thinking, prior to his conversations with Husserl and Fink and his encounter with Heidegger. Given that, for Patočka, the history of thinking is the *conditio sine qua non* of thinking *per se*, I suggest that Patočka’s attention to the historical perspective might be one of the ways to assess his early writing.

My aim, then, is to highlight certain themes that are present in Patočka’s PhD dissertation. I do not claim that this is the only way to interpret Patočka’s dissertation; and I will not present a sustained interpretation of its content. However, I will argue that certain concerns that are present in the dissertation never leave Patočka’s thinking. Moreover, there is a tension between his overall epistemological focus, based on cognition only, and his concern with beings, which exceeds his purported concern with evidence and knowing.<sup>5</sup>

In *The Concept of Evidence*, Patočka offers a historical account of the concept of evidence, by considering the methodology of modern science based on modern epistemology as inaugurated by René Descartes. His concern is how we can navigate between the Scylla of empirical evidence,<sup>6</sup> which is by definition changing, and the Charybdis of the rationalists’ immutable, *a priori* ideas, which are

<sup>4</sup> From now on referred to as ‘*The Concept of Evidence*’.

<sup>5</sup> James Mensch points to similar tension in Husserl’s *Logical Investigations* (Mensch 1981).

<sup>6</sup> See Part II of *The Concept of Evidence* on empirical genesis (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 87–100).

supposedly innate.<sup>7</sup> To offer a different approach to the concept of evidence, Patočka examines both rationalist and empiricist systems. He points out that rationalists dispense with the idea of the external world and construct it through “method”; while empiricists – dispensing with the external world as well – place the external world in the human mind on the model of *spatium*, where ideas are almost literally taken as mental ‘pictures’ of external things (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 86). Following from this unexamined assumption, we supposedly compose complex ideas from simple ideas (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 88).<sup>8</sup> Who or what ‘performs’ this composition had already been questioned by Leibniz (1934 [1765]). The historical account that Patočka presents points to the importance of the concept of evidence, which is equally pertinent to both positions and highlights the problem at the heart of modern epistemology.

Rationalism and empiricism are the outcome of Descartes’s search for the certainty of knowledge and the self-sustained absolute evidence that does not need any other thing for its existence [“*nulla re indigeat ad existendum*”] (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 76).<sup>9</sup> In Descartes, of course, only God fulfils this condition; because God creates everything, hence he does not need anything else for his being. However, *per analogiam*, Descartes uses the being of God to argue that, since *res cogitans* and *res extensa* need nothing except God to exist, in this derivative sense, these two substances into which he splits the world are not only self-sufficient, but also self-subsistent (Descartes 1985: I, 52, 25).

Rationalism takes over the notion of ‘absolute evidence’; while, by contrast, empiricists question the rationalist idea of absolute evidence, arguing instead that evidence must come from experience. Yet, since empiricists accept the Cartesian split between the world and thinking, there remains the problem of accounting for experience. In what way do we experience things in the world, if the world is independent from our thinking? Patočka asks: given the history of modern epistemology, how can we account for human knowledge; how can we jump over the crevasse between the world and thinking created by tradition? To reconsider modern epistemology, Patočka starts with cognition. How can we know that our thinking is about the world; how can we know the meaningful whole and the truth that is its correlate? How can we think about the evidence that we need in order to justify the meaning constitution of, for example, a triangle? He suggests that this “thought-whole” of a triangle is “the object of cognition”, therefore it cannot be “independent from me; it is not inaccessible to me” (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 20).

However, is knowing a triangle enough to account for the being of a triangle? How do we know that the triangle about which we think *is* in reality? Is it possible

<sup>7</sup> See Part II of *The Concept of Evidence* on the genesis of rationalism (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 76–86).

<sup>8</sup> cf. Locke, esp. Locke 1976 [1690]: Book II, Chapter XXV, 1, 2, 5 [150–152].

<sup>9</sup> “*co žádnou věc nepotřebuje ke své existenci*” (Editor’s note in Patočka 2008 [1931]: note 108, 176). In English translation: “*By substance we can understand nothing other than a thing which exists in such a way as to depend on no other thing for its existence*” (Descartes 1985: I, 51, 24 [210], italics in original).

to infer from knowing the triangle that triangles exist? Patočka does not ask these questions; he asks, instead, how we can address “the question concerning what *is*” (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 28, italics in original).

We can formulate the problem differently: is Patočka inquiring about the being of beings or is he searching for evidence concerning our ways of knowing? Does Patočka ask a question about the being of a thing or a state of affairs that is in the world, or does he ask how he can know and give evidence for his knowing about a thing or a state of affairs? In other words, as Kant noted, existence is not a real predicate; and to simplify, something must already exist if we want to speak about it (Kant 1996: A 598, B 626). So, in this context, what does ‘the question concerning what *is*’ relate to? It might be argued that two different inquiries can proceed from this question, depending on the starting point: epistemology or ontology.

In *The Concept of Evidence*, both inquiries (ontological and epistemological) are subsumed under cognition: knowing is thinking that aims at a formation of meaning by providing reasons that contribute to the fullness of meaning, for the clarity of a ‘thought-whole’. Thinking is *cogitatio* and reasons – in the form of thoughts – are *cogitata*. The chain of reasoning constitutes evidence. Each reason is built on another, tied together from the antecedent through to the consequent; thereby constituting the full sense of a thing or a state of affairs (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 15). When we look at a triangle, we simply cannot know that the sum of its inside angles is  $180^\circ$ . For us to grasp the meaning of a triangle, we must know what a triangle is, what angles are and why the sum of them is  $180^\circ$ . We need reasons to understand it. In the case of mathematical knowledge, we need a specific, artificial method supplied by mathematics (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 62). Only then can we grasp the whole meaning of a triangle. To develop the cognition of the meaningful whole, we seek the clearest and the most cardinal reasons that we can provide among the never-ending stream of consequences. The idea expressed in this whole is truth (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 15). The question remains, is this an ideal or a real triangle? In the domain of scientific cognition, which Patočka considers, how can we think this difference?

By contrast, common sense (*sensus communis*) is qualitative and not quantitative. Although quantitative thinking – in other words, scientific knowledge – is based on our original, qualitative sense, our everyday experience is not quantitative (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 66). We know that when we throw a rock against a window, it is very likely that the window will break. In this sense, we experience a connection between our action and the broken window: we *see* the regularity of our acting; we also *see* the regularity of certain events we encounter in the world. We know, in terms of common sense, that the sun will come up every morning and set in the evening; leaves will fall and birds will migrate in the autumn. This regularity (or *typicality*, as Husserl calls it) is a part of our living (Husserl 1970: §9b, 31). However, this acceptance of the typical cause and effect that we experience is not the same as the causality that science must presuppose for its own investigations of nature. We should not conflate the regularity we experience in our everyday living with the idea of perfect causality in the domain of science. These are different ideas (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 69).

As Patočka notes, David Hume provides the most influential critique of the scientific idea of causality. Following his predecessors, Hume explains the “category of causality” psychologically, on the model of ideas that influence our mind through experience (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 69). Ideas are relational, explained on the models of spatiality and causality. These relations occur either between thoughts themselves in the mind, or between worldly beings and the mind of the knowing subject. Consequently, because Hume accepts an empirical understanding of consciousness based on the model of spatiality (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 88), he discredits “direct knowing [*noetiku*]” (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 69), as well as causality. He dismisses rather than questions the model that he inherited. Hume, therefore, denies both the modern scientific idea of perfect causality and the everyday regularity of our experience, because he does not distinguish between them.

The problem of the connection between the world and our thinking is not endemic to empiricism only. As already noted, it starts with Descartes and his search for certainty of knowledge, which he supposedly achieves by splitting the world into *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. Evidence becomes the measure of truth based on *cogito sum*; thereby instituting the separation of a being that is in the world from the knowing subject (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 78). The connection between knowing and being becomes the “riddle of transcendence” (Husserl 1999: 45) or “the *enigma of all enigmas*”, as Husserl expresses it (Husserl 1970: §5, 13, italics in original). Since the connection between things in the world and the mind is explained through causality, truth is explained as “*adequatio intellectus et rei* [the correspondence of a thing to the intellect]”, which, according to Patočka, is pure myth. It is impossible to explain knowledge on this model. Patočka points out that we have no access to “absolute being” that we can use as evidence. We can only use “a being that shows itself”, thereby letting us “know it” (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 15).

One may note here that the questions of being and knowing are interrelated in this instance. If something appears to me, then that something must have an independent being from me. Yet, it seems that, for Patočka, this manifestation is immanent: in other words, in our thinking. It is this showing of a being that Patočka refers to as evidence. Patočka explains that “a being for me” is limited by “how and as long as it shows itself”. Therefore, “an outside being becomes an ‘inside’ being; the meaning of the existence of a being coincides with a being for me” (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 16). It follows then, that truth is not the correspondence of a being in the world and intellect, but is the idea of a thought-whole constituted through knowing, because the “truth of the subjectified being is necessarily the idea of fulfilled sense [thought-whole]” (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 16).<sup>10</sup> Yet, the tension does not disappear. How does the outside being become the inside being for me?

One answer could be pre-knowledge. If Patočka’s ‘pre-knowledge’ is similar to Husserl’s idea of pre-predicative thinking, then the connection between the world and thinking might be explained by our pre-knowledge of the *Lebenswelt*. However, this does not seem to be the case. According to Patočka, the idea of truthful

---

<sup>10</sup>“subjektivací jsoucna se tudíž pravda stává nutně. . . ideou myšlenkového celku”.

knowing encompasses the cognition of manifestation, as well as the meaning of the ‘thought-whole’. Consistency defines the character of knowing, which aims at the cognition of the meaningful whole. This fulfilled sense of the whole means that the constitution of the world is formed in stages, where each becomes the reason for the next (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 17). Meaning constitution begins with the intuition of the whole. The entire uncovering (*invenio*) in its essence is nothing more than an attempt to reach new meaningful constitutions. Uncovering is the projecting (*rozvrhování*) of truth. Abstract thinking is not the only cognition that aims toward the fulfilled meaningful whole: the formation of wholes happens in connection with intuition (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 17). Perhaps we might recall Patočka’s description of “the instance of categorial intuition” in *An Introduction to Husserl’s Phenomenology*, “which is a correlate of spontaneous, free mental activities in which objective formations common to diverse real mental processes... ‘originate’” (Patočka 1996: 71). In science, we do not have finished ‘objective formations’. Science is a way towards newer and newer configurations; newer and newer syntheses in the sphere of knowing (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 17). In this connection, Patočka tries to unpack what ‘pre-knowledge’ is (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 21–23).

One explanation is that pre-knowledge is a state of thinking in which details become subsumed under the unclear intuition of the whole (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 19). In other words, we have an intuition of something, but instead of progressing, as with clear conceptual knowledge, from the *cogitatum* to the *cogitatum*, forming the meaningful whole, this whole is somehow already here in my thinking, but I cannot think it clearly. Citing Dostoyevsky’s reflection on the clear moment of consciousness in which the soul becomes prophetic, Patočka suggests that this tenebrous whole guides us in those prophetic moments (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 19). Patočka’s focus is on scientific thinking when he suggests that the scientist must at some point confront the feeling of something that he cannot as yet express. Citing E. Le Roy, he writes that pre-knowledge is a movement of thinking, away from unconceptualised certainty, which one is unable to put into words or even think (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 22). This pre-knowledge might lead the scientist towards a change in thinking; towards a different understanding and truth. “In those twilight and dreamy regions, certainty is born and evidence is sought”.<sup>11</sup> An inkling of truth brought about by pre-knowledge leads a scientist on the road to discovery: as Patočka notes, the inventor follows his pre-knowledge to change the present state of science. However, the inventor is not enough; the systematiser must accompany him. The systematiser conceptualises the shift in knowledge, constructing a new methodological structure. The paradigmatic example of the inventor is Galileo; the systematiser is Descartes (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 24–25).

In 1933, Patočka reflected on Descartes and Galileo again in his ‘Afterword’ to Descartes’s *A Discourse on Method*. He explains that Galileo and Descartes ended the crisis of scholastic Aristotelianism, lasting for 300 years. While Galileo’s work

---

<sup>11</sup> “E. Le Roy, *Sur la logique de l’invention*, in: *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 13 (1905), str. 196” (Patočka 2008 [1931]: note 21, 23).

changed natural science only, “Descartes built a new metaphysical system”. Here Patočka notes that the Cartesian transformation of thinking is hard to gauge, because the “revolution, launched by Descartes, was successful in some respects all too perfectly” (Patočka 1992 [1933]: 65). The Cartesian conception of the world led to a rupture in our understanding of the world: between the world of our living and its scientific construct. Now, Patočka thinks this split differently. It is no longer only the abyss between our thinking and the world. He extends it in a form he is to elaborate in more detail in his habilitation, *The Natural World as a Philosophical Problem (Přirozený Svět Jako Filosofický Problém)* (Patočka 2008 [1936]). In the ‘Afterword’ to Descartes, Patočka points out that “on the one side, we are spiritual beings, primarily closed within ourselves, on the other side, the world of objects is understood purely rationally and geometrically, without qualities, without inner forces” (Patočka 1992 [1933]: 67). This fractured world is the problem of present-day science and philosophy (Patočka 1992 [1933]: 68).

In *The Concept of Evidence*, this fracture is not yet addressed. However, in his ‘Sketch of the evident structures of our world’ (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 33–47), Patočka notes that “a correlation of the subject and object and the form of time is the most universal basis of concrete experience” (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 34). The flow of experience is temporal. “Consciousness becomes dynamic”, with its own time experience, where “past awaits each present which drags the future with it” (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 35). As Patočka writes, “my own being and time clash against each other. On the one side, I am like everything else being here by the grace of time, dependent on time, without any guarantee that at any given moment there will be a future for me; on the other side, I have the idea of time, which is nothing empirical. This universal idea elevates me above particular time [of finite existence]” (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 35). Hence, “since time relativizes my existence”, it is clear that “our consciousness cannot be purely a consciousness of existence” (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 35). We can think about ideas that are not in time. Hence, what I understand are not simply beings that exist; I also grasp the sense and significance of them, their meaning. Meaning cannot be reduced to their objectivity, their thingness, their existence. It transcends them. This implies that the idea of time discussed is a cue to how we can understand meaning. It gives us a way of unifying ideal meaning and the uncertainty of existence, which is life. The “logical-structural evidence” that we understand is not the existence of things but their *meaning* (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 36). Redness or greenness is not identical with a thing that is green or red, but we understand the meaning of redness or greenness, apart from red or green things. Similarly the “relation ‘in between’ is not identical with the aggregate of things, where there is something third in between them, but it is the characteristic mode of a relation that we can grasp through individual cases” (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 36).

Patočka follows with a discussion of our understanding of ideas and their different role in the mathematical and natural sciences, pointing out that these are domains of natural laws only. Except in formal domains, there cannot be ideal laws. Nature changes through time. Things influence each other constantly. Yet these changes are not arbitrary. The “*conditio sine qua non* of natural being” is time,

which means that “everything that is has the reason for its being in the past” (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 36). Reasons for change are in the past, which influences the future. From this observation comes the idea of scientific causality, leading to that of the lawfulness of nature. However, this lawfulness is predicated on the neutralisation of time to a homogeneous medium that is free of contingency. In other words, although “the idea of scientific causality leads naturally to the idea of natural lawfulness”, natural science cannot reduce this lawfulness to its logical moment. To reduce nature to its scientific model would mean that the world of our living would become “only the spatial whole, where time would become one of the dimensions of space” (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 39). Scientific nature is not the world in which we live.<sup>12</sup> Thus, as Patočka sums up, “there is no law that science could legislate as unchanging; yet each scientist must believe in the principle of constancy” (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 41).

The principle of constancy gives certainty to the natural scientist in researching the ‘facts of nature’ relative to the current state of knowledge. For the “Ancient Ionian physicists, the fact was that the Earth is flat”; while for us this is simply a “prejudice” (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 41). There is a relation between the state of scientific knowledge and the form of evidence employed because scientific cognition and the evidence needed for its support are mutable. Each new aspect of knowledge requires new evidence. The science of the Ancient Ionians is incompatible with science today. Current natural science constitutes the world based on spatial and causal relationships (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 42). This is important to remember: with new inventions and the shattering of old models, what counts as evidence for knowing undergoes modification. However, there is a constant that demarcates the modern sciences. Each science is based on a foundation and a set of basic principles in each regional domain that are established deductively. From these fundamental principles, scientific nature is built or shattered whenever those principles are challenged and new foundations need to be laid for new knowledge claims. In this sense, the scientifically constructed world is “independent of the subject, it does not belong to him”: scientific nature is built from the ideas of homogeneous space, time and causality, from which the subject is excluded (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 42).

In contrast, we live in a world that we understand practically, through our acting there. This is the ‘subjective world’ which includes the experience of all subjects. Here we speak of “intentional acts”, such as “perceiving, remembering, judging, valuing. The subject has oneself in his own acts and through the acts, he has all other objects” (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 42). The question is how we can know other subjects. What kind of evidence is needed for recognition of the other? We have to be careful not to “hypostatise the other subject as well as ourselves on the model of a substance, which persists, even if nobody is aware of it” (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 46). Here evidence is not the same as in natural science. Our awareness of doing, acting and the responsible realisation of our aims is “evidence where our life takes

---

<sup>12</sup> Husserl will argue this in his last work, see Husserl 1970.



place, especially our cultural life". The "principle of this evidence is the conceptual correlation of ends and means" (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 46).

Patočka concludes his consideration of the structures of our world by noting that we have two flows of life that constitute the world in two different ways: one is the objective world of science; the other is the subjective world of various regions of values (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 47). The question is how the concept of evidence applies to these different regions. As he notes, the study of evidence clarifies how reasoning leads to the constitution of the meaningful whole. According to Patočka, it would also resolve a perennial problem of philosophy, the question of being (*otázku jsoucná*) – or at least would look for its solution. The concept of evidence, then, requires that in order "to write the history of modern philosophy", we need to "examine different approaches that offered a solution to this problem" (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 16). It is said that modern philosophy is the search for the correct sense of evidence. Thus, the essence of philosophy should be to unify life, which is spread between different regions of being; to return to life the awareness of its unity, to provide the "balance sheet of spirit with itself" (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 16).

### Conclusion

Patočka's starting point is the history of thinking, with particular focus on the idea of evidence. He sketches the historical unfolding of this concept. His aim is to show that only through a historical untangling of the problem of evidence can we make sense of our current notion of evidence, and its scientific character as it developed throughout history. Thus, only by understanding the history of ideas can we understand the present crisis of philosophy and science.

At the heart of Patočka's dissertation is the history of scientific reasoning, especially as it is ineluctably tied with mathematics and mathematical logic. All the themes that Patočka addresses in his lifelong *oeuvre* are, *in nuce*, already there: situational knowledge (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 32); the problem of the body (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 66); the question of meaning, which is the goal of life and the world (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 30); and the two different constitutions of the world, objective and subjective. Perhaps Patočka's historical framing of these topics leads him to foreshadow certain problems that already exceed Husserl's model of immanence and transcendence; in other words, Husserl's phenomenology. In *The Concept of Evidence*, concerning knowing and evidence, Patočka suggests that to speak of knowing, a being must show itself to us, thereby allowing us "to know it" (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 15). It might be interpreted that without this showing, there cannot be knowing; hence this showing of 'what is' is the meaning of a thing, which it is not possible to 'freeze' in time and secure by a proposition. Thereby, this showing, related to our cognition, might be taken as a predecessor to Patočka's late meditations on a-subjective phenomenology. There are other

(continued)

aspects in *The Concept of Evidence* that could support this reading: for example, when Patočka discusses “the correlation of subject–object”, he notes that a flow of consciousness is tied to one subject only, constituting the unity of experience. This primordial fact of conscious experience does not require diversity on the side of the object. As he elaborates, for the unity of experience of a thing it is not necessary to have the multiplicity inherent in the thing; yet the object has this multiplicity (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 34).

Patočka also reflects on the idea of the subject and asks who is this ‘I’ that knows: “why am I exactly this particular one; what am I, in this place and time and why, precisely, is it me who has to carry my own individual lot?” His answer is that “I am something inexplicable [zvláštní], which cannot be reduced to any causal bundle, I am not only in the world but I also stand against it as an autonomous component” (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 87). It would be enlightening to extend this investigation to consider how ‘the question concerning what *is*?’ relates to the knowing subject.

Patočka concludes his treatise on verification with reference to Husserl, noting that “phenomenology cannot tell us what is actual”. It can only outline the conditions of possibility for something to be considered real. “In phenomenology, there is no passageway from ideas to things” (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 118). The problem of distinguishing between real and ideal, the problem that is most acute in natural science, is avoided in phenomenology. In the last part of his dissertation, Patočka employs Husserl’s concept of evidence to answer most of the questions that he poses in the preceding part of his work regarding modern tradition. Yet, there is an important caveat in the last sentence of *The Concept of Evidence*. According to Patočka, Husserl does not offer a finished philosophy, but rather provides the best possible philosophical attempt so far at answering the question of evidence inherited from modern epistemology (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 119). His *Natural World as a Philosophical Problem* follows Husserl’s transcendental method. However, in *Meditations*, written 30 years later, he questions these same transcendental claims of phenomenology (Patočka 2009 [1969]).

Curiously, Patočka never abandons Husserl’s phenomenology entirely. Years later, citing Husserl – “*Das Selbstverständliche verständlich machen* [to explicate what is self-evident; to make the obvious/self-evident comprehensible]” – Patočka explained phenomenology as “a study of phenomena” (Patočka in Rezek 2010: 13). Yet, in the year 1969–1970, in his lecture course *Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, Patočka reflects on the study of phenomena, asking what is and what is not an entirely legitimate claim to knowing. Reminiscent of the observation he made in *The Concept of Evidence* about what being is and how we can know it, Patočka writes:

(continued)

During each showing, we must presuppose that what shows itself to us, must be; that it is a real being, that it is not just a mere phenomenon, a piece of our inner experience, that it is not something private, that it *is* in the strong sense of the word.

What does this ‘is’ mean? Beings show themselves to us, that they are and as they are (Patočka 1993: 72).<sup>13</sup>

In Patočka’s view, we need to rethink phenomenology, not abandon it. We need to continue on the road started by Husserl and pay attention to what manifests; to what shows itself to us. As Husserl saw in *Logical Investigations I*, we must pay attention to what is given to us but to nothing besides the given (Patočka 1993: 73–74). We need to clear our seeing from the encrustations inherited from tradition. Phenomenology must concentrate on the ‘appearing’, as such. As Patočka claims, Husserl and Heidegger lost this ‘appearing’ by stepping over to what already appears.

Finally, I will allude to Patočka’s *The Concept of Evidence* once more. Citing Maine de Biran and Jacobi, Patočka explains how the wonder experienced in childhood in the face of the mystery of existence and the wonder about the intuition of eternity, respectively, marked the two philosophers’ paths of thinking (Patočka 2008 [1931]: 19). The same might be said of Patočka himself. Throughout his life, Patočka’s philosophical interests seem to circle around questions concerning meaning constitution, truth and responsibility. From the beginning to the end, Patočka circumnavigates the same problems; looking at language, the world, the body and human existence from different perspectives. His approach to considering these same things under many ‘shades of light’ is in itself a profoundly phenomenological practice.

## References

- Blecha, Ivan. 1997. *Jan Patočka*. Malé Monografie. Olomouc: Votobia.
- Descartes, René. 1985. Principles of philosophy. In *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Trans. John Cottingham. ed. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, vol. I, 177–291. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Husserl, Edmund. 1960. *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*. Trans. Dorion Cairns. The Hague: Nijhoff.
- Husserl, Edmund. 1970. *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*. Trans. David Carr. Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology & Existential Philosophy. Evanston: Northwest University Press.
- Husserl, Edmund. 1998. *The Paris Lectures*. Trans. Peter Koestenbaum. Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Husserl, Edmund. 1999. *The Idea of Phenomenology: A Translation of Die Idee der Phänomenologie*. Husserliana II. Trans. Lee Hardy. Edmund Husserl Collected Works, vol. 8. Dordrecht: Kluwer.

<sup>13</sup> “Při každém zjevování musíme nutně předpokládat, že to, co se nám zjevuje, jest, že je to skutečné bytí, že to není pouhý fenomén, kus našeho prožívání, že to není něco jakkoli privátního, že to jest v silném smyslu slova. Co toto ‘jest’ znamená? Jsoucná se nám odkrývají v tom, že jsou a jaká jsou.”

- Kant, Immanuel. 1996. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans. Werner S. Pluhar, Unified (with all variants from the 1781 and 1787) Ed. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett.
- Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. 1934 [1765]. New essays on the human understanding. In *Philosophical Writings*, Trans. Mary Morris, 141–191. London/New York: J. M. Dent and Sons/E. P. Dutton and Co.
- Locke, John. 1976 [1690]. *An essay concerning human understanding*, Abridged ed, ed. John W. Yolton. London/New York: Dent and Dutton.
- Mensch, James R. 1981. *The question of being in Husserl's logical investigations*, *Phänomenologica* 81. The Hague: Nijhoff.
- Patočka, Jan. 1992 [1933]. Doslov [Afterword]. In *René Descartes: Rozprava o Metodě*, 65–68. Praha: Svoboda.
- Patočka, Jan. 1993. *Úvod do Fenomenologické Filosofie* [Introduction to phenomenological philosophy]. Praha: ISE, Oikoymenh, Edice Oikúmené, ve spolupráci s Archivem Jana Patočky.
- Patočka, Jan. 1996. *An Introduction to Husserl's Phenomenology*. Trans. Erazim Kohák. Chicago/La Salle: Open Court.
- Patočka, Jan. 2008 [1931]. Pojem Evidence a Jeho Význam pro Noetiku [The concept of evidence and its significance for noetics]. In *Fenomenologické Spisy I: Přirozený Svět. Texty z Let 1931 – 1949*, ed. Ivan Chvatík and Jan Frei, 14–125. Sebrané Spisy Jana Patočky. Svazek 6. Praha: Oikoymenh.
- Patočka, Jan. 2008 [1936]. Přirozený Svět Jako Filosofický Problém [The natural world as a philosophical problem]. In *Fenomenologické Spisy I: Přirozený Svět. Texty z Let 1931 – 1949*, ed. Ivan Chvatík and Jan Frei, 127–260. Sebrané Spisy Jana Patočky. Svazek 6. Praha: Oikoymenh.
- Patočka, Jan. 2009 [1969]. ‘Přirozený Svět’ v Meditaci Svého Autora po Třiatřiceti letech [“The Natural World” reconsidered thirty-three years later]. In *Fenomenologické Spisy II: Co je Existence. Publikované Texty z Let 1965 – 1977*, ed. Pavel Kouba and Ondřej Švec, 265–334. Sebrané Spisy Jana Patočky. Svazek 7. Praha: Oikoymenh.
- Rezek, Petr. 2010. Fenomén, Jev a Originál [Phenomenon, appearance and the original]. In *Jan Patočka a Věc Fenomenologie*, 9–28. Praha: Jan Placák, Ztichlá Klika.
- Schuhmann, Karl. 1987. Husserl and Patočka. *Proměny* 24(1): 34–41.
- Tholt, Pavol. 2003. *Patočka a Vznik Matematickej Prírodovedy* [Patočka and the emergence of mathematical science]. Košice: Vydavateľstvo Interart.