Abstract
In order to show a different understanding of what it means to be human, in this paper, I will present Jan Patočka 's discussion of human existence. For Patočka, human existence is essentially historical and situational. His reflections proceed from Edmund Husserl's Life-world, Martin Heidegger's explanation of the structure of human existence in *Being and Time* [*Sein und Zeit*] and Arendt's understanding of labour. According to Patočka, Heidegger's exposition is predicated on a negative human relation to the world; we are originally inauthentic. Yet Heidegger forgets to take into account that *Da-Sein* is a doublet: *animal rationale*.
Patočka appropriates Arendt's phenomenological account of the human condition in order to extend Husserl's original insight embedded in Heidegger's account of *Da-sein* in *Being and Time* to develop his own understanding of human existence

Human Existence: Patočka's Appropriation of Arendt

> A historical being…is a being who distinguishes among that which is given, that which is lost and irretrievably gone, and that which does not yet exist except in the mode of unfulfilment in what is present. A historical being leans on the past, using it to open up the horizon of the given, with its help overcoming the given and the present. He can do that, however, only if the power of dissociation is available to him, the power of dissociation from mere givenness and presence, the power of liberation from the purely objective and given.[1]

In his article, "Moving beyond the Sophists: Intellectuals in East Central Europe and the Return of Transcendence", Arpad Szakolczai argues that "the dominant role played by intellectuals in Central and Eastern Europe was motivated" by the Enlightenment legacy[2] and their search for answers to the oppressive reality of the socialist regimes was very different than the reaction to the Enlightenment in the Western World. As he asserts, this alternative route has lead intellectuals in Central and Eastern Europe to rethink the Enlightenment and to reclaim "the radically *transcendental* character of human experience and nature".[3] One of these thinkers was Jan Patočka, the Czech philosopher and student of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. Patočka's thinking was influenced by Husserl , Heidegger, but also by Hannah Arendt, and his thinking, in turn, influenced Jacques Derrida as well as Michel Foucault.[4] In this paper, I would like to revisit Patočka's search for a meaningful answer to the crisis in our modern society.

We hear everywhere about the existential crisis in our modern society. Instead of engaging with the world, the number of suicides is rising, young and not so young are abusing various drugs to 'escape' reality of the everyday and the cyber space of the internet is populated by many in order

[1] Patočka, 1989 [1953], p. 199.
[2] Szakolczai, 1994, p. 417.
[3] Ibid, p. 430, italics in original.
[4] See, for example, Findlay, 2002. See also Derrida, 1995.

to avoid 'reality', or so we are told. These days we are also aware of the environmental crisis. More and more reports about the global warming are confirming the result of our abuse of the environment. All these symptoms of the crisis are openly acknowledged while, at the same time, science penetrating deeper and deeper into the mysteries of life is admired for its success and efficacious reasoning. Why do we have, on the one side, portentous signs of doom, on the other, an unstoppable success in producing desired results? Almost daily, it seems, science's discoveries are testimony to our power over nature with the promise to give us more control over life's contingencies, yet the meaning of our lives seem to be more and more obscure. So how can we think about these incompatible signs of our time? How can we *think* about our present day anxieties? How can we think about our own responsibility for this state of affairs?

In this paper, I will rethink Patočka's extension and critique of Edmund Husserl's concept of the life-world (*Lebenswelt*) as a culmination of Husserl's life-long project concerned with the responsibility for our knowledge claims and Heidegger's transformation of it.

Husserl's reflection on the life-world was occasioned by the social crisis where reason is supplanted by skepticism, relativism or outright irrationalism. As he says, European society is sick and there is no cure for this disease; yet, scientific reasoning is never questioned and is very successful. Husserl's question then becomes: "Why do…humanistic disciplines fail to perform the service…so admirably performed by the natural sciences in their sphere?"[5] His answer is that the cure for society's illness is impossible to find by using scientific approach. Humanistic disciplines and natural science's enquiries are different. Natural science's research cannot consider questions concerning "the meaning or meaninglessness" of our "human existence".[6] These types of questions are outside of scientific enquiry. Science must strip all its inquiries of the subjective human standpoint, otherwise it would be impossible to share the outcomes of research with others. Knowledge presented must be impartial, in other words, objective. It is this type of an enquiry that insures the tremendous success of sciences.

By contrast, to account for human existence, we must acknowledge our particular circumstances. Does it mean, then, that the research of physical nature is meaningful but to enquire into human existence is meaningless? Must we be content with knowledge that science is rational enterprise;

[5] Husserl, 1970 [1935], p. 270.
[6] Husserl, 1970, § 2, p. 6.

while, on the level of society, there is no place for rational enquiry and *doxa* is the last word on our situation?

How can we think about human existence if reason is mistrusted? Patočka extends Husserl's idea to take into account the life-world as a historical one. For him, the growth of irrationalism can only come from the soil of rationalism and it must be confronted from there too.[7] Patočka refuses to subscribe to the view that reason is applicable only in the sphere of sciences. He maintains that it is meaningful to enquire into human existence because to reduce reasoning to its efficaciousness, as it is utilised in sciences, is to miss what reason means and what it means to be a human being living in the world.

For Patočka, the human existence is essentially historical and situational. He appropriates Martin Heidegger's explanation of the structure of human existence in *Being and Time*,[8] which Heidegger calls *Da-Sein*. As Patočka explains, Heidegger begins with the analysis of *Da-Sein*,[9] only to abandon it in his later work. But it does not mean that this type of enquiry is finished. Heidegger left it open for others to expand or modify it.[10]

For Heidegger, we are thrown into the world that was here before we were born and that will be here after we die. We accept the world in which we live and draw meaning from things and people around us. It is from traditional ways of thinking that we draw significance, through which we understand our lives. According to Patočka, Heidegger's exposition is predicated on a negative human relation to the world; initially, we are drowned in the world of things, becoming one of them. Our understanding of life is inauthentic. As Patočka notes, Heidegger's account is situated "in the dimension of human moral struggle for one's own autonomy".[11] We are originally living inauthentically; we uncritically accept meaning from 'the they', from everybody and anybody, the meaning of the public anonym. In this sense, our lives are not defined by us: we accept meaning from others without ever questioning it. As Patočka interprets Heidegger, our understanding is debased, we live in decline.[12]

[7] Patočka, 1941, p. 15.
[8] See Heidegger, 1996.
[9] See Patočka, 2002 [1975], p. 328.
[10] Ibid, p. 327.
[11] Patočka, 1995, p. 40.
[12] Patočka, 2002 [1974]-a, p. 428.

Yet Patočka suggests that to negatively view our original encounter with the world misses the most important aspect of our lives. We are born into the world defenceless; we rely on others to provide our nutrition, to care for us, to teach us how to use tools – *pragmata* – that, for Heidegger, constitute our primary encounter with the world. Heidegger neglects something very important.

Patočka underscores the irreplaceability of others in our lives more than Heidegger. Before we can understand the meaning of tools we need others to teach us about them; "a meaning, once understood, is always already a meaning transmitted by the other, not solipsistically created by myself".[13] Following from this awareness, Patočka points out that our initial encounter with the world is always located in the past, "the past which is ever inevitably with us",[14] because we rely on others to help us to 'sink the roots', 'to anchor' our existence in the world with others.[15]

Our initial living is in the sphere of pure sustenance. Patočka draws this insight from Hannah Arendt's phenomenological analysis of the human condition, which she designates *vita activa*. Our fundamental encounter with the world is through labour, by procuring subsistence from nature; it is a life of consumption.[16] Life is a never-ending cycle of labouring–consumption–subsistence, which repeats itself over and over again. Arendt uses Karl Marx's phrase to make clear the idea of labour by describing it as human "metabolism with nature".[17] As she explains, "labor and consumption are but two stages of the ever-recurring cycle of biological life". Indeed, for Arendt, "the human condition of labor is life itself".[18] Nothing lasting is left behind. We simply consume in order to live: "life itself depends upon it".[19]

For Patočka, then, we must take into account this recurring cycle of biological life if we want to consider human existence. It is this aspect of our life that is expressed in the doublet of *animal rationale*. We are not only rational beings who practically act in the world but also *animal laborans* for whom the life is the never-ending cycle of labour and consumption. In this respect, the subsistence of life is a perpetual cycle of renewing itself. Life consumes the world forever to produce only itself.

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[13] Patočka, 1989 [1967], p. 259, translation modified.
[14] Ibid, p. 265.
[15] Patočka, 1965, p. 4; Patočka, 1969, p. 695. See also Patočka, 1996a.
[16] Arendt, 1998 [1958], pp. 79 ff. Patočka uses 'work' in place of Arendt's 'labour; and 'production' in place of 'work'.
[17] Ibid, p. 98.
[18] Ibid, p. 7.
[19] Ibid, p. 87.

Heidegger neglects this side of our existence, which leads him to assert that some of us *can* overcome the negativity of our existence, if we only confront the public anonym's meaning, if we only confront our finitude. But even if we do that, as Patočka points out, we still have to take care of our life's never-ending cycle of consumption. From that point of view, life is forever in decline because we are both: biological bodies *and* rational beings; not just one or the other. We need to acknowledge this dual character of our lives. For Patočka, perhaps, fundamental human characteristic is being in decline. Life is always a struggle between living in decline, as our biological bodies remind us, and our never-ending attempts to rise above this decline. It is not superfluous or negative to think of this interplay of our living: "the human life is a harsh play", based on the initial decline.[20] Human existence is not only threatened by inauthenticity produced by the public anonym; it is fundamentally underwritten by our biological bodies.

Patočka radicalises Heidegger's structure of existence by taking into account the body, yet without reducing it to its material substrate. The body that 'I am' cannot be exhausted by categorial descriptions; it is not only biological body that science makes its object of enquiry. The body is irreducibly tied to my existence, which is always defined by my situatedness in the world; it is the zero-point of my encounter with the world.

By the same token, to reduce our existence to our biological bodies is to miss who we are because we *can* rise above the biological level of our lives. To confront the question of our biological bodies is to reflect on modern 'objective' knowledge that is a defining characteristic of our age. Is it possible to explain human life by reducing it to the biological body and explain it by using a scientific model, say, the model of biology or neuroscience? No doubt, most scientific research is devoted to this task and there are some interesting results relating to our biological bodies coming from neurology, biology, chemistry. But the question remains: is this all that we can 'know' about human existence; is this all that it means *to be* human?

To understand this quandary, let us recall the problem of modern philosophy and, as Husserl notes, our natural attitude:[21] the Cartesian split of the world into two substances, *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. In order to confront the skepticism of his time, René Descartes' search for clarity and perspicuity of knowledge leads him to posit the ground of this certitude in the indubitability of our thinking, *res cogitans*. As Husserl and Patočka point out, in the 'I', Descartes 'discloses' the

[20] Patočka, 2002 [1974]-a, p. 428.
[21] See Husserl, 1973; Husserl, 1990; Husserl, 1970.

personal. Yet despite his stumbling upon the personal dimension of the 'I', he obscures this discovery by shifting his attention to *res extensa*, which could be accounted for by geometry.

Patočka notes that the Cartesian *cogito* is *quaternio terminorum*. The personal 'I think' is equivocated with the "permanent [*trvalá*] substance with all the attributes belonging to it": *res cogitans* – the thinking thing – the impersonal ground of certainty.[22] My personal thinking cannot be the ground on which the certainty of knowledge can be erected. Only a thought that is clear and distinct (*clare et distincte*) can certify the being of a thing (*res extensa*). Descartes' new "ontological conception" – derived from Galileo and Newton – is no longer nature as we experience it in our everyday living, it is not based on the personal 'I think', but it is nature constructed in thought, derived from the impersonal ground of certainty, where *clare et distincte* ideas are certified by mathematics. Calculation is based on principles grounded in thinking that are impossible to verify by human experience, leading to an indirect mathematisation of nature. The contemplation of nature is replaced by mathematised structures constructed by thought that become knowable objects.[23] On this model, *res extensa* becomes a thinkable 'object' based on the clear and distinct ideas of *res cogitans*; yet, paradoxically, a thinking thing cannot be converted into a geometrical manifold. This is the outcome of the unacknowledged equivocation between the two senses of *cogito*. Our thinking processes might be certain for each of us but they are impossible to 'compare' with others; they cannot be taken as identical to the thinking processes of someone else. The personal 'I' becomes reduced to our thinking only, the thinking thing, separated from the world in which we live. Correlatively, the world of our living is reduced to the impersonal substrate thought of as *res extensa*. Matter alone can be expressed through "*extensio*, *cogitatio*, and so forth".[24] Only matter can be thought identically by everyone because only an object – *res extensa* – can be converted hypothetically into its numerical indices. The question of correlation between two separate substances is resolved by "the principle of psychophysical parallelism". On this model, thinking becomes *impersonal* 'thinking thing'– *res cogitans* separated from matter – *res extensa*. Matter is privileged as the only knowable substance accounted for by the thinking thing. Certainty of knowledge is based on the privileged forms

[22] Patočka, 1980, 2.3.14.
[23] Patočka, 2002, p. 471.
[24] Patočka, 1995, p. 26. See also Patočka, 1996a, p. 30.

supplied by geometry because it can be reckoned with.[25] Knowledge is assured, skepticism is confronted and overcome, but the personal is lost.

It is this separation of the world into two substances – privileging the mathematised nature over the personal dimension of our lives – that leads to the problem of the modern discussion of human life. Suddenly, to speak of knowledge is to speak about our life in terms of *res extensa* only. Only in the sphere of matter can we achieve a certitude that can be confirmed or falsified by many different researchers. We can always come back to the 'objective data' of life discovered by science: blood circulation, muscles, firing neurons, MRI scans of brain activity which supposedly tell us about our thinking by 'mapping' the electro-magnetic activity of sections of our brains that are 'activated' when we love and hate.[26] But can this so-called objective knowledge tell us about love and hate as we live it? What has science to offer in the case of our human existence?

If science is, as Patocka states, "nothing else but an assertion that two times two is four in an elaborate manner",[27] then where does the 'definition' of love and hate come from? Is it not the case that before we even begin to research something like the relation between our feelings and brain activity, love and hate must first be defined by researchers and matched to the understandings of participants?[28] There is already implicit understanding of what it means to love and hate. And this can only come from the world of our living. So, despite these scientific findings, we already understand those feelings on a more basic level because we live with others. As Patočka notes, it is a part of our human interaction with others, our social existence, which is always already based on an irreplaceable, fundamental and original understanding of others. No chemical formulae can tell us about reciprocal relations between humans, no formulae can be meaningful without human experience between people; "their mutual sympathies and dislikes, their cooperation and reciprocal dependencies on each other – it is here where love and hate dwell".[29] Certainly, science can tell us about our biological bodies but can scientists as scientists say anything about love and hate, about our being with others, about our hopes and disappointments? No impersonal scientific research can give us appreciation of the *meaning* of

[25] Patočka, 1996a, p. 30.
[26] See Kahn (2008).
[27] Patočka, 2002 [1974]-a, p. 429.
[28] I owe this point to Anita Williams.
[29] Patočka, 1994, p. 84.

these emotions. "Human actions are always intelligible to us, even if we cannot substantiate this understanding by physicalist explanations."[30]

For Patočka, then, the important question is: "What is more categorical and significant? Is this mute and seemingly indifferent universe, without any meaning in itself, the last word concerning human beings?" Is nature in itself a litmus test through which we can understand human existence? "Or, are humans the key that can, perhaps, partially open this universe?"[31] To extend Patočka's question, how could the objectified nature constructed in thought on the model of mathematics become the ground from which we derive the meaning of our human existence? Humans constructed science to unlock the secrets of inanimate nature and, suddenly, this knowledge is elevated into the only way to understand humans as if we were just one inanimate thing alongside other things.

To confront this dilemma between formalised, efficacious, reasoning of sciences and existential reasoning, Patočka accepts Heidegger's analysis of the structure of *Da-Sein*: the impossibility to understand human existence on the same level as we understand things in the world.

The first issue arising from an analysis of *Da-Sein* is the emptiness of the 'I' tied to our initial relation to the world of things and to the public anonym, 'the they'. Originally, 'I' is everyone and no one.[32] We accept the way society functions, we follow the established ways of thinking and doing, we work, act and think without questioning anything at all. The 'I' is empty because it is interchangeable; we all work, we all follow established ways of 'doing things'. We are part of the public anonym. To shake up our everydayness, our reliance on the public anonym, we must confront our finitude; we must realise that no one can take away our only certainty in life – that we will die – simply because our own death is irreplaceable, no one can step in to die instead of us. Similarly, no one else can *live* our life for us. It is ours only. For better or worse, we have to live it and be responsible for our way of living. Only by shaking up our inauthentic reliance on the public anonym, we *might* realise that it is we who must define the meaning of our lives.

[30] Ibid, pp. 84-85.
[31] "Neboť zůstane tu ovšem otázka: co je rozhodnější a významnější? Je němé a na pohled zcela lhostejné a nesmyslné univerzum posledním slovem o člověku, nebo je naopak člověk klíčem, kterým možno alespoň pootevřít univerzum?" (Ibid, p. 85).
[32] See also Patočka, 1989 [1967], p. 265; Patočka, 1967, p. 61.

Yet to refuse to be defined by the public anonym means that we have to take up our own living without the banisters provided by anonymous society.[33] We must take up the harshness of living without the support of 'the they'. It is not easy.

As Patočka suggests, our life is finite, it is lived between two outer limits: we are born and we will die.[34] Those two boundaries are irreplaceable. They are by definition outside of the public anonym, outside of the habitual ways in which society functions. Our existence is not interchangeable, as the public anonym leads us to believe. Each existence is unique.[35]

How we carry on our living, what kind of existence we live, depends on each of us because we are and we are not only the public anonym. We are and we are not only *animalia*, the biological body. We are capable of reasoning. This is one of the reasons why human life as we live it cannot be exhausted by considering it, either on the level of a never-ending cycle of survival in order to live, or by the account given by science. Although scientists discover 'facts' within the sphere of our biological bodies and convert them into data that can help us, perhaps, to understand life in general, they cannot proceed from scientific data to the meaning of our existence.

There is a similarity in understanding life as an object of science and life as consuming the world in order to live. In both cases, it is a life of everybody and nobody: no personal space is available to change the situation. In the case of biological body, the incessant consumption defines us all on the same level. To live we must nourish our bodies in the never-ending cycle of toiling and consumption, devouring the world to sustain ourselves. Likewise, in the case of biological body constituted as an 'object' of science: the personal situation is by definition excluded. Science must be able to reckon with, to quantify this 'life' through unambiguous data that every other researcher can examine; allowing all to access the same information in order to expand the research of 'life' through new observations and experiments. Both types of understanding are proclaimed as definitive of our circumstances, our human existence.

Yet our existence is personal. It cannot be lived by anyone else. So, if we accept that human existence is personal, always lived in the first person, then we must also accept that it is outside of the jurisdiction of science; it cannot be 'researched' as something 'objective', unchangeable for every observer. From the scientific point of view, it has no meaning that can be transferred

[33] Arendt speaks of 'thinking without banisters' (*Denken ohne Geländer*).
[34] Patočka, 2002 [1974]-b, p. 300.
[35] See also Arendt, 1998 [1958], pp. 8, 9, 247.

into ‘facts’; it cannot be scientifically defined. But then, how can we think about it? How can we speak about human responsibility?

For Patočka, science is mute about our lived experience because to exist means to actively shape our existence. It is us who must act responsibly to become who we are. Not in the sense of creating ourselves as an artwork. Our existence is neither an object forever identical with itself, nor it is something plastic, mouldable by us in whatever way we wish: we *cannot* shape our life according to a design that we conjure up ‘in our minds’ for ourselves.[36]

Hence, drawing on Heidegger’s analysis, the second issue for Patočka is the insight that we are *not* objects. Who ‘I am’ cannot be exhausted by categorial descriptions of human life as if I were a thing alongside other things in the world. We are always more than things in the world. A thing is a singular instantiation of the genus/species. A rock will be a rock, a tree will grow and change its shape, but what a tree is will not change. An oak tree might be crooked or tall according to nutrients, wind currents, sun, but it cannot be anything else but an oak tree. All oak trees can be accounted for according to the species they belong to; a tree may decay and perish but a species persists throughout time. The material substrate is the same for all members of the species and we can account for each of them according to this substrate. We can categorise them, including external conditions, internal nourishment, and so forth.

Certainly, we can ‘categorise’ our biological bodies as well. For science, that is exactly *what* our body is. Yet, can this type of ‘categorisation’ help us to speak about our lived experience? Is our biological body *who* we are?

Who we are is not reducible to our biological body because the sphere of human existence cannot be accounted for scientifically. It is not repeatable for all observers. There is not one template that can account for the lives that we live. Our lived existence is not the same for all according to a species of *homo sapiens*. Yes, as an instance of the biological species, I am a member of the *homo sapiens* class but this knowledge refers only to my biological formation. But who I am is not exhausted by my biological constitution. We are not only biological organism, we are *animal rationale*; we exist in the world that is tied to our human situatedness, and, hence, changeable with it. Not in the sense of wind currents, sun and nutrients: there is something more to our living in the world. Categorial descriptions are not appropriate to account for our lived experience. Yet

[36] Arendt expressed this by saying that we cannot know human nature because we did not make it. We can only know what the product of our hands is. For her, we can only inquire into our human condition.

if we cannot account for existence in terms of categories, as Heidegger posits, then how can we speak of our existence at all?

Heidegger's enquiry into the ontic and ontological structure of *Da-Sein* is the first step in his quest to recover the Ancient question of being: *Sein*. For Heidegger, this question was forgotten in the history of thinking. To reclaim this question, Heidegger starts with human existence because it is only we who can understand our own being, therefore, opening the space for further enquiry into being, which underlies all and yet is not something we can encounter in the world. For Heidegger, *Da-Sein* is the opening for the reflection on *Sein* – being.

Patočka's focus is different. He is interested in what it means to be human. He rejects Heidegger's reading of the history of being. As Patočka points out, in the end, it is the history of being (*Seinsgeschichte*) that in Heidegger obliterates the consideration of humans as the situational and historical beings responsible for their acting in the world. Hence, Patočka radicalises Heidegger's structure of existence. As he affirms, we cannot plan out or organise our own possibilities because those possibilities are not objectively in front of us as if we were disinterested observers. Nor is it *liberum arbitrium indifferentiae*;[37] we do not have the freedom of choice to select from different possibilities presented to us in a particular situation. We *are* our possibilities. Freedom is not something we have; freedom is what defines us as human. We are free to act or not, given the particular possibilities of a given situation. The possibilities are opened up or closed off for us according to the situation we are in; according to the things that surround us and demarcate for us the possible courses of action that we *can* seize or overlook. As Patočka puts it: "A situation is something *where* I must be in order to understand it (not *above* or *in front of* it), and I can always only understand it partially".[38] Each situation opens up different possibilities.

For Patočka, to be situational does not mean to be in some place that we simply pass through, and it also does not mean that we are in space as objective things are; we are not *partes extra partes*. We are not indifferent to things and others that we encounter. We are situational beings. Humans cannot *be* in any other way; we are always in different situations because this is what it means to be human: "*the fundamental human situation* [*prasituace*] *is to be always in some situation*".[39]

[37] Patočka, 2002 [1975], p. 332.
[38] Patočka, 1989 [1967], p. 254, italics in original, translation modified. See also Patočka, 1967, p. 47.
[39] "Člověk je bytost situační. *Prasituací člověka je být vždy v nějaké situaci*" (Patočka, 2002 [1974]-a, p. 424, italics in original).

To *be* in a situation always creates a problem because we come face to face with something that needs to be resolved, that we need to confront, that requires us to act one way or the other.[40]

Situation is not something external. It is not a container in which we find ourselves. It is not a mechanism that holds us through a system of springs, allowing us only to react to the elasticity of the springs. As Patočka notes, this would be a description of animals. But we are not animals. We are *animal rationale* because we can each act differently in a given situation. If we find ourselves on a ship that is sinking, our situation is not an ocean, or the bad condition of a ship. We are in this situation because we happened to set off on a journey.[41] If there were no one on that ship, the ship might, indeed, sink, but it would not be a human situation as Patočka understands it, because humans *can* change the situation they are in.

Humans always actively *relate* to their situation through reflection. They do not *re-act* but actively *act*. Even doing nothing is a way of acting. To paraphrase Patočka, our real test is not how well we play the role we dreamt up for ourselves, but how well we play the hand we have been dealt in a situation we find ourselves in.[42] This is tied to a human ontological structure. We *are* free. We can act or not act in relation to a situation because we are free in respect to that situation. Of course, it does not mean that we are unaffected by the situation or that we can simply eradicate it by thought alone. Not even Neo in *The Matrix* could do that.[43] No human situation is closed off. We can mentally distance ourselves from what is immediate and reflect on a situation. A situation creates problems for us by presenting only certain possibilities that we can undertake; it calls upon us to reflect, take a stand and act. To be able to reflect on a situation, we must be free.[44]

Patočka's notion of freedom is not about our empirical freedom to do something in the world of our living, although this type of freedom is underwritten by our ontological potentiality. In this sense, freedom is the ontological condition of our ability to act in the world; it is what makes us human. It simply means that to be a human is to be free. We are free because we can always turn away from what is presented to us immediately and reflect to consider what we are up against. To be able to reflect, to distance ourselves from the immediate situation, will lead us to act in a

[40] Ibid, p. 425.
[41] Ibid, p. 424.
[42] See Patočka, 2004 [1969], pp. 431-432.
[43] *The Matrix*. 1999.
[44] Patočka, 2002 [1974]-a, p. 424.

certain way that was brought about not only by the situation we are in but also by our reflection on that situation. Yet it is not the case that we stop, pause, think, reflect, decide on the best possible action and then act. Our acting is informed by our unthematised reflection; most of the time, we do not even realise that our acting is not an automated response to a stimulus but a considered action. We simply act.

Our existence is our acting.[45] In a situation, we can only actualise possibilities that are presented to us by taking them up or refusing them, not realising them, or giving them up. Thereby, by avoiding some possibilities, we open up others, and so on. Human existence is nothing else but this actualisation or running away from situational possibilities. For this reason, Patočka speaks of existence as a movement.[46]

Conclusion

To conclude with Patočka and Arendt: for Patočka, the human life has three dimensions; it is related to the beginning, the end and to life necessities in the form of the never-ending cycle of consumption.[47] And because there is a similarity between biological life as an object studied by science and biological life defined by consumption only, Patočka points out that because we are *animal rationale*, in our struggle between these two aspects of who we are, the modern age privileged the space of biology: *animal*.[48] Arendt's claim is similar. The problem of reducing human experience to biological necessities and by substituting scientific facts for the world of our living leads to "the modern growth of wordlessness, the withering away of everything *between* us". For her, this is "the spread of the desert".[49] In the end, the progression of modern science reduces humans to "no more than a special case of organic life"[50] subsumed under the ends-means category of modern thinking.[51]

To recall Patočka's claim that science is "nothing else but an assertion that two times two is four in an elaborate manner" is to realise that science is a practical affair; it belongs to our practical,

[45] In a certain way, as Nietzsche noted, "there is no 'being' behind doing…'the doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed – the deed is everything" (Nietzsche, 1989, I, §13).
[46] See Patočka, 1969, p. 694.
[47] "Život člověka má vždycky tyto tři velké dimenze: vztak k začátku, vztak ke konci a vztak k životu jakožto propadlému této nutnosti" (Patočka, 2002 [1974]-b, p. 300).
[48] For a similar claim but stressing psychologism rather than biologism, as Patočka does, see Gurwitsch, 1945.
[49] Arendt, 2005, p. 201, italics in original.
[50] Arendt, 1968, p. 266.
[51] Arendt, 1993, p. 147

everyday life, the life preoccupied with means and ends only.[52] In sciences, this type of thinking is formalised, becoming the efficacious reasoning. To recognise that is to recognise also that science is very successful what it achieves. However, to understand reasoning on the scientific level is to forget that it is not the only way to account for the world. It is to forget that reasoning is also expressed by the Socratic question: 'what do you *mean* when you say…?' This type of question is impossible to answer by formalised knowledge. Yet our present world is reduced to efficacious reasoning only. The life is reduced to calculable data that eliminate any other consideration of what it means to live one's own life or to be among others living their different lives. At the same time, the seduction with scientific achievements led us to extend this type of reasoning – in other words, efficacious reasoning that is concerned with the means-end categories – to the space of human affairs. We have reduced understanding of life to the biological level only: the never-ending consumption that devours the whole earth, threatening not only our lives but the planet as well.[53]

For Arendt, similarly, to recognise the importance of recent reduction of life to "the matter of merely laboring and consuming is of crucial importance" because it leads to the present situation of crisis where "nobody cares any longer what the world looks like".[54] Yet, as long as "we are and remain aware that our problems are unprecedented and that we do indeed live in a situation of crisis",[55] we can recover meaning for ourselves, we can confront "the outstanding characteristics of our time" defined by "thoughtlessness – the heedless recklessness or hopeless confusion or complacent repetition of 'truths' which have become trivial and empty". To do so, however, we must "think what we are doing".[56]

In his lecture course from 1974, Patočka notes that either this society will collapse, or we will realise that we have to take responsibility not only for our own lives but for the way our society functions. Scientific reasoning is very successful in the domain of inanimate nature, giving us many advantages that make our life easier. However, this type of thinking is not successful when it comes to our existence because science is concerned about unchangeable, therefore, objective aspects of nature. It cannot give us answers about the most important aspect of our lives: how to

[52] Patočka, 2002 [1974]-a, p. 429.
[53] For an extended discussion, see Patočka, 1996b.
[54] Arendt, 2000 [1964], p. 19.
[55] Arendt, 1966, p. 114.
[56] Arendt, 1998 [1958], p. 5.

procure meaning from this mute, scientifically conjured-up universe, which is indifferent to our lived experience of the world; which is indifferent to what makes us human.[57]

To be human means to be responsible for our way of living and for the world we live in, not because of a God or the ordered *Kosmos*, but because we live with others, because we are humans. Scientific reasoning cannot help us with this type of reasoning because it is concerned only with the 'mute' nature. We need to rethink our relation to nature and the world; we need to realise that nature is not only an object of study but it is the world in which we live.

[57] Patočka, 2002 [1974]-a, p. 429.

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