

THE MOVEMENT OF TRANSCENDING OF 'BARE' LIFE TOWARDS THE POLITICAL. FROM HUSSERL TO PATOČKA

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Abstract

This paper addresses the topic of life in the philosophy of Jan Patočka, specifically in its intertwining with, on the one hand, the one of finitude and, on the other, the dimension of the political. This topic is taken into consideration focusing on two perspectives: first, the relation between 'bare' life as prolongation of itself and life as existentially meaningful; second, the relation between individual life and the broader dimension into which individual life may be integrated. Patočka's reflections are approached starting out from partly similar thoughts found in Husserl's meditation. This paper attempts to point out the parallels between Husserl's and Patočka's position, as well as the aspects which differentiate them. The main textual points of reference for tracing this comparison are the following: for Husserl, besides the first *Kaizo* article and some related passages on the political, especially the Vienna lecture *The Crisis of European Humanity and Philosophy*; for Patočka, especially the *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, in addition to the text *Supercivilization and its inner conflict*. In the case of Husserl, the transcendence of finite everyday interests leads towards an integration of life into 'life' as a transcendental, intersubjective dimension and movement. In such context, the political is to be conceived starting from the rational teleology of this movement. For Patočka, it is rather the confrontation with problematicity and finitude that opens up the possibility of a movement which, leading beyond the prolongation of life, can integrate the assumption of mortality with the opening of an authentic political dimension – and this in a thinking of finitude and of the political which focuses in a more radical way on the original event of shaking, crisis, and transformation.

Keywords: life; finitude; transcend; rational teleology; mortality; Patočka; Husserl

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Introduction

In this paper, I will address the topic of life in its intertwining with the political dimension as well as with finitude and mortality in the thought of the Czech phenomenologist Jan Patočka. While the main focus will be on Patočka, I will also approach his reflections tracing a parallel with and a comparison to Husserl's phenomenology, inasmuch as Husserl remained always a central point of reference as well as a recurrent topic for critical reflection in Patočka's works, from his early essay *The Natural World as a Philosophical Problem* (1936) to his late meditations, for instance in the *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History* (1975).

I will address this topic – life intertwined with finitude and the political dimension – focusing on two perspectives, which especially in Patočka's meditations overlap each other and can ultimately be thought together: on the one hand, the relation of 'bare' life, understood in the sense of life as a prolongation of itself, and life as existentially meaningful; on the other hand, the relation between individual life and 'life' as a broader dimension into which individual life may be integrated or to which it can open itself.

In line with the chosen approach to Patočka, starting with some remarks about comparable reflections in Husserl, I will also point at the aspects of continuity – and discontinuity – between Husserl's and Patočka's thought. In the late Husserl, the passage from a life oriented towards finite and everyday interests to a life which integrates a broader and philosophical dimension coincides with the integration of individual life into 'life' as transcendental, intersubjective dimension. In particular, Husserl's remarks on the political allow, as I will show, for an interesting comparison with Patočka's thought.

In order to sketch Patočka's reflections on life and its relation to the political and finitude, I will take as a main point of reference his late work *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History* – though in this paper, I do not intend to extend the consideration of this important work beyond merely pointing at some thoughts and passages which best help to synthesise his position in respect to this constellation of concepts. In the first two essays, *Reflections on Prehistory* and *The Beginning of History*, the Czech phenomenologist develops, in the context of an original philosophy of history, an interpretation of the beginning of philosophy and politics, which coincides with the beginning of history itself, according to which their joint appearance in ancient Greece took place through the manifestation of a radical problematicity of human life and through a new openness for transcending that which characterized human life and existence before it: namely, a life bound by its own mortality to its self-preservation and self-prolongation through labour, and

not yet open, in this “natural world” of human life, to this radical problematicity. In this ‘natural’ world, humans “do not encounter the mystery of manifestation as such”¹, while only with the openness, taking place in the Greek *polis*, to a radical problematicity which remained concealed before, “life becomes free and whole” and “consciously builds room for an equally free life, not exhausted by mere acceptance”.² History begins for Patočka “where after the shaking of life’s ‘small’ meaning bestowed by acceptance, humans dare undertake new attempts at bestowing meaning on themselves in the light of the way the being of the world into which they have been set manifests itself to them”.³

Patočka develops these thoughts – above just briefly sketched – under a clear influence of both Martin Heidegger and Hannah Arendt, but there is another influence that can be recognized, which emerges from a reception that had closely accompanied the Czech phenomenologist from his early thought: the one of Husserl. It is possible, in particular, to recognize here and point at a parallel to Husserl’s Vienna lecture from 1935, *The Crisis of European Humanity and Philosophy*, which much likely lies in the background of Patočka’s thoughts in the *Heretical Essays* and had an influence on them. I will thus make some brief remarks on Husserl, which will offer the possibility of a comparison with Patočka especially in respect to the theme of the political, referring first of all to this late Husserlian text.

1. Husserl: The *Urstiftung* of *Theoria*, the Transcendence of Finite Interests and the Political

As Husserl states in *The Crisis of European Humanity and Philosophy*, “spiritual Europe has a place of birth” in Ancient Greece in the 7th and 6th Century BC, where “a *novel attitude* of some individuals towards the surrounding world emerges”.⁴ It is “the breakthrough of a totally new type of spiritual creations [*geistiger Gebilde*]”, which soon develops into “a systematic [...] cultural form”, which under the title of ‘philosophy’ means, according to Husserl, “universal science, science of the cosmos, of the totality of every being”.⁵ The theoretical attitude,

¹ Patočka, Jan: *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, translated by Erazim Kohák, Open Court, Chicago and La Salle 1996, p. 13.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 40–41.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁴ Husserl, Edmund: *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie. Eine Einleitung in die Phänomenologische Philosophie*, Martinus Nijhoff, Den Haag 1954, p. 321. My own translation.

⁵ *Ibid.*

the philosophical *theoria* that is born, generates a new cultural form through its discovery of idealities and the pursue of infinite tasks in the theoretical praxis; this new type of attitude and praxis makes possible the transcending of the finite interests of the everyday, “natural” praxis, the “natural interests of life”⁶, in a way for Husserl still impossible for pre-scientific, pre-philosophical human cultures. In a culture still untouched by *theoria*, the “infinite horizon” in which humans live has in fact not yet been opened; their tasks and actions, their “personal, collective, national, mythical motivation”, everything remains in the context of their finite environment⁷: the world as the universal horizon which is always present, is not yet thematic⁸, but it becomes thematic in the *Urstiftung* of *theoria* (although not yet in the way it is thematic for transcendental phenomenology). The transformation which takes place through the birth of *theoria* encompasses the entire European culture in its historical, intersubjective, cultural and political dimension, and as a revolutionizing of the way in which humanity produces culture while “becoming a humanity of infinite tasks”⁹, it constitutes according to Husserl the foundation of a rational teleology, of a “*historical teleology of infinite tasks of reason*”.¹⁰

While encompassing the entire European culture derived from that original foundation, this rational teleology characterizes also the political dimension as an intersubjective dimension of rational praxis and tasks; however, the return to an exclusive orientation towards the finite tasks of ‘natural life’ is always possible, and this not only with respect to individual subjects but also on a collective, cultural and national level. This aspect of politics and political life, which can often appear as prevalent in history and everyday experience, is addressed by Husserl with the term “realpolitik” (*Realpolitik*). As stated by Sara Pasetto, “Husserl outlines the realpolitik as an empirical politics linked to people and country (*Volk und Land*), where actions are naive due to an unaware attitude towards life, and, most importantly, where the idea of power and ideologies (*Machtideen und Ideologien*), an imperialistic unity of will (*imperialistische Willenseinheit*), as well as authority (*Autorität*), egoism and selfishness (*Egoismus und Selbstsucht*) rule”.¹¹ The realpolitik

⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 328.

⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 324.

⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 327.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 325.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 347.

¹¹ Pasetto, Sara: “The Husserlian Will to Power: ‘I Can Do Whatever I Want’”, in *Human Studies*, Vol. 45 (2022), p. 110. In reference to Husserl: *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie*, *op. cit.*; Husserl: *Aufsätze und Vorträge (1922–1937)*, Kluwer, Dordrecht 1989; and Husserl: *Studien zur Struktur des Bewusstseins. Zweiter Band: Gefühl und Wert. Texte aus dem Nachlass (1896–1925)*, Springer, Dordrecht 2020. See also Pasetto: *La politica*

is nonetheless unsuitable for human subjects or communities in accordance to the full depth of their rationality. In his first *Kaizo* article, Husserl writes:

A nation, a humanity, lives and creates in the fullness of its strength when it is sustained by a faith in itself and in a beautiful and good sense of its cultural life; when, thus, it not only just lives, but lives to meet what it considers to be greatness, and is satisfied in its onward successes in the realisation of genuine and growing values. [...] We are human beings, free-willed subjects who actively intervene in our environment, constantly shaping it. Whether we want to or not, whether bad or right, we do so. Cannot we also do it reasonably? Are not reasonableness and goodness in our power?

These are chimerical goals, will certainly object the pessimists and *realpoliticians*.¹²

In “Beilage X” in the same volume of *Husserliana* (Hua XXVII), Husserl addresses, furthermore, the fact and symptom of crisis that “a *scientific culture of rationality*, a real age of ‘enlightenment’ through pure science, does not come into existence”, while “the inert masses are the prey of the leaders who drive them according to egoistic interests (individual and national egoism)”¹³, or even according to a “delirium of political power”.¹⁴

For Husserl, this loss of rationality – of a full rationality transcending finite interests – in the domain of *Realpolitik* is to be countered through a renewal of rational teleology and through philosophy as phenomenology in its ‘revolutionary’ and transformational potential in respect to the finite natural interests. Transcendental phenomenology makes possible in this sense a ‘phenomenological politics’, since it enables the passage from a life oriented towards finite and everyday interests to a life which integrates a broader and philosophical dimension. Through its more radical renewal of the philosophical *Urstiftung* of European humanity, phenomenology discovers for Husserl another and wider dimension of ‘life’, in which individual life, as well as the life of communities, is integrated into ‘life’ as a transcendental, intersubjective dimension and movement.

dell’“Europa” nella fenomenologia di Edmund Husserl, in *Segni e Comprensione*, Vol. 68 (2009), <http://212.189.136.205/index.php/segnicompr/article/view/7291> (15.04.2024).

¹² Husserl: *Aufsätze und Vorträge (1922–1937)*, *op. cit.*, pp. 3–4. Translation by Sara Pasetto.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

¹⁴ Cf. Pasetto: “The Husserlian Will to Power: ‘I Can Do Whatever I Want’”, *art. cit.*, p. 112; with reference to Husserl: *Studien zur Struktur des Bewusstseins. Zweiter Band: Gefühl und Wert...*, *op. cit.*

2. Patočka: The Turn to Finitude, the Beginning of History as Transcendence of 'Bare' Life and the Critique of Supercivilization

While Husserl – who for sure is not a thinker of human finitude and mortality – conceives life in its more every day and limited aspect as linked to the latency or forgetfulness of the rational depth and infinite teleology of life in its full dimension, Patočka has a partly comparable but also different approach to this topic. Influenced by Heidegger and his notion of existence – but also attempting to attain his own path of phenomenological thinking beyond both Husserl and Heidegger, not without a relevant reception of Fink and the reception of notions of other thinkers, such as the one of ontological negativity in Hegel and Kojève¹⁵ –, Patočka puts a much stronger accent on the corporeal and finite character of human existence and starts out from the finite and mortal character of human life in order to think life in its unfree state as mere self-prolongation. As already briefly sketched, in the *Heretical Essays*, Patočka believes that this unfree character of life was most prevalent in 'pre-historical' humanity, i.e. in human cultures before what he characterizes as the actual beginning of history, and at the same time of philosophy and politics, in Ancient Greece. The world of the (in this particular sense) 'pre-historical' humanity is characterized by a mythical order governing the relation of the immortal gods to the mortal humans which guarantees a limited but secured meaning of human life; in this 'mythical world' in which answers precede questions, "[w]hatever seems to go beyond" the aim of preservation of life through work comes

from the fact that the primordial bond between mortals and gods, the life-giving and at the same time dangerous powers of the earth and the sky, remained unbroken and that human self-preservation took place in the glow of this undisturbed natural world. With respect to this world, though, humans are not free, having therein no space which would be their own, their work, and no goal or purpose which would rise above the maintenance of life.¹⁶

Patočka does not deny that even in the mythical world of 'pre-historic' humanity, a relation to truth and some form of transcendence with respect to the mere self-preservation of life are actually possible and exist. Of the three movements which he theorises as the fundamental moments characterizing human existence

¹⁵ Cf. Tardivel, Émilie: *La liberté au principe. Essai sur la philosophie de Jan Patočka*, Vrin, Paris 2011, pp. 44–51, and Patočka: *Éternité et historicité*, Verdier, Lagrasse 2011, pp. 119 and 124–130.

¹⁶ Patočka: *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History, op. cit.*, p. 24.

(and to which I will briefly return later in this paper) – the movements of acceptance, defence and truth – the movement of truth is in fact not absent in the world of ‘pre-historic’ humanity, but “without the explicitly thematic orientation characteristic of a historical epoch”¹⁷; the life of ‘pre-historic’ societies is “focused on the acceptance and maintenance of life”, i.e., on the first two movements, and humans live in a “vital cycle of acceptance and transmission” that “exhausts the meaning of what is done”.¹⁸

This prevalent orientation towards the maintenance of life is not something that Patočka in his meditation would attribute only just to ‘pre-historic’ cultures and societies, since on the contrary he recognises this tendency as present also, even to a larger extent, in contemporary societies informed by modern natural science and technology. This diagnosis is accompanied by a critical consideration given to the kind of rationality which is linked to modern science and technology – a critical view which can very well point to a parallel with the critique of limited, objectivistic rationality in Husserl, but is also different from Husserlian rationalism. Furthermore, another parallelism can nonetheless be traced between Husserl and Patočka, since the crisis which both thinkers recognise in the contemporary technological epoch and its rationality derives from having been made possible, on the one hand, by a beginning (the *Urstiftung* of *theoria* for Husserl, the beginning of history for Patočka) and, on the other hand, from being forgetful of, or not adequate to this beginning. Whereas for Husserl such inadequacy concerns the relation of the technological rationality and society to the rational teleology in its original depth, for Patočka it concerns rather the relation to problematicity as the beginning of history, in connection with the return to a main focus on the maintenance of life, i.e., on the “perspective of the day”¹⁹, with the tools of instrumental rationality and technology, which in its tendency becomes even exclusive.

I will refer here very briefly to the analysis and critique of contemporary technological societies which Patočka develops not only in the *Heretical Essays* but also in a much earlier text, *Hypercivilisation and its Inner Conflict*, which he wrote around 1955.²⁰ A central role in Patočka’s analysis – from the perspective of the *Heretical Essays*, which to a large extent can also be adopted to understand

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Patočka: *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

²⁰ Cf. Patočka: *Liberté et sacrifice. Écrits politiques*, translated by Abrams, Erika, Millon, Grenoble 1990, pp. 99–177.

the above mentioned previous work of Patočka, where it just appears in a slightly less explicit manner – is played by modern functional-instrumental rationality in its application on a political-social level in order to manage life, its maintenance and transmission according to its everyday dimension. In his analysis – which due to the focus on the governance of life in the above mentioned sense and to the pervasive character of the role of instrumental rationality on the social level could be brought into a comparison with the more recent and contemporary notions of biopower and biopolitics – Patočka distinguishes between two types of contemporary societies: the ones governed by the ‘moderate’ and the ones governed by the ‘radical’ version of hypercivilisation. The ‘moderate’ version of hypercivilisation does not pervade society and culture entirely, to the point of seeking control of every aspect of the subjective-personal life, which is yet ultimately marginalised and made irrelevant in comparison to the rational and functional organisation of society; the ‘radical’ version shows a thoroughly totalitarian character in its penetration into the sphere of subjectivity, values and freedom – yet both forms of hypercivilisation erode subjectivity and tend to reduce the human subjects to their functions from the point of view of instrumental rationality applied to the governance of society. Both of them according to Patočka fail to consider the depth of human life and – from the perspective of the *Heretical Essays* – adopt exclusively the point of view of the day, concealing individual life and existence as capable of truth in, and from, its possible confrontation with finitude and problematcity.

3. The Three Movements of Human Existence. The Beginning of History, Philosophy and the Political in Patočka’s *Heretical Essays*. A brief Comparison with Husserl

Whereas the technological society in Patočka’s meditation appears as a gigantic structure dedicated to the prolongation of life and the functional-instrumental management of the everyday life, the confrontation with problematcity and finitude opens up the possibility of a movement towards another dimension of life which integrates the acknowledgement of mortality with the opening of an authentic political dimension. In the background of these thoughts, a relevant role is played by the doctrine of the three movements of human existence, i.e. the three moments in which according to Patočka the movement of embodied human existence in the world articulates itself. This doctrine was elaborated by the Czech phenomenologist in the second half of the 1960s and is developed in depth in

writings such as *The "Natural" World and Phenomenology*²¹ and the *Body, Community, Language, World*²², but as already mentioned it is still present in the *Heretical Essays*. The first movement or moment, which Patočka calls acceptance or sinking roots, points at the originary character of existence as being-with: only through the acceptance by others, through their mediation, we can sink roots in the world, we can achieve a world and develop our own possibilities. The conception of this first movement already shows that, despite a recognisable influence by the Heideggerian concepts of Being-in-the-World, of decadence and of authenticity, Patočka's understanding of embodied human existence puts a much stronger accent not only on embodiment but also on being-with and alterity as its very conditions of possibility. The second movement, the one of self-projection or defense, enables the maintenance of a world and is connected to the dimension of need and to the dimension of work and labor, to falling into things, to instrumentality and objectification. This second movement is present in the background of Patočka's understanding of bare life and its enchainment to itself, as well as of technological society, in which individuals relate to each other first and foremost in objectifying ways. The third movement, the authentic movement of human existence, is the one of truth or openness, which is conceived as an overcoming of decadence, as well as an achievement of a relation to the whole, of an authentic relation to alterity and of an encounter with the other (although it can be pointed out that for Patočka this third movement can also be accomplished in a defective or inauthentic way, as it is shown, in the *Heretical Essays*, in his account of the un-problematic mythical world of pre-historic humanity). The influence of Heidegger is only partial, because Patočka's thoughts do show a reception of, but cannot be reduced to, an orientation towards Heidegger's notions of authenticity and ontological difference.

Patočka's conception of the beginning of history, philosophy and politics shows furthermore, as already sketched, both parallels and differences to the Husserlian *Urstiftung* of *theoria*; meanwhile, the elements of similarity to Husserl, as for example the pronounced character of discontinuity that for both thinkers the beginning of Ancient Greece exhibits, constitute another aspect of distinction between Patočka and Heidegger. However, in the case of Husserl, this beginning is primarily understood as foundation of the rational teleology of Europe; in the case of Patočka, for whom this beginning also constitutes the opening event of the European tradition, it is first of all conceived of as a crisis, or even a collapse,

²¹ Cf. Patočka: *Philosophy and Selected Writings*, translated by Erazim Kohák, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1989, pp. 239–273.

²² Cf. Patočka: *Body, Community, Language, World*, translated by Erazim Kohák, Open Court, Chicago and La Salle 1998.

of the ‘mythical’ natural world of ‘pre-historic’ humanity and its order. The beginning of history has the character of a shock: “Nothing of the earlier life of acceptance remains in peace; all the pillars of the community, traditions, and myths, are equally shaken, as are all the answers that once preceded questions.”²³ It is interesting to point at the fact that even in respect to this character of the Greek beginning as shock or shaking, a parallel with Husserl can be found, as noticed for example by Hans Rainer Sepp: “[A]lready Husserl derived the origin of philosophy from a specific mode of encounter with the alien [*mit dem Fremden*]: the experience of foreign worlds of meaning [*fremder Sinnwelten*] made the validity of the own world become problematic.”²⁴ Coming into contact with different and culturally developed nations in its surrounding world, writes Husserl in *The Crisis of European Humanity and Philosophy*, the Greek humanity “observes above all the multiplicity of nations, the own and foreign ones, everyone with its own surrounding world, with its traditions, its gods, demons, its mythical powers, which it considers without any doubt as the real world. In this astonishing contrast emerges the difference between world-conception and real world and originates the new question of truth.”²⁵ While Husserl, however, focuses on the search for universality, for universal truth beyond finite horizons originated among the Greeks as a reaction to this shock, Patočka puts the accent rather on the very event of crisis and transformation.

This event of crisis and transformation, the originary event of history, is thought by Patočka in the *Heretical Essays* as the one that opens up the possibility of “life unsheltered” and “life as a whole”, of a life that “does not seek to escape its contingency, but neither does it yield to it passively”.²⁶ With the beginning of history – which for Patočka remains a human possibility that can be regained even from amidst the contemporary technological society – the “whole [...] speaks to humans *directly*, free of the muting effect of tradition and myth, only by it do they seek to be accepted and held responsible”.²⁷ At stake in this beginning of history there is the difference between the ‘perspective of the day’ – which by covering up in contemporary societies mortality and finitude in function of mere life on

²³ Patočka: *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, *op. cit.*, pp. 39–40.

²⁴ Sepp, Hans Rainer: *Über die Grenze*, Verlag Traugott Bautz, Nordhausen 2014, p. 172. My own translation.

²⁵ Husserl: *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie...*, *op. cit.*, p. 332. My own translation. See also Husserl: *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie. Ergänzungsband. Texte aus dem Nachlass (1934–1937)*, Kluwer, Dordrecht 1993, pp. 386–389.

²⁶ Patočka: *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

a societal level loses sight of the depth of individual human life as such – and what Patočka calls the ‘night’ as a radical limit and difference in opposition to the ‘day’. Also, the community which can emerge on the basis of this event of shaking – and according to Patočka was founded with the beginning of European history, constituting its peculiar tradition and also the authentic form of community and of the political – is a community based on difference, which Patočka thinks recurring to the term *polemos*. “Life need be understood not from the point of view of the *day*, of life merely accepted, but also from the view of strife, of the night, of *polemos*.”²⁸ “*Polemos*, the flash of being out of the night of the world, lets everything particular be and manifest itself as what it is. Thus, the greatest contradiction cleaves together in a unity which is above all, which manifests itself in all and governs all.”²⁹ Patočka doesn’t think *polemos* as “destructive passion”, but rather, and on the contrary, as “unity of the shaken”³⁰, a unity which integrates radical difference and the transcendence of the point of view of the day and of mere life.³¹ In the ‘breakthrough’ which in the experience of the shaking can lead beyond the point of view of the day, the limited rationality of the day is transcended and transformed into a new, different rationality – a rationality that knows how to deal with the night, with finitude.

4. Final Remarks on the Parallels and Differences between Husserl’s and Patočka’s Position

Patočka’s account of the movement of transcending ‘bare’ life in connection with the political dimension shows several and important parallels to Husserl’s understanding of the same fundamental movement, as the comparison of their positions carried out so far has shown.

The first parallel can be recognized in the fact that both Husserl and Patočka point at the possibility of a transcendence of ‘bare’ life in its everyday interests, which are proper to the ‘natural world’; Husserl conceives the ‘natural world’ as the world of the natural attitude and the pre-theoretical world in its finite interests, Patočka as the ‘pre-historical’ world before the emergence of its problematicity, a world in which human existence is focused on the first two movements of acceptance and self-prolongation of life.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 134–135.

Another parallel can be seen in the connection between this movement of transcendence and the political dimension. This connection is very explicitly present in Patočka's *Heretical Essays* – where both philosophy and the political are thought to originate from the movement of truth and its surpassing of life in bare acceptance and self-prolongation –, but it can be recognized also in Husserl's thought: according to Husserl, with the *Urstiftung* of *theoria*, European humanity discovers idealities and the pursue of infinite tasks beyond the one of finite everyday interests, and this event shapes European culture in its historical, intersubjective, and political dimension. Both Husserl and Patočka point at the presence within European culture of a tradition which had its foundational moment in the Greek beginning, through the emergence of a movement of transcendence of the everyday interests; Husserl understands this tradition as the opening of a historical teleology of reason, while Patočka addresses it in his philosophical reflections on history and politics as the tradition of the 'care for the soul'.³²

A further parallel between both authors can be recognized in the fact that they both thematize the possibility of an inadequacy with respect to the foundational moment and the movement of transcendence – an inadequacy which Patočka addresses as decadence³³ and Husserl as a return, also on a cultural or national level, to an exclusive orientation towards finite tasks, which characterizes 'realpolitik' in its falling short of rational intersubjective teleology.

The aspect in which Husserl's and Patočka's positions differ from each other most clearly is the question of finitude. Patočka puts in fact a strong accent on the finite corporeal character of human existence and on the link between its mortality and its unfree state of mere self-prolongation. Both for Husserl and Patočka, the Greek foundational moment, as well as its possible historical renewal encompass a discontinuity and, to some extent, a transformation. Husserl conceives such discontinuity as the surpassing of finite interests towards infinite tasks in the foundation of *theoria*, which ultimately leads towards transcendental phenomenology and its teleological movement of constitution – a theoretical framework which Patočka leaves behind in search of his own phenomenological path. Furthermore, Husserl's conception of the political appears to be ultimately grounded in intersubjective teleology at a transcendental level. When the political dimension doesn't fall short of its rational teleology, individual life integrates itself into 'life' as a transcendental, intersubjective dimension.

³² Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 82–83 and 103–105.

³³ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 95–97 and 102–103.

Meanwhile, in his turn towards finitude and through his emphasis on the corporeal and mortal character of human existence, Patočka develops an account of the authentic political dimension which, on the one hand, still shows a parallel to the Husserlian conception because it also recognizes the possibility not only of transcending the finite, everyday interests of life in their unfree state, but also the potential for a discontinuity and transformation in respect to it. On the other hand, however, Patočka thinks of this movement of transcending – which remains just a *possibility* of human existence – not anymore in connection to a transcendental teleology and an infinitude rooted in its rationality, but in connection to corporeity and to the facing of finitude, mortality, and strife, as well as to the shaking from which a solidarity of the shaken can arise.³⁴ Patočka's understanding of the authentic political dimension points at a transcending of the point of view of 'the day' and its rationality, as well as at a more radical account of the encounter with alterity.

Lastly, building on the thematization of the political and the movement of transcending, it is possible to develop another comparison between Patočka and Husserl – to which, however, only a very brief reference can be made in the context of the present article.

Husserl's account of the *Urstiftung* of *theoria* as the foundational moment of European cultural history as well as Patočka's reflections on the beginning of philosophy, politics, and history in the Greek *polis* seem to put an accent on the exceptional character of European culture and history in respect to other cultures, and in this way, they could seem at a first glance to assign a privileged position to European culture over other cultures, taking a somewhat eurocentric stance. While such perception of a certain degree of eurocentrism in both Husserl and Patočka – especially with reference to *The Crisis of European Humanity and Philosophy* and the *Heretical Essays* – could appear to be not completely baseless, it is important to stress the fact that both authors, rather than affirming a privileged character of Europe among human cultures, simply set a focus on understanding the specificity of European culture and its historical beginnings. This can be said of Husserl, for whom not Europe as a factual humanity or a factual place of origin of *theoria* receives a central role, but rather the rational transcendental teleology itself which reaches beyond factual Europe and encompasses all humanity; it could nonetheless be observed, from a critical point of view, that Husserl still seems to assume a somewhat privileged role, extensible to the rest of humanity, for the kind of rationality and universality that originated in European culture.

³⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 134–135.

Patočka, on the other hand, seems to put different accents in different texts, so that he often points to the depths of myth and of extra-European cultures as being capable of a transcending movement, a movement of which the modern European technological civilization has become forgetful.³⁵ Nevertheless, on the other hand, he also seems – particularly in the *Heretical Essays* – to consider the world of myth as only capable of a defective and incomplete transcending movement of truth in comparison to the one which he addresses as the actual beginning of history, philosophy, and politics. However, Patočka provides an account of the original and renewable, transcending movement in a stronger connection to a shaking and to alterity – a connection that, as mentioned above and shown by Hans Rainer Sepp³⁶, can be recognized also with reference to Husserl, but emerges in Patočka's thought in a stronger way as an original character of the transcending movement. From this perspective, whereas Husserl focuses on the search for universality and universal truth which originated in this shock, Patočka lets the very event of shaking, crisis, and transformation – beyond the European search for universality and a rationality oriented towards the 'point of view of the day' – emerge in a more radical way. In this sense, Patočka's thought appears to offer potentially more viable paths towards intercultural reflection.

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³⁵ See for example Patočka: *Liberté et sacrifice...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 181–213.

³⁶ Cf. Sepp: *Über die Grenze*, *op. cit.*, pp. 171–174.