
Patočka's Discussion with Dostoyevsky on the Future of Science and Christianity

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Speculation that modern subjectivism is basically guilty of bringing about the skeptical crisis which deprived European society of faith in eternity is itself questionable to the highest degree.¹

Introduction

In this paper, I will present a short outline of the changes to the conception of nature and reason since the rise of modern science as a background to my discussion of human responsibility in the modern world. I will argue that changes to our understanding of the human place in the world are concomitant to modern reconceptualization of reason. In the new scientific formation of knowledge, human meaning is considered subjective, relative and not important in terms of the new objective reasoning. Jan Patočka says that we live in a double world, one created by science, the other one is the world of our everyday living.² The gulf separates these two understandings. On the one hand, we have the epistemologically secure objective, scientific, world, accessible to everyone familiar with the modern science's project; on the other hand, the world of our everyday living is, supposedly, subjective and fuzzy, hence relegated to the irrelevance in regard to modern knowledge. It is important to note that these descriptions are already based on the modern, efficacious, reasoning, which began with the rise of modern science.

Patočka offers a different way to think about the present world by showing how reasoning from Ancient Greece changed into the modern instrumental reason, which we now take for reasoning as such. He insists that this is not the only way to think about reason. Originally, instrumental, practical, reason was just one way to think and justify one's beliefs. Sophists were the first to equate reasoning with the technique of argumentation. Reason is an instrument to win any and every argument, regardless of an arguer's convictions. The fight of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle against this type of reasoning is already circumscribed by sophists' intervention. Yet, what is important to remember is, as Patočka insists, Socrates' changed attitude, by bringing to the forefront human concerns at the time of a broken tradition. Patočka further claims that Immanuel Kant is the first philosopher to reflect on *human* meaning, relegated to the sphere of subjectivity by modern, objective, reason. To rethink the Western heritage of reasoning is important, especially now, when

¹ Patočka, 1991 [1976], 98: "Spekulace, že moderní subjektivismus je v podstatě vinen onou skeptickou krizí, která evropskou společnost připravila o víru ve věčnost, je sama na nejvyšší míru pochybná."

² Patočka, 2008

this reasoning colonized the whole planet, since it is embedded in science and technology.

The inception of the new conception of reason began in the middle ages. The struggle between Platonists and Aristotelians for the best understanding of the perfect *Kosmos* ended with the defeat of both their doctrines in favour of modern science, defined by cold, objective reasoning that aims to be equally accessible to all. Science is the highest achievement of this ‘objective’ reasoning. Kant was the first to realise the problem of ‘objective reasoning’, in terms of finding human meaning and responsibility in a universe perceived as a fine-tuned machine that is without purpose, aim or values. His attempt to stave off Humean scepticism – the outcome of modern natural scientific reasoning – is to formulate a moral theology, thereby saving both: natural science and theology. Kant’s heroic endeavour to account for *human* meaning in a physical world stripped of all sense, except the scientific, is countered by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. His dissatisfaction with the Kantian solution is presented through the characters of Ivan Fyodorovich Karamazov in *The Brothers Karamazov*³ and Nicolai Vsevolodovich Stavrogin in *Devils*.⁴ Ivan Karamazov rebels against scientific–utilitarian reasoning, leading ultimately to his madness; whilst Nicolai Stavrogin’s struggle between the incompatible call of conscience and utilitarian reasoning ends in suicide.

Dostoyevsky’s novels play out the tragic clash between new instrumental reasoning and human responsibility. This tragedy is an outcome of the new conception of nature, which privileges objective reasoning as the only way to reason. Kant’s endeavour is to recover human meaning in the world created by modern science. As Dostoyevsky writes, the Kantian solution is problematic if God is conceived as the stipulative idea only. Taking into account Kant’s solution and Dostoyevsky’s answer, Patočka suggests that we need to rethink the history of European reason and responsibility by returning to the Socratic learned ignorance and his conception of the care for the soul.

Human Meaning and Science

I had admired these super-philistines long enough – these servants of forces unknown to them. As long as such admiration lasts, destruction will increase and human standards decrease. A mind that endangers worlds cannot create a fly. The huge scaffolding reveals itself as a scaffold indeed. If knowledge is power, one must know first what knowledge really is.⁵

In our contemporary world defined by the primacy of knowledge, the major problem is the impossibility of thinking the soul. What does Patočka *mean* when he speaks of the soul? What is the sense of Patočka’s care for the soul? Nowadays, we are accustomed to give sufficient reasons for all

³ From now on, abbreviated to *BK*.

⁴ From now on, abbreviated to *Ds*.

⁵ Jünger, 2000, 95

our claims in terms of, what we call, scientific reasoning.⁶ At the inception of modern science, Francis Bacon already says, “*ipsa scientia potestas est* [knowledge itself is power]”,⁷ but knowledge can become power only if reasons supporting it can be shared by different scientists everywhere, to assure a certitude while building a scaffold of positive knowledge. Scientific knowledge concentrates on *how* processes occur, so the scientists can learn patterns repeatable in these processes in order to use the acquired knowledge to predict future occurrences and thereby master those processes to be used in our human projects. Hence, to frame the question of the soul in terms of scientific knowledge – and there seems to be no other knowledge possible – is a hopeless undertaking. It is not a ‘thing’ or a process that science can give an account of or describe. Soul is an untenable metaphysical idea as modern science had shown.

However, Patočka’s question is different. It is not a question of knowledge. He does not want to learn *how* the soul ‘works’. He wants to think about human existence. For him, to care for the soul means to think through the way we care for ourselves, for our being. As Socrates says to the Athenians, “are you not ashamed of your eagerness to possess as much wealth, reputation and honors as possible, while you do not care for nor give thought to wisdom or truth, or the best possible state of your soul?”⁸ This type of attitude is impossible to reduce to scientific reasoning, which scientists use to describe the world, in order to understand the way natural or social processes work. To care for our souls is to think through reasons that we have become accustomed to; it is to question the traditional beliefs, which in our case are scientific. Although, science is the highest achievement of objective reason, it cannot speak of human meaning related to our lived experience, because human experience is impossible to reduce to the repeatable patterns of similar occurrences. In this way, to reason does not mean to apply the objective reasoning to our existence, thereby reducing all to the common denominator. To justify one’s claims means to be consistent while presenting claims to others and always supporting them with reasons that they can understand. Those reasons cannot be objective reasons that we can repeat as the same in all situations, but are reasons that relate to our human existence. It also means to accept responsibility for oneself, others and the world in which we live by recognising our situatedness, finitude and impossibility of objectifying our lived experience. To reason in this way means to call into question truisms that we have inherited from a tradition. When the ground of meaning relating to our human concerns seems to disappear with the absent God, it is imperative to search for a new meaning. Humans cannot live without meaning but meaning is never given as something unchanging. We are not a God, who can see everything at once. Human meaning is always in crisis because it is partial, incomplete and

⁶ See, for example, Heidegger, 196; Heidegger, 197; Heidegger, 1996.

⁷ See Bacon, 2010 [1597].

⁸ Plato, 1997, 29d-e

related to our place in the world. In this context, the most important question is to inquire if the crisis of meaning, which is also our crisis, is the outcome of God leaving the world to itself. Perhaps the issue is wrongly formulated.

Patočka points out that the crisis of meaning is not the outcome of the loss of faith but the shattered meaning and the loss of faith are both symptoms of the new scientific conception of nature that we usually associate with the names of Galileo, Newton and Descartes.⁹

Descartes' endeavour is to secure knowledge of nature against the attacks of scepticism after the new mathematised, that is, scientific reconfiguration of nature, began its new 'conceptual march'. The only secure place against his famous *genius malignus* is in the space of thinking. In Descartes' system, the touchstone of reality is, for the first time in history of thinking, enclosed within the human mind. Human experience is replaced with the mind's own operations. Thinking can go on without the need to worry about unreliable human senses, or the possibility of an 'evil genius' who could deceive us.¹⁰ The outcome of this Cartesian move is the split of the world into two substances: mind and matter. The split leads also to, as Patočka is never tired to call into question, the modern – supposedly bad – subjectivism. The allegedly bad subjectivism is the cause of egotism and the false belief that humans now occupy the place of God.¹¹ On this view, the Cartesian overturning of the tradition leads to bad subjectivism that threatens our moral, human world.

However, Patočka insists that to understand the ideas of subjectivism and objectivism is to grasp that the Cartesian subject/object split can lead to different accounts, depending on our analyses. Moreover, we cannot think anymore outside of this understanding. To rethink our tradition, we need to return to Socrates and his learned ignorance as the ground of the Socratic care for the soul.

These issues were thought through by many thinkers and we can only follow in their paths.

Modern Science

I see the blindness and the wretchedness of man, when I regard the whole silent universe, and man without light, left to himself, and, as it were, lost in this corner of the universe, without knowing who has put him there, what he has come to do, what will become of him at death, and incapable of all knowledge, I become terrified, like a man who should be carried in his sleep to a dreadful desert island, and should awake without knowing where he is, and without means of escape.¹²

To start an outline of the origin of the transformation of modern reason, which for us is the only

⁹ According to Hannah Arendt also, "the modern loss of faith" is the result of "Cartesian doubt". See Arendt, 1998 [1958], 320.

¹⁰ Arendt, 1998 [1958], 277

¹¹ See Patočka's discussion of 'bad subjectivism' that T. G. Masaryk identifies as the root of all problems of modern humans, in Patočka, 1989 [1936]-; Patočka, 199; Patočka, 2007. In English translation, see Patočka, 1989 [1936]-a.

¹² Pascal, 2013, *Pensées*, XI, Kindle Locations 5429-5432

conception we know, let me begin with Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *BK*, where he explicitly takes up the problem of modern reason in the world stripped of meaning, purpose or the final *telos*. According to Ivan Karamazov, in the modern scientific world, "there exists no law of nature" impelling humans to love their fellow human beings. In other words, no laws of nature will tell us anything about our human existence or its meaning. To have faith in the mutual relationship with others is simply a human prejudice based on an outdated belief in the immortality of the soul. Humans simply overlooked the 'fact' that God is dead.¹³ The larger issue is, of course, that if there are only "the blind, mute, merciless laws of nature,"¹⁴ which cannot account for morality or human meaning, then without God with his promise of immortality of our souls, "there is no virtue"¹⁵ and "everything [is] permitted", even "evildoing". It is the logical outcome of a belief that we are left only with the material universe. For Ivan Karamazov, however, and contradictory to his professed Euclidian, that is, utilitarian logic, if the belief in immortality is destroyed, "not only love but also any living power to continue the life of the world would at once dry up in it".¹⁶

In Dostoyevsky, the issue is framed in terms of a fight between two opposing beliefs: a belief in immortality of the soul and utilitarian reasoning. The battleground is defined by the struggle to account for the meaning of human lives. His novels are not only the critique of modern utilitarian reasoning, which strips nature of meaning that anchored human lives in the world up to the modern period, but he also shows the outcome of the utilitarian rationality leading to unspeakable horrors, if this reasoning is taken to its limit in the space of politics and morality.¹⁷ His novels are configured as the *reductio ad absurdum* of scientific utilitarian reasoning.

So, why is modern science held responsible for stripping the world of its aim, purpose and its *telos* and what implications follow from this new conception of nature.

In short, one might follow Nietzsche to say that the problem started when "we unchained this earth from its sun".¹⁸ By contrast, in their different ways, Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger analyzed the problem as the mathematisation and formalisation of nature.¹⁹ Patočka extends their analyses to examine the changes that followed from the Galilean science, which replaced God as the new explanatory horizon.

From the fifteenth to seventeenth century, the struggle between Platonists and Aristotelians over the

¹³ Dostoevsky, 2004, 69

¹⁴ Dostoevsky, 2004, 340

¹⁵ Dostoevsky, 2004, 70

¹⁶ Dostoevsky, 2004, 69

¹⁷ See, especially, *Demons*, Dostoevsky, 1995.

¹⁸ Nietzsche, 1974 [1882], §125, 181

¹⁹ See Husserl, 197; Heidegger, 1967.

best way to conceive *Kosmos*, ended up in abolishing it. The fearless man of Copernicus's imagination, standing on the sun and overlooking all the planets, becomes the image of the new world.²⁰ The Ancient and Medieval continuous, harmonious universe – intelligible to humans – turned, first, into a Copernican nature of “mathematical simplicity and harmony”,²¹ only to be transmogrified into “the mathematically expressible motions of matter itself” in space and time.²² Now, identical laws rule the heavenly sphere and earthly nature. Ceasing to be different, both realms become equally accessible to reason, yet no more accessible to human senses – which the new science regards as unreliable.

Galileo's merger of Aristotelian science with Platonic ideas changed the way we understand the world, ourselves and the universe. While supposedly nature itself is mathematical, letting us to write it in geometrical language of circles and triangles, humans with their unreliable senses are pushed outside of this new universe. This human loss of place from the centre of creation to its margins is not the outcome of the earth becoming one planet among many others, but it is a consequence of the mathematisation. Galileo's project was to make the earth as divine as the other heavenly bodies. In the process, *Kosmos* where humans dwell until then was no more. Fallible human senses and their qualitative experience of nature become an impediment to the new quantifiable scientific edifice. The mathematised nature cannot include human experience, which is impossible to reduce to the repetition of the same, in other words, to regularity. J. W. N. Sullivan suggests that mathematised science “made of man an entirely accidental by-product of a huge, mindless, purposeless, mathematical machine”,²³ with no access to this machine's ‘reality’.

E. A. Burtt notes that the new science abolished the teleology of the scholastics, which was “an ultimate principle of explanation”, and replaced it with the concept of *perfect* causality in physical nature: that is, with a mathematical concept that humans cannot experience.²⁴ In our experience, we understand that events follow one after the other with some regularity, but this type of cause and effect is imprecise; and therefore, cannot be used in an exact mathematised science. Science must lift this imprecise regularity out from our everyday experience and generalise it. In thought, we can *posit* perfect causality, but we cannot experience it.

The world that until the advance of modern science was meaningful, harmonious, with its divine purpose, intelligible to humans, ceased to exist. Mathematised nature was never imagined as a

²⁰ Arendt, 1998 [1958], 264

²¹ Burtt, 1925, 54

²² Burtt, 1925, 92-93

²³ Sullivan, 1933, 139

²⁴ Burtt, 1925, 95

substitute for God, because its formal definitions are meaningless in terms of human experience. God was reconfigured as the first mover, who created the universe and left it on its own, leaving humans without any guidance to their lives.

One of the first to realised the problematic nature of those terrifying empty spaces, without meaning or purpose was Blaise Pascal.²⁵ As Pascal puts it, already in the language of mathematics, “what is man in nature? A Nothing in comparison with the Infinite, an All in comparison with the Nothing”. He is “a mean between nothing and everything.” Worse, still, without God, he cannot understand “the end of things and their beginning.” So, “he is equally incapable of seeing the Nothing from which he was made, and the Infinite in which he is swallowed up”.²⁶ Without God, “we burn with desire to find solid ground and an ultimate sure foundation whereon to build a tower reaching to the Infinite. But our whole groundwork cracks, and the earth opens to abysses”.²⁷

In the First *Critique*, Kant confronted reason’s desire to “build a tower that was to reach to heaven”²⁸ by arguing for the humility of reason. Although, “human reason...is troubled by questions that it cannot dismiss, because they are posed to it by the nature of reason itself, but that it also cannot answer, because they surpass human reason’s every ability”.²⁹ In his “Critique of Teleological Judgment,” Kant attempts to justify human experience.³⁰ As discussed above, human experience and the possibility of human meaning is eliminated from “the mechanism of nature,” as science conceives of it. Still, humans doggedly believe that “nature [is] acting from a purpose”, and for our benefit.³¹ Yet, we cannot attribute “an objective purposiveness of things themselves”³² to things, unless we think that nature is an intelligent agent, which, scientifically speaking, it cannot be. The question really is, “how purposes that are not ours, and that we also cannot attribute to nature” can be thought differently, in line with our, so-called, unscientific experience. In his essay “On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy,” Kant insists that “[i]f one understands by *nature* the sum-total of all that exists as determined by laws,” then we “can pursue two paths: either the merely *theoretical* path or the *teleological* path, and with respect to the latter either as *physics*, using only such ends for its intention that be known to us through experience, or as *metaphysics* using for its intention, in accordance with its calling, only an end that is fixed through pure

²⁵ “The eternal silence of these infinite spaces terrifies me” Pascal, 1960, no. 392

²⁶ Pascal, 2013, Kindle Locations 1579-1582

²⁷ Pascal, 2013, Kindle Locations 1620-1621

²⁸ Kant, 1996 [1781], A 707, B 735

²⁹ Kant, 1996 [1781], A vii

³⁰ See Kant, 1987 [1790].

³¹ Kant, 1987 [1790], Part II, 1, §64, 369-371 [248-249]

³² Kant, 1987 [1790], Part II, 1, §63, 368 [246]

reason.”³³ By recognising these two paths, we “could constitute, a special kind of causality, or at least a quite distinct lawfulness of nature”³⁴ than the one offered by modern science. In other words, we can reconcile our belief in the purposiveness of nature itself, which the Ancient and Medieval science was based on, with the modern mechanical understanding of universe, which is oblivious to human needs.

For Kant, we cannot attribute to nature *telos* or harmony, however, we can re-think them. So, he makes a distinction between efficient cause (“the *nexus effectivus*”), which is at the basis of mathematised science, and final cause [“the *nexus finalis*”], which Aristotelian science attributed to all natural things and nature itself.³⁵ And here Kant’s innovation lies. Harmony between our understanding and “empirical basis outside of us” is our human contribution to knowing. And this harmony is not in nature. In other words, we cannot know if nature is harmonious or purposeful, but we can think it: “this harmony, despite all that purposiveness, is cognized a priori rather than empirically,” in other words it us who think it. In short, “it is not a characteristic of things outside me but a mere way of presenting [them] within me”.³⁶ We might suspect that “there is something else above and beyond those presentations of sense”, yet we cannot know it. And it *might* be “the ultimate basis for that...harmony”.³⁷ To put it differently, we can stipulate it as an idea, but we cannot know it. Knowledge is secured as well as human meaning. In the end, human meaning is restored in terms of “man’s own reason”, because it is able to harmonise things with our understanding. Teleology is also secured, although we cannot “justify any absolute teleological judgment”.³⁸ Instead of teleology and harmony that were attributes of the Medieval *Kosmos* that God created, Kant introduces a different explanation in terms of human experience by acknowledging our human participation in the constitution of meaning. We can think purposes of things and harmony in nature as if they were a part of nature, but we *know*, or should know, that “the product of a rational cause [is] distinct from the matter of the thing”.³⁹ So, Kant’s project is to justify human experience in the aftermath of modern scientific re-conceptualisation of nature, which is not interested in accounting for human experience. But, is Kant’s attempt successful?

Morality and Science

Pascal insists that once “the causes of things” are shrouded in mystery, morality without the divine

³³ Kant, 2007, 8:159 [195]

³⁴ Kant, 1987 [1790], Part II, 1, §61, 359 [235-236]

³⁵ Kant, 1987 [1790], Part II, 1, §61, 360 [236]

³⁶ Kant, 1987 [1790], Part II, 1, §62, 365 [242], square brackets in translation

³⁷ Kant, 1987 [1790], Part II, 1, §62, 365 [243]

³⁸ Kant, 1987 [1790], Part II, 1, §63, 368-369 [246]

³⁹ Kant, 1987 [1790], Part II, 1, §65, 373 [252]

ground ends in proliferation of theories that cannot provide their own grounding. As he notes, “One says that the sovereign good consists in virtue, another in pleasure, another in the knowledge of nature, another in truth...another in total ignorance, another in indolence, others in disregarding appearances, another in wondering at nothing... We are well satisfied.”⁴⁰ On this view, human responsibility in a world without God seems to end up in a wild proliferation of theories that try to replace Christian ethics revealed in its nakedness without divine ground.

According to Patočka, utilitarianism is one of such attempts to fill the void left by the disappearance of God. Humans become objects among other objects, looked at from the outside, configured as self-interested, egotistic individuals that can be accounted for by utilitarian theory in terms of their egotism, rationality and self-interest.⁴¹ Living human beings disappear from such an account of “moral physics”.⁴² Science becomes not one domain of human activity, creativity and thinking among many others but it is the only one invested with the power of knowledge. It becomes also a judge and arbiter of human affairs. Numbers are turned into the sacred language for all, suddenly having an ability to freeze all human relations to a formulaic language that reduces all to objective reasons accessible by all those who are familiar with the system. Those who are not are left on the margins of knowledge. In such formal systems, human meaning simply disappears.

For Patočka, in his last essay he wrote, “Notes on Masaryk’s Theological Philosophy”,⁴³ Kant is the first to reflect on human meaning, although he never calls it as such. As already noted, Kant’s role in the history of theology and his recognition of the importance of ‘human meaning’ is not clearly recognised. His First *Critique* not only ‘destroys’ speculative metaphysics but also rational religion, which replaced revealed religion under the influence of modern science. Kant’s achievement is to re-think the role of God and the place of humans in this modern, mathematised universe that ceased to have meaning in itself, turning into mechanically self-driven machine, oblivious to human ends, hopes, and devoid of any moral precepts.

Patočka, extending Dieter Henrich’s argument *On the Ontological Proof of God*,⁴⁴ summarises the Kantian project that shattered the old metaphysics, by setting the boundaries to the flight of reason. Kant shows that the aim of rational theology, accepting the new scientific reasoning, is to offer an ontological *proof* for the existence of God. No such proof of God is possible. As Kant points out, we can neither *know* God, nor the immortality of the soul nor freedom. Those are metaphysical

⁴⁰ Pascal, 2013, Kindle Locations 1668-1671

⁴¹ Patočka, 2007, 33

⁴² Patočka, 2007, 28

⁴³ “Kolem Masarykovy Filosofie Náboženství”.

⁴⁴ Henrich, 1960

ideas and not empirical facts. But can we think morality without these Christian pillars? Kant's answer is to construe theology derived from practical and reflective reasoning. This new moral theology "understands God only in his relationship to man". Kant's theology is not revealed or rational, but it is, as Patočka says,

a new doctrine of God...conceived in terms of the meaning of human life within the overall meaning of the universe. The condition of genesis of this new theology is modern mechanism. When modern mechanism is deprived of its escort (support) – rational metaphysics [rational theology] – it has to retreat (speaking metaphysically) into the purely materialistic doctrine of nature that is inherently devoid of all meaning. We should possibly be talking about a new theology and metaphysics of meaning. Never before it was necessary, but not even possible to reflect on the meaning of the world and human life, until this moment.⁴⁵

With the advancement of scientific thinking, the idea of God as *ens necessarium* or *ens maximum* becomes groundless.⁴⁶ According to Patočka, Kant realises that rational theology that tries to combine faith with scientific reason is untenable. Mechanistic nature does not need anything outside of itself, thereby God is incomprehensible within scientific conceptual edifice. Yet, this removal of the transcendent ground brings about a realisation that humans lost a divine measure in the domain of meaning. Once nature with its purposes and *telos* is transformed into the geometrical manifold of modern science, into the self-running mechanism, divine reason as superfluous is replaced by the new type of reasoning that Dostoyevsky calls Euclidian.⁴⁷

The Grand Inquisitor

A man's worst difficulties begin when he is able to do as he likes.⁴⁸

The problem that Dostoyevsky grapples with is the problem of responsibility in our modern age when the dominant mode of explanation is scientific. Once we accept that everything in the world is defined by scientific reason, or as Dostoyevsky puts it, when man becomes god, when the idea that 'if there were no God, he would have to be invented' becomes possible, the notion of God, the immortality of the soul and with it, the future harmony, becomes problematic. Revealed religion – where God as the creator of the world is unquestioned – covers over human meaning and humans' active role related to responsibility. New scientific ideas shake this complacency to the point of a disaster. God's 'role' in the world of humans must be rethought. The offered solution is the Kantian moral theology. Yet, if humans accept the crude utilitarian reasoning, then the Christian ideas of human freedom, the immortality of the soul and the future harmony become doubtful. This is also the problem of our times. God cannot be 'justified' by human reason, practical or reflective, but,

⁴⁵ Patočka, 1991 [1976], 53

⁴⁶ Patočka, 1991 [1976], 57

⁴⁷ See Dostoevsky, 2004, 235-236.

⁴⁸ T. H. Huxley cited in Dodds, 1951, 236

then, how to think about moral conduct of humans. In Dostoyevsky, it is the problem of future harmony, which Ivan Karamazov refutes in his talk with Alyosha, using utilitarian justification for his argument. The basic premise is derived from the idea of egotistical individuals who must be punished in this world if there be this-worldly justice and responsibility.

There are several characters that stand in for the egotistical individuals that are supposedly produced by bad subjectivism, mentioned above. The enthusiast of Euclidean logic in the novel *Ds* is young Pyotr Stepanovich Verkhovensky, who has no problem to murder one of his associates, as long as the others are present as accomplices – even though not literally murderers – during this deed. In *BK*, Pavel Fyodorovich Smerdyakov, the illegitimate son of Fyodor, commits patricide. This is the *reductio ad absurdum* mentioned at the beginning. Once the Euclidean enthusiast embraces the utilitarian logic and accepts without reservation that all is allowed, the conclusion is inevitable: disregarding everything except the wishes of oneself. It would not be a Dostoyevsky, the master of the human soul, if he did not complicate this picture. Young Verkhovensky as well as Smerdyakov are not really unqualified enthusiasts. They both need a guardian to lean on for the support in following through the utilitarian logic. And they both choose a strong individual to stand in for the ideas of this logic. It could even be said, that they construct their own man-god to be able to see through ‘everything is allowed’. And in both cases, those chosen are unwilling to support the inevitable conclusion. As I noted above, Nicolai Stavrogin kills himself, when he realises what has followed from the ideas that he flirtatiously supported in his deep boredom, and Ivan Karamazov ends in madness, while refusing to sanction Smerdyakov’s accusation that it was him that guided Smerdyakov to commit patricide. In the end, Pyotr Verkhovensky leaves Russia just in time to escape punishment, no doubt in search for another man-god to rely on, while Smerdyakov, deprived of Ivan Karamazov as his tower of strength, commits suicide.

Ivan Karamazov accepts Euclidian logic but cannot accept its outcome. His conscience seems to resist this logic. Likewise, Nicolai Stavrogin’s conscience leads him to his suicide. Despite his public exploits in his youth, he cannot face up to his conscience, which – as his inner voice – reminds him repeatedly of his youthful abuses of others.⁴⁹ Similar to Ivan Karamazov’s predicament, this inner voice is presented as a personified devil. However, Dostoyevsky is careful not to suggest that it is *really* devil. In Ivan Karamazov’s as well as in Nicolai Stavrogin’s case, the inner voice reveals the incompatibility between those different stand-points, Christianity and Euclidean reason. The inner voice stages a struggle between good and bad, between conscience and utilitarian logic in the innermost soul of those two protagonists.

⁴⁹ See also Dostoyevsky, 1922.

This could be read differently, relying on Patočka's conception of the care for the soul. The Socratic idea is to care for one's soul as the way to constantly question incompatible presuppositions from one's own resources, through *dialegesthai*, "travelling through words,"⁵⁰ as Hannah Arendt would say, or dialectic. Only by hard work, questioning one's own beliefs and always giving reasons for one's conduct, the balance of the soul can be achieved. But it never can end. It is a hard work lasting a life-time. Once the care of the soul is re-configured by Christianity, as Patočka says, the Greek struggle for the unity of the soul is replaced by a relationship between the omniscient God and a person. The dialectic is eliminated in favour of Christian commandments. This is the problem of Ivan Karamazov and Nicolai Stavrogin. Both of them rely on Christian teaching, instead of searching for the unity of the soul through their own reasoning. They both see the problematic nature of Euclidean mind but cannot see the way out of it, since their option is only modern reason versus God's commandments. The similar problem, but played out differently, is in the case of those who think that the Euclidean logic is the only way to reason.

It is illuminating to compare the vision of the Grand Inquisitor with the system of Shigalov from *Ds*. Shigalov acknowledges that he started to construct his system to assure happiness and satisfaction of needs for all with the idea of free humans but the logic of his argument leads him to the conclusion that all must be enslaved or, if necessary to teach them a lesson, most of them murdered in order to build a new society. In Ivan Karamazov's poem "The Grand Inquisitor," humans are already portrayed as indistinguishable cogs in a huge machine, presented as a better model of Christian community than what Jesus teaches, who foolishly insists on the freedom of individuals. As the Grand Inquisitor explains, once the human beings are reduced to the bundle of passions, desires and needs that he will satisfy; his society will run smoothly. There will not be an opposition to this utilitarian society. People do not really want to be free. They want to live with full stomach and provisions for their needs being in a constant supply. Freedom is a burden, because it requires of people to think for themselves. Once we accept that humans only want to satisfy their ever-newly defined needs and desires, the Euclidean logic follows to the inevitable conclusion, there can only be one man-god, the rest must follow his lead.

Ivan Karamazov realises the necessity of the conclusion to the logic of the Euclidean mind, but he is not at all sure that it is a good logic; hence his struggle and suffering. On the one hand, he affirms the existence of God, on the other, he also accepts the Euclidean, utilitarian, reasoning. And he is well aware of their incompatibility. The logic gives him only this world, but, then, how to think divine justice, if one rejects transcendence. Important to stress here is that this transcendence must

⁵⁰ Arendt, 1978, I, 185

not necessarily be God, but this is how Ivan Karamazov frames it (and Dostoyevsky).

In his discussion with Alyosha, Ivan Karamazov offers innumerable examples – collected from newspapers – of children being tortured as a basis for his refutation of God and immortality on which the future harmony is based. One should note, of course, that his examples are already examples of his Euclidean mind. They are not, as Zosima shows later in the book, personal encounters with suffering, where the compassion with the murderer, for example, the stranger or a woman visiting Zosima in the monastery, can lead to the face-to-face forgiveness, and they are not theological examples from the bible either. The presented list enumerates case by case the tortured children, a clear empirical study of the researcher-scientist, who accumulates his data to proceed by an induction to a general explanation. With Ivan Karamazov, this explanation is the reason to reject the world created by God and a divine promise of the future harmony. But does it follow? His question to Alyosha is already a utilitarian thought experiment that cannot be refuted on its own ground. The only possibility is yes or no.

Tell me straight out, I call on you – answer me: imagine that you yourself are building the edifice of human destiny with the object of making people happy in the finale, of giving them peace and rest at last, but for that you must inevitably and unavoidably torture just one tiny creature, that same child who was beating her chest with her little fist, and raise your edifice on the foundation of her unrequited tears – would you agree to be the architect on such conditions? Tell me the truth'.⁵¹

But the required truth is already determined by the way the question is posed. The question is already framed with the possibility of only two answers. One might call it a fallacy of the excluded middle.

Zosima's Answer

Zosima gives an answer, but *not* in terms of “building the edifice of human destiny”. That is not for us to consider. His answer is compassion, understanding and love of other human beings. Yet, for us, his answer is hard to think, or accept, since we are even further influenced by modern instrumental/utilitarian reasoning.

Zosima recognises Ivan Karamazov's problem. He sees that Ivan is troubled by the acceptance of utilitarian logic. Ivan Karamazov recognises this logic as problematic, if accepted without reservation. He is aware where it might lead (unlike Rakitin). As Zosima says to Ivan Karamazov (at the visit in the monastery), either you “are blessed if you believe” that all is permitted because there is no immortality of the soul, or you are “most unhappy”.⁵² Zosima understands Ivan. This is confirmed at the end of the novel, when Ivan Karamazov's inner voice, personified as a devil,

⁵¹ Dostoevsky, 2004, 245

⁵² Dostoevsky, 2004, 70

throws his reasoning back at him. He goes ‘mad’, because he cannot resolve his justice dilemma between the physical world and the world beyond.

Zosima’s different answer to justice, responsibility and human meaning is already based on his acceptance of the victory of the utilitarian reasoning and the reduction of humans to a bundle of passions, desires and needs. Not that the old Church is presented by Dostoyevsky as divine. The Father Ferapont is an example of how one can forget people in the self-imposed and exaggerated ascetic approach to life. Zosima is aware that the world changed, hence his reminiscences how he was lured by the earthly possessions and desires. After all, already his dying brother rejected the Euclidian world. He is a constant reminder to Zosima that love for others is what can keep community together. This is affirmed further by the scene between young boys and Alyosha, when Alyosha says goodbye to them at the rock where their friend – a recently deceased Iljushka – loved to come. He reminds them of the importance of love for each other.

Perhaps the lesson from Dostoyevsky’s novels is to re-frame his struggle that he defined narrowly as the struggle between the faith in the immortality of the soul and utilitarian rationality as the strife between good and bad in the innermost core of our being, which all of us must confront at some point in our lives. This is Patočka’s project. Not only he redefines the framework of Dostoyevsky’s offered descriptions of human beings, but he also redefines the reading of the characters in relation to the Euclidean mind that Dostoyevsky took as the only reasoning in the modern world. Patočka’s description of the underground man is an example of someone who sees the problematic nature of utilitarian logic,⁵³ but not the way to resist it. On the one hand, the underground man refuses to be defined by the logic of everyone and no-one, by the public anonym, where most of humans bury themselves in the everydayness without questioning the problems that pile up everywhere; on the other hand, the underground man can only *re-act* against this logic by negativity. The public anonym is an attitude of most of us when we accept the smooth running of society that reduces us all into the interchangeable cogs. Only by changing one’s attitude and positively redefining one-self as unique, not reducible to everyone and no-one might be a way out. But this would require responsibility for our own being by changing our attitude. The underground man cannot take that step towards one’s own responsibility and love for others and he ends up hating others as well as himself. The precondition of moral understanding of others that are part of the world is to accept the world into which we were thrown and for which we must be responsible.

⁵³ See Dostoevsky, 1993.

The World Sense

Sense is, however, an ontological category, which originally, in its primordial being, is not concerned with human values, cares and purposes. That is indeed so: sense as the foundation of all understanding is the primordial difference between being and beings, and there is, in that, no one's purpose or intention – as Hegel says, the absolute wants to be and is with us – the difference has neither purpose nor intention.⁵⁴

We are born into the meaningful world that is already here, already defined by the generations that preceded us. Hence, sense is given to us in our historical situatedness, sense of things, tools, events, situations is different, according to the world horizon that gives meaning to all. As Patočka terms it, it is a difference between Being and beings: the way we *see* a thunderstorm as a fury of Zeus or as an electrical discharge, the way we see nature as the ordered *phusis* or as a resource for our use is not our subjective meaning locked up in our consciousness. Here belongs Patočka's critique of bad subjectivism. Since we have become aware of the power of our understanding we cannot simply renounce subjectivity in preference to objectivity, as Masaryk proposed. Objectivity and subjectivity are inter-related. To think the one, we must think the other. There is also bad objectivity if we transgress the limits of reason, as Kant shows, or transplanting the scientific, objective, reason into domains that cannot be reduced to the lowest denominator that is a precondition of the repeatability of the same, in other words, observable regularity. For Patočka, we need to re-think subject object relation that is bequeathed to us through history of thinking. Moreover, he stresses that without subject, there is no possibility to think responsibility. However, to rethink subjectivity is important. To retain belief that all the world is enclosed in consciousness leads to the charges of egotism and self-interest. We are not creators of meaning, not everything goes. In that sense, meaning is not from us. It is not us that can 'open' the space of manifestation of things that we encounter and that let us to encounter them, independent of the history of thinking. But neither there is a world independent of us. As Kant and Husserl show, meaning is our human achievement.

Conclusion

'I admit, though, that the chief factor was my own wicked will, and had nothing to do with my environment; of course nobody commits such crimes. But all, who are uprooted from the ground, do the same kind of things, although more feeble and watery. Many people do not even notice their nasty acts and think themselves honest'.⁵⁵

This bewildered wandering is manifest, among other things, in modern homelessness. For all the vast production of the wherewithal of living, human life remains homeless. Home is understood ever more as a shelter, a place to sleep over so we can return to work the next day, the place where we store the fruits of our labour and lead our 'family life' of which there is ever less. That humans, unlike all other animals, build dwellings, because they are not at home in the world, because they lean out of the world and for that

⁵⁴ Patočka, 1991 [1976], 113-114: "Smysl je přece ontologická kategorie, které původně, v jejím prabytí, není nic po lidských hodnotách, starostech a účelích. Tak tomu opravdu je: smysl jako základ všeho porozumění je pra-rozdíl mezi bytím a jsoucnem, a v tom není ani ničí účel, any úmysl – tak jako třeba Hegel říká, že absolutno chce být a je u nás – difference nemá žádný účel ani úmysl."

⁵⁵ Dostoevsky cited in Fricher, 1922, 119

reason are charged with a calling within and towards it, anchored in deep layers of the past which have not passed as long as they live on in them – all that vanishes in the face of modern voluntary and enforced mobility, the gigantic migrations which by now affect nearly all continents. The greatest homelessness, however, is in our relation to nature and to ourselves.⁵⁶

Patočka notes that any theory that is based on the modern scientific view reduces human beings to the pawns in the play of indifferent forces, such as some kind of mental processes or predictable laws of society. No theory can account for responsible human beings who are free. Free humans take up responsibility for what they did not create, and they might not even want to create. Nevertheless, free humans *assume* responsibility for situations and the world into which they were born,⁵⁷ as well as for life itself, even though they did not create it.⁵⁸ As Patočka insists, this is the strange meaning of Dostoyevsky that we are all responsible for everything: “each of us is...guilty on behalf of all and for all on earth, ...personally, ...for all people and for each person on this earth”.⁵⁹

We came into the world, where others already live, we are born into families that accept us and provide warmth when we are young. We learn to move around the world with the help of others who love us. We begin to act on our own by impacting on the lives of others. When we start something, we can never predict the outcome because we are not alone in the world. Human acting is not a vase that one can produce in seclusion, knowing what the end of her labour will be. Human life is unpredictable and our actions are never ours only. We might cause harm to others without even realising it in a way that might be imperceptible. As Dostoyevsky shows, the ripples that our action creates influence others. We must take responsibility for it. As Patočka writes, “we did not personally bring about the adversity of our age and the present situation, we inherited it. Nonetheless, we are responsible for it”.⁶⁰

Perhaps there is another lesson in Dostoyevsky. Either we affirm that we are free, then we must take up responsibility for our and others’ actions, for the choices we have never made but the consequences we inherited; or we can refuse that and become a part of the public anonym, satisfied with worshipping to our passions, desires and needs, lost in our ever-changing projects, accepting only *carpe diem*. But there is also a danger when we renounce our freedom. We might end up in Shigalov’s society or the society of the Grand Inquisitor. There is a choice to be made.

Patočka’s heretical history of European reason and science is an answer to Kant and Dostoyevsky and their attempt to rethink human responsibility in the world where objective reasoning relegates

⁵⁶ Patočka, 1996b, 115

⁵⁷ Patočka, 1991 [1977], 41, italics in original

⁵⁸ Patočka, 1991 [1977], 49

⁵⁹ Dostoevsky, 2004, 164

⁶⁰ Patočka, 2004 [1969], 418

our human experience to the margins of knowledge limiting it –at most – to the domain of arts. As Patočka sees it, the most successful attempt to anchor human responsibility was Christianity, which still needs to be rethought, as he suggests. Yet, for him, this solution is not adequate because it is based on the human relationship to a transcendent God who always watches over us and knows all about our acts, thoughts and intentions, while specifying religious commandments for human acting. As Zosima says in *BK*: “everything is from the Lord, and all our fates as well.”⁶¹ A singular human responsibility is already rooted in the prescriptions of the omnipotent and omniscient God. The Christian theological venture is built on otherworldly ground.

Kant’s project seemingly disrupts this ground, making it problematic. The Kantian shift to account for human meaning is not always acknowledged and, yet, his problematic was brought about by the changes in the conception of new science. As a result of the changed conception of nature, the place of God and humans in the new universe becomes problematic. God turns out to be an unknowable and distant being, while nature is conceived as the self-running machine. As a consequence of this new mathematised nature, the old surrounding world, full of colours, smells and warmth, which humans understood, is stripped of any teleology and harmony. The mathematised nature is oblivious to human needs. In this changed world, to think of human meaning and their place in the world becomes impossible. Kant offered a new way to think about it. According to Patočka, Kant’s contemplation of “*the starry sky above me and moral law within me*”⁶² is a problematic solution in the world, where scientific knowledge replaced God in the edifice of human knowledge. The Christian theological venture is historically one of the most successful transcendent ground to anchor the human temporal meaning and a singular human responsibility as the care for the soul. Yet, it is built on otherworldly ground. We need to return to the Socratic solution, when Socrates tries to think through the transient human meaning without any transcendence. It was a time of the changes in the conception of *Kosmos* and the new answers were needed in place of the old, mythical, ones.

Socrates offers a different way to think about the shaken meaning of traditional beliefs. Socrates’ learned ignorance is an acknowledgement of the incompleteness of human knowing. We can never know all. Instead, we need to ask questions about our common-place understanding that we think we already know. The Socratic inquiry is predicated on this critical approach to knowing. It is never final but it is always structured around an open question that urges us to reflect, again and again, on the shaking ground of our beliefs. The Socratic teaching is closed off by Plato, who offers the new transcended ground in the form of his unchanging Ideas, to secure the changing opinions of humans

⁶¹ Dostoevsky, 2004, 285

⁶² Kant, 2002, 161 [203], italics in original

by creating the unshakable ground of knowing. Christianity takes over this solution, further perfecting it by placing God as the unshakable foundation to human meaning, strengthening it by the personal communion between a finite human being and the omnipresent God. The Socratic attempt to think through the shaken meaning of the tradition without transcendence is eliminated by the offered solution of transcendence in the form either of the Platonic Ideas, or later, God to safeguard human finite knowing by something permanent. Humans can err, they can doubt but there is always secure meaning they can rely on. When science ceased to offer the ground to human meaning, we need to revisit the Socratic solution formulated as ‘learned ignorance’ and ‘the care for the soul’ to think anew human responsibility in the world we live today.

Taking care of our own soul opens up the concept of the soul and this concept adequately clarified gives access to all other dimensions of philosophical thinking and questioning. Care for the soul takes place through *questioning one’s way of thinking*. The form of this questioning is such that one of the participants in a conversation allows himself to be questioned. It takes the form of a conversation that is ordinarily divided between two persons, but it can also take place within the core of the soul itself. To allow the question to arrive, one must problematize one’s own and the other’s way of thinking (Patočka, 2002a, 91-92, italics in original, translation modified).

Starost o duši nám vlastně otvírá pojem duše a tento pojem patřičně objasněn dává přístup ke všem ostatním dimenzím filosofického myšlení a tázání. Starost o duši se vůbec odehrává *dotazujícím se myšlením*. Forma tohoto dotazujícího se myšlení je taková, že někdo z účastníků rozhovoru se nechá vyslyšet, má formu rozhovoru, který je obvykle rozdělen na dvě osoby, ale může se odehrávat také v nitru duše samotné.⁶³ Při tom je důležitá pohotovost nechat se zproblematizovat, nechat na sebe otázku dojít. V této ochotě nechat se vyslyšet je obsažena na jedné straně jistota, že běží jenom o věc samu, a na druhé straně, že neexistuje žádný konec, žádné uzavření, neboť je zde zkušenost, že i to, co se zdá na první pohled samozřejmé, je možno učinit předmětem dotazování, problematizování a stává se požadavkem, že se to tak dělat musí. Jenom naprosto jasná a jednotná, sobě neodporující, nýbrž souvislá řeč o všem, o čemkoli, o čem se může myslet smysluplně, jenom takováto naprosto koherentní řeč bude tedy moci znamenat existenci, vytvoření vnitřně jednotné duše, která tím, že její myšlenky jsou *závažné*, není rozpolcena, roztrhána v různá navzájem protikladná mínění. Poněvadž ale předběžně si tím nejsme jisti a jenom ve zkoumání se tím můžeme ujistit, právě proto *zkoumání samo* vytváří zvláštní jednotu, totiž postoj zkoumaného hledatele je si sebou v jistém smyslu před rozporem a před jeho duševními následky *jist*. Je to – mohlo by se říci s užitím pozdějšího termínu – jakási *εποχή*, která je nadmíru pozitivní.

Εποχή tedy neznamená zdržení se úsudku vůbec, nýbrž znamená *předběžné hypotetické nasazení mínění*, které je vystaveno ve vši loajalitě a ve vši ochotě k dalším a dalším výskumům, a to s úmyslem docílit koherentního diskursu, docílit názoru, který znamená nahlédnutí v plném smyslu slova, nahlédnutí, které se nemusí dementovat, které se nemusí brát zpět, které ovšem znamená *přítomnost ideálu*, jenž ve faktickém životě nemusí být nikdy realizován. Ale tahle idea – že chceme nakonec jenom to, co můžeme tímto způsobem zodpovídat, co vidíme s takovou jasností, že to obstojí ve všem možném průzkumu, a to tak, že je to buď tak počáteční, tak elementární, že otázky, které by se o tom kladli, to samy předpokládají, anebo takové, že to v průzkumu mínění obstojí v křížovém ohni otázek –, tohle dvojí tvoří *jednotní ideál*, za kterým jde toto zkoumání, tato starost o duši (Patočka, 1999 [1973], 229-230, italics in original).

by “seeking reasons and accepting responsibility for” it.⁶⁴ For Socrates, meaning can only be “in the mode of questioning because the question is built up on an awareness of the problematic nature of

⁶³ Srv. Platón, *Gorgias*, 493b-c. (Pozn. Vyd.)

⁶⁴ Patočka, 1996c, 60.

meaning.”⁶⁵ This is also Patočka’s approach. We must be open to questioning and give up “any claim to universal validity.”⁶⁶

The care for the soul is this striving “to be in unity with one’s own self. Man, originally and always, is not in this unity with himself; this is incredible work, the work of a whole life. Behind this stands that impulse to unite.”⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Patočka, 1996a, 142.

⁶⁶ Patočka, 1996a, 144.

⁶⁷ Patočka, 2002b, 189.

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