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Patočka's Socrates and His Socratic Politics

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This paper gives an account of Jan Patočka's reception of the figure of Socrates. Patočka sees as Socrates' most important insight his knowledge of ignorance – the fact that we lack *knowledge* of the most important things in life, but we merely have *opinions* of them. Socrates then questions and examines such opinions, his own as well as those of others, and this practice of questioning thinking is what Patočka calls *care for the soul*, and which he understands as the general form of all genuine philosophic questioning. The mature Patočka understood the entirety of Plato's thought as rooted in his account of the self-moving soul, and this account as arising from reflection on Socratic questioning. Finally, I argue that Patočka's decision to actively engage with the Charter 77 movement was explicitly motivated by the example of Socrates.

Keywords: Jan Patočka – Socrates – Plato – the soul – care for the soul – political philosophy

Introduction

The subject of this paper is Jan Patočka's reception of the figure of Socrates, who was for him *the* model of the philosophic life understood as life in truth, and thereby of human excellence as such (cf. *CW* 2, 311 / Patočka 2002, 177).[1] To my knowledge, this hasn't yet been thematically done in the literature – although there already are several studies on Patočka's interpretation of Plato (Karfík 2008, ch. 6; Karfík 2021; Hopkins 2011). And, of course, given that the conception of "care for the soul" is Socrates' central philosophical achievement for Patočka, this subject has been discussed by multiple scholars (e.g., Chvatík

[1] Patočka's texts are referenced first to the Czech original, then to the English translation (if available). I use the abbreviation *CW* for Patočka's *Collected Works*.

2011; Cajthaml 2014, chs. 2 – 3; Ritter 2019, ch. 11; or Dodd 2023, ch. 4). In this paper I shall first discuss in detail care for the soul as it arises from Socrates' public activity, as it is depicted in the Platonic dialogues and discussed by Patočka. Then I shall outline how Patočka understood the Socratic care for the soul as a kind of existential movement, thereby bridging this conception with his understanding of the soul as self-motion, which is according to Patočka the central Platonic doctrine (*CW* 2, 64 – 65 / Patočka 2022, 80). Finally, I shall briefly discuss how Patočka understood his own political engagement with Charter 77 on the model of Socrates' public activity.

Socrates himself, of course, never wrote anything; the historical Socrates is therefore inaccessible to us, and what we know about him is derived from the depictions of his contemporaries Aristophanes, Plato, and Xenophon (plus a few other minor testimonies, such as the account of him in Book II of Diogenes Laertius). When Patočka speaks about Socrates, he means above all *Plato's* Socrates – he considers Xenophon to be an inferior thinker (*CW* 1, 146), and he barely mentions the Aristophanic critique or ridicule of Socrates. In contrast, he finds in Plato both the depiction of Socrates' public philosophizing and the account of the nature of the human soul that explains the significance and importance of this activity – both of which were deeply influential on Patočka's own understanding of philosophy.

The ancient tradition considered Socrates to be the founder of philosophical reflection on the human things, i.e., on ethics and politics: as Cicero put it, "Socrates was the first who brought down philosophy from the heavens, placed it in cities, introduced it into families, and obliged it to examine into life and morals, and good and evil" (*Tusculan Disputations* V.10). In other words, pre-Socratic philosophy was fundamentally apolitical. To the extent it reflected on politics at all, it conceived of it as something that belongs to the domain of νόμος in contradistinction to φύσις – as something merely conventional and unworthy of serious attention (cf. Strauss 1953, 90 – 94).

According to Patočka, Socrates changed this by inventing the question after the Good. Therewith he established a genuine foundation for our understanding of the human things – of the questions after good and bad and after the best way of life (πῶς βιωτέον). He (or at any rate Plato) projected a method that starts from the evident, from the phenomena of our experience, and on their basis systematically progresses toward the non-apparent but genuine ground of these phenomena, using solely the powers of human reasoning and insight. Crucially, the most evident phenomenon among the human things is that despite the central importance of these questions for our

lives, we *do not know* how to adequately answer them, we do not *know* what is "the just and the unjust, the noble and the shameful, the good and the bad" (*Euthyphro* 7d; *Theaetetus* 172a; *Phaedrus* 263a; *Statesman* 295e, 309c). We don't have knowledge about these things, but only differing *opinions*, and consequently we come into conflict with each other. This is apparent in the fact that these questions admit of many possible answers, none of which is obviously superior to all others: different human communities, even well-ordered ones, widely differ in their laws, the ways of life founded by these laws, and the justifications of these laws. Socrates' great insight was, of course, was precisely this – the awareness of our ignorance regarding the most important things in our lives (*Apology* 21d).

I. Knowledge of Ignorance and Care for the Soul

Socrates recounts this result of his questioning of his fellow citizens in the *Apology* (20c–23b), and Plato depicts this universal human ignorance about the most important things in the aporetic dialogues. The diviner Euthyphro *doesn't know* what piety is; the generals Laches and Nicias *do not know* what courage is; in the *Ion*, the poets *do not know* the things they write about; and in the *Greater Hippias*, the sophist Hippias for all his 'wisdom' *doesn't know* what the beautiful is. The central consequence Plato's Socrates drew from this knowledge of universal human ignorance (including *his own* ignorance) was to develop a new way of life that stands on this foundation – his care for the soul. Patočka first developed his understanding of this term in ch. 3 of *Eternity and Historicity* from the 1940s (*CW* 1, 141 – 147), and it remained decisive in his thought ever since; thus I will not differentiate between this text and Patočka's later writings on Plato.[2]

The question after the Good takes its bearings from universal human experience. Whatever we do, we do for a purpose, i.e., for the sake of some good. And although we may fake the possession of various goods as far as other people are concerned (the challenge of Glaucon and Adeimantus in Book II of the *Republic* is precisely that Socrates should show them what good does justice do in the soul by itself, disregarding the goods that can be gained from *appearing* just to others), when it comes to the good that we seek for ourselves, we only want what is *genuinely* good (cf. *Republic* 505d); in this sense, the good

[2] In *Eternity and Historicity*, Patočka attempted to disentangle Plato's depiction of Socrates from a putative "Socratic Socrates" (*CW* 1, 141 – 147). Later on, however, he came to consider such an attempt as futile, and, moreover, he ceased to see Plato as a metaphysician. Thus, the later Patočka would speak about "the line Socrates – Plato" (*CW* 3, 737) rather than of any significant break between them.

is "unfalsifiable" (*CW* 3, 739). In *Eternity and Historicity*, Patočka interprets the question after the Good as follows (*CW* 1, 144):

> Socrates' question: "what is the Good?" means: what is the sole, universal, fundamental goal of human life?…what goal do we have in life that wouldn't itself be a means to another goal? Where is the unity to which the entirety of life can be fully and without exception subordinated?

It is a question after such a goal of human striving, of life as a whole, that would not be relative to any situation or particular circumstances and that would not be just a means to another goal. This Socratic questioning does not aim at positing of any transcendent "Good in itself," of any hitherto unheard-of object (be it a god or an Idea) that would be the source of meaning for the relative, partial goods with which we deal in our daily life: it is rather a way of questioning precisely these relative, everyday goods. These ordinary goods, such as wealth, health, or social status, namely raise an implicit claim to be the Good itself, to be something we should value above everything else and orient our lives around; and "we can take [the relative good] up in this claim, fixate it, and show it cannot fulfill its promise [to be the Good]" (*CW* 1, 145). The question after the Good thus takes up the basic *fact* that all our actions are aimed at some good, at something meaningful to us ("good" is a formal expression for any human goal whatsoever – *CW* 2, 255 / Patočka 2002, 120), together with the (often contradictory) *multiplicity* of the goods at which we may aim, and seeks a *unity* in which all these various goods would be comprehended, a position from which the structure of this most fundamental human striving would become clear to us.

The first step in the attempt to find the Good is to admit that we do not know what it is: it is the knowledge of our ignorance. It is the realization that we have to *search* for the Good, that the Good is a *question*, that no claim of any given good to be the Good can be simply accepted. Be it some form of pleasure, the way of life to which we have been raised by a tradition, or a passion that takes hold of us – none of these "relative goods," which "raise the claim to be the Good of human life as such" (*CW* 1, 145), can be accepted as the Good without first properly investigating them. Here is also the root of the conflict of philosophy with the naïve political life: the naïve life always sets up some good as authoritative, as the Good, and philosophy consists precisely in questioning all such claims and showing their inadequacy.

Having recognized the multiplicity and the contradictory character of the various goods, the philosopher strives to be in unity with oneself, to think in a

way that doesn't contradict itself and to live according to one's thinking. Socrates emphasizes this in the *Gorgias* when he tells Callicles that unless he manages to refute his thesis that it is worse to commit injustice than to suffer it, he will be "dissonant with [himself] all [his] life long" (482b); and he adds that as far as he is concerned, "I think it's better to have my lyre or a chorus that I might lead out of tune and dissonant, and have the vast majority of men disagree with me and contradict me, than to be out of harmony with myself, to contradict myself, being one [ἕνα ὄντα]" (482b–c). This striving for unity with oneself takes place by "*questioning thinking*" (*CW* 2, 229 / Patočka 2002, 91), by the willingness to examine every single one of our views and opinions, everything we stands for.[3] The goal is to attain a unity of all our views, to make them fully coherent with each other: for "only this kind of absolutely coherent speech then may mean the existence, the creation of the internally unified soul, which, because its thoughts are *binding*, is not split apart, torn into various mutually contradictory opinions" (*CW* 2, 229 – 230 / Patočka 2002, 92). This striving for unity with oneself, for the perfectly coherent *logos*, is what Patočka calls *responsibility*: it is "the will to have everything I mean or think responsibly, that means so that I can be responsible for everything, for each thought, for each of its steps. Responsibility for everything I do, not just externally, but also in thought, responsibility for what I am – that is what philosophy teaches us" (*CW* 14/4, 146). "Responsibility" is then another name for the fundamental Socratic principle of *logon didonai*, of being able to give an account of one's actions and especially thoughts (e.g., *Theaetetus* 175c, 183d, or *Gorgias* 501a).

Such a goal is, of course, unattainable for mortal and embodied beings such as we are: knowledge of ignorance means also the awareness that despite our best efforts, our views may not really be as solid and coherent as they appear to us. This unattainability of the perfectly coherent *logos* also corresponds to the fact that Socrates offers no positive answer to the question after the Good, that his ignorance is not a stage to be overcome and replaced by some alleged knowledge. It thus requires the willingness to always be ready to question and problematize our opinions again. The only certainty we have in this striving is that we always have to persist in it. And that is precisely why "*the examination itself* creates a particular unity, namely the attitude of constant examining and searching, of examining searching" (*CW* 2, 230 / Patočka 2002, 92). This attitude of examining searching, originating in Socrates-Plato, this "examined life" (cf.

[3] Emphases here and in all other quotations are original unless indicated otherwise.

Apology 38a), is the very core of the philosophic life *as such*: it is "the philosophical ideal that *does not depend* on a particular philosophical opinion, on any philosophical thesis and thought, on any system" (*CW* 2, 230 / Patočka 2002, 93). And it is this fundamental philosophic attitude of striving to be in unity with oneself by the means of questioning thinking, this self-formation and ordering of the philosopher's soul, that Patočka calls *care for the soul*.

Patočka emphasizes that care for the soul is a single unified thought, a single essential word that describes the practice of the philosophic life, whose various moments or expressions cannot be understood in separation from each other. He understands the famous Socratic intellectualist theses – that nobody does bad things willingly (*Apology* 25d–6a), that suffering injustice is better than committing it (*Gorgias* 469c), or that virtue is knowledge (*Phaedo* 69a–c) – as such expressions of care for the soul (Patočka 1990, 143). Let us take the last of these as an example. The cardinal virtues – wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice – were in the pre-philosophic understanding four disparate qualities related to different domains of life. This appears most clearly in characters like Protagoras or Callicles, who believe it is possible to possess some virtues (especially courage) while lacking others (*Protagoras* 349d; *Gorgias* 491e–2c). In sharp contrast, the soul that has taken up the attitude of caring for itself by examining itself has in the process also experienced "that it is *courageous* because it exposes itself to problematization, that it is *wise* in the knowledge of its ignorance as examination, that it is temperate and *moderate* because it subordinates all other matters of life to this intellectual struggle, and it is *just* by doing what is proper to it,[4] what is binding to it, by doing nothing but what we moderns would call its duty" (*CW* 2, 128; *CW* 2, 231 / Patočka 2002, 93; *CW* 2, 372). The cardinal virtues thus become inseparable moments of the activity of caring for one's soul founded in the knowledge of ignorance: and it is *this* knowledge that is fundamentally identical with genuine virtue (Patočka 1990, 115, 126). And the opposite of this, life in ignorance (more specifically, in ἀμαθία, in the illusion that one knows when one in fact doesn't know – cf. *Sophist* 229c, *Timaeus* 88b, and Klein 1989, 200), is vice or κακία in the Socratic sense.

Care for the soul, the philosophic life, thus forms a single overarching perspective on the whole of human life and all its moments that completely

[4] A reference to the definition of justice as τὰ αὑτοῦ πράττειν, "doing one's work" or "doing what is proper to oneself," from the *Republic* (433b). Socrates also characterizes the philosopher's life with this phrase in the *Gorgias* (526c) and describes himself as τὰ ἐμαυτοῦ πράττοντος in the *Apology* (33a).

transforms the pre-philosophical understanding. There is then a profound disconnection between the philosopher and the non-philosophers with whom he talks, and *irony* is an expression of this disconnection. Irony is a result of "Socrates' transcendence": he uses the same words as his interlocutors, but their meanings are completely transformed. Patočka explains that "Socrates' irony is given simply by the fact that the whole of human life has become a question for him – that he ceaselessly and necessarily sees it in a twofold perspective" (Patočka 1990, 123). Socrates doesn't emphasize his different perspective – he rather pretends to speak on the level of ordinary, naïve life; he "says less than he is," as Aristotle defined irony (*Nicomachean Ethics* IV.7). Yet what Socrates means isn't comprehensible from this naïve perspective: he perplexes his interlocutors and leads them to *wonder* about the true meaning of his speeches.[5] Related to irony is Socrates' elenctic, his refuting questioning, which is the first step of Socrates' conversations with others. Its goal is to bring the questioned person to *aporia*, to make them realize the incoherence of the views they had hitherto unreflectively accepted; it poses to them the question after the Good, shows them the problematicity inherent in it, and so teaches them to pose it by and for themselves, to start the activity of caring for his own soul. Elenctic is a part of protreptic, and, as with irony, its purpose is fundamentally educative (Patočka 1990, 114).[6]

These rhetorical means utilized by Socrates show that care for the soul isn't just a private matter of the philosopher. It takes place as the examining of opinions – one's own or another's – in conversation. Thus it extends also to the political domain, as a striving to improve one's fellow citizens in the same way one improves oneself, i.e., as inducing them to live responsibly and virtuously, and Socrates claims to be the only one in his day to practice this "true politics" (*Gorgias* 521d–e). He practices it by nothing else than questioning his fellow citizens about virtue, by inducing them to care for their souls as he cares for his own: as he puts it, by telling them (*Apology* 29d–e):

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[5] Wonder (θαῦμα) is, of course, the beginning of philosophy for both Plato (*Theaetetus* 155d) and Aristotle (*Metaphysics* 982b12ff.).

[6] Patočka brings Socrates' elenctic into an interesting connection with the "art of lying" from *Hippias Minor* (366e–7a), whose greatest master is precisely the person who knows the truth. Socrates "deceives" his interlocutors by denying the partial truth of their answers to his "what is" questions; but his purpose in doing so is to show them the fundamental self-deception in which they already live, namely their false belief to *know* what the Good is (Patočka 1991, 129).

> Good sir, you are an Athenian, a citizen of the greatest city with the greatest reputation for both wisdom and power; 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?

Socrates' "true politics," his public activity, is then the outward expression of his care for his soul, or an extension thereof to his fellow citizens.[7]

With Socrates and his care for the soul, *the philosophic life* appears in a definite form for the first time in history, or at least in a much sharper and clearer form than it had with Democritus. It is *the* philosophic life, or the universal form of philosophic life, regardless of what doctrines a given philosopher may hold. The philosophic life is thus the same thing as *the responsible life* and as *care for the soul*: "precisely this is the meaning of the Socratic method of questions and answers: responsibility. It means caring for oneself, caring for one's innermost essence, it means caring for the soul" (*CW* 14/4, 156). Or, given that the human situation is fundamentally one of ignorance, the best we can do is ceaselessly strive to overcome it; to use a sentence from *Eternity and Historicity*, "philosophy as care for the soul is Socrates' answer to Socrates' question" (*CW* 1, 146). This account of care for the soul is for Patočka paradigmatic of what philosophy as a practice, as a way of life, is, and it is as actual for Patočka himself as it was for Socrates and Plato.[8]

II. The Soul as Self-Motion

In the 1977 essay *The Origin and Meaning of the Thought of Immortality in Plato*, Patočka shows how this Socratic practice leads to the Platonic ontology of human existence. He notes that care for the soul as ἐξέτασις, i.e., as the dialogical examination of opinions, effects a change in the soul of the persons involved. Therefore, it is a movement in the ancient sense, developed most clearly by Aristotle in the *Physics* III.1 (*CW* 2, 372 – 373 / Patočka 1977, 104 – 105). This movement takes different forms in different people. For Socrates himself, it increases the unity and self-coherence of his soul. For many of his interlocutors, however, the revelation of their ignorance makes them ashamed

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[7] This political moment of Socratic care for the soul is notably present also in Plato's political thought, as e.g., Gadamer argued in his essay *Platos Staat der Erziehung* (Gadamer 1985, 249 – 262).

[8] I thus object to Derrida's historicist reading of the *Heretical Essays* (1995, ch. 1), according to which the Platonic care for the soul is a matter of the dead past, and the future belongs to Christian or post-Christian forms thereof (if to *any* at all, that is).

and consequently angry at Socrates for dismantling their most dearly held opinions. These fall ever deeper into their ignorance (and thereby into vice, *κακία*, in the sense discussed above), and turn into Socrates' enemies and accusers. Finally, in those who observe these Socratic dialogical examinations, the desire may arise to imitate Socrates and his practice of caring for his soul.

In all these regards, the essential thing for Patočka is that "the state of the soul is dependent on its movement," that is, that the soul makes itself into what it is by its own activity (*CW* 2, 374 / Patočka 1977, 105). In his late interpretations of Plato, he places great emphasis on this self-making nature of the soul, on the fact that it is an *existence* (*CW* 2, 77 / Patočka 2022, 89; *CW* 2, 379 / Patočka 1977, 112).[9] He understands the Platonic definition of the soul as "self-motion" (τὸ αὐτοκίνητον; cf. *Phaedrus* 245c–e; *Laws* 896a; *Timaeus* 37a–b) in precisely this sense, and he goes so far as to say that "it is from this center alone that Plato's most important doctrines can be understood" – doctrines ranging from the Ideas through his ethical and pedagogical thought up to his myths (*CW* 2, 64 – 65 / Patočka 2022, 80). Moreover, Patočka understands Plato's doctrine of the soul as genuinely scientific and systematic: it "doesn't arise as a mere moral practice, but rather as a philosophical consideration of what makes any such practice possible" (*CW* 2, 51). That is to say, it is a reflection on the structure of the soul as such and therewith on the conditions of possibility of *any* moral practice, any kind of human moral-spiritual self-formation.

This interpretation of the Platonic soul as self-motion was prepared by Patočka's work on the Aristotelian concept of κίνησις in his 1964 *Aristotle* book, as well as by his own doctrine of the "three movements of human existence," which he explicitly presents as a radicalization of the Aristotelian *kinesis* combined with the Heideggerian threefold ecstatic temporality of existence.[10] Plato is thereby positioned as both originator and the peak of this way of understanding human existence out of itself and its own activity. Most

[9] These interpretations can be found in *Plato and Europe* and *Europe and the Post-European Age* (*CW* 2, 80 – 148), as well as in the essays *The Origins of Systematic Psychology* (*CW* 2, 45 – 57), *On the Soul in Plato* (*CW* 2,58 – 79/ Patočka 2022, 75 – 92), *The Origin and Meaning of the Thought of Immortality in Plato* (*CW* 2, 370 – 382/ Patočka 1977), and *The Oldest Systematic Doctrine of the Soul* (*CW* 3, 735 – 748).

[10] On the "three movements" cf. *CW* 7, 319 – 334 / Patočka 2016, 165 – 180, and *CW* 7, 202 – 237 / Patočka 2022, 107 – 138. On their being a fusion of Aristotelian κίνησις with Heideggerian temporality, cf. *CW* 7, 314 – 319 / Patočka 2016, 160 – 165. For extensive discussions of this conception, cf. Mensch (2016, ch. 6) or Dodd (2023, ch. 3).

interesting in this regard is that the essay *On the Soul in Plato* ends with the following highly significant statement (*CW* 2, 79 / Patočka 2022, 92):

> But one of the greatest teachings of Plato's doctrine of the ψυχή: the soul *originally doesn't know itself, precisely because it is* in motion, because it doesn't observe itself like an audience observes a stage; it has rather always already decided about itself, and consequently about what it can see, know, understand *of things as well as of itself*; the ψυχή sees itself according to how it *is*, and not the other way round, that it would *be* the way it sees itself. What we see and know depends on our being, and being doesn't depend on our knowledge – that is the doctrine of the ψυχή of this 'idealist'. But, unlike the parallel modern ideas that first conceive a certain biased idea of being, to which they then – in a vicious circle! – subordinate the being of human beings, Plato starts from *the being of the human being* in its basic κρίσις and problematicity which is essentially *moral*, i.e., such that it concerns our being and non-being in *partial* dependence on us, on our decision, on our *ἑαυτὸ*-κίνησις. Plato doesn't start from *cogito sum*, from *certainty*, but rather from the original confusion and uncertainty of existence, from its *movement*, whose meaning is clarified only in its being carried out and by itself, that is, never independently and definitively…
>
> One could say with a modern thinker that the ψυχή shows itself to itself, that it gets to know itself according to whether and how *being* uncovers itself to it; but we also have to emphasize that *αὐτὸ*-κίνησις, we have to emphasize that being doesn't uncover itself independently and arbitrarily, with that metaphysical gamble which the late Heidegger propounds, but rather in accordance with how the ψυχή *is* – *responsible* or *irresponsible* – i.e., in accordance with a decision that is *not* arbitrary. The moral side, responsibility, doesn't uncover the *other* world, as in Kant, but rather *this* world.

Patočka is saying here that the Platonic conception of the self-moving soul is in several decisive respects superior to the modern doctrines of Descartes, Kant, and Heidegger. However, a thematic comparison of the Platonic self-moving soul and these modern conceptions of human existence is beyond the scope of this paper.

III. Patočka's Socratic Politics

The figure of Socrates has also decisively influenced Patočka's reflections on political action on behalf of philosophy. In the 1975 private lecture *The Spiritual Person and the Intellectual*, whose main point is to distinguish genuinely spiritual people (i.e., those who are willing to expose themselves to the problematicity of all given meaning) from the intellectuals understood as a

merely sociological category, Patočka explicitly returns to Plato. He says that Plato recognized three political possibilities: the Socratic one, a direct involvement in politics – "but that means coming *into conflict* and going to one's death"; the Platonic one, "internal emigration," i.e., indirect, educative political action; "and the third possibility is to become a sophist. There is no other possibility" (*CW* 3, 362 / Patočka 2022, 301). At the end of the lecture he reiterates the fundamentality of these options: "the situation as Plato presents it, those three possibilities, those have always been here, since history has started" (*CW* 3, 371). That is to say, since history for Patočka begins with the simultaneous emergence of philosophy and politics in Archaic Greece (*CW* 3, 49 – 51 / Patočka 1996, 37 – 41), these possibilities are coeval with philosophy.

Here I will just briefly mention that for the late Patočka, the crisis of modernity is decisively caused by the forgetting of care for the soul, or by it being replaced by "something we could call care for *world domination*" (*CW* 2, 228 / Patočka 2002, 89),[11] or by the rise of the purely instrumental "superficial modern rationalism, estranged from any personal and moral vocation" (*CW* 3, 110/ Patočka 1996, 111) that lacks reflection on the goals of our actions and is ready to serve any and every purpose. And the solution Patočka proposes to this crisis is "to *repeat* care for the soul in new circumstances," "*to say that which is, again, over and over, and always in a different way, but it always has to be the same thing!*" (*CW* 2, 228 – 229 / Patočka 2002, 90), which is to say: *a return to Plato, to Plato's Socrates, and to their care for the soul*.

It is fitting to finish this paper by discussing Patočka's engagement with the Charter 77 movement, his only overt political action other than writing (for *scribere est agere*). I have already discussed this subject at length (Majerník 2017), so I'll just restate the main points here. In 1975, the Czechoslovak government signed the Helsinki accords which committed it to upholding the human rights of its citizens. In practice, however, nothing has changed about the repressive nature of the Czechoslovak regime, and this prompted a group of dissidents to form an organization called Charter 77. In its *Manifesto*, published on 1 January 1977 (as *samizdat*, of course), they claimed to want no changes to Czechoslovak government or laws – merely that the government actually observe the rights of its citizens to which it committed itself in the Helsinki accords. This was a

[11] Czech: "péče o *zmocnění se světa*." The primary meaning here is mastery over innerworldly entities in the sense of modern techno-science; but such mastery has no inherent limits, and "world domination" as power over the totality of innerworldly entities, including other human beings, is indeed the ultimate consequence of this "care."

public action fully in line with Patočka's conception of oppositional intelligentsia – the concept of human rights showed itself as a viable form of resistance against ruthless instrumental manipulation of humanity in his time and place[12] – and he agreed to become one of its first three spokesmen. In this capacity, he wrote seven texts[13] and managed to hold an unauthorized meeting with the visiting Dutch foreign minister Max van der Stoel on 1 March 1977, thereby causing a diplomatic scandal. This act cost him his life: he died on 13 March 1977 as a consequence of prolonged interrogations by the secret police.[14]

I argued in Majerník (2017) that the main philosophic motive of Patočka's engagement with Charter 77 was an effort to awaken his audience – this time explicitly including the general public – to assume responsibility for their lives and for the society they live in, and to reject passive obedience to the regime for the sake of mere life and creature comforts. The decisive difference from his earlier writings lies in the fact that Patočka decided to abandon the "Platonic" position of "internal emigration" and to embrace the "Socratic" position of open conflict with political authority and so (at least potentially) "going to one's death" (*CW* 3, 362 / Patočka 2022, 301) – or, in other words, to practice Socrates' "true politics" from the *Gorgias*. Socrates thus shows himself as Patočka's great model not just when it came to the conduct of his life, but also when he came face to face with death. To my knowledge, Patočka doesn't discuss this change in his views anywhere. But, if we take bearing from our Socratic guideline, perhaps he came to the same conclusion as Xenophon's Socrates – who, likewise at the age of 69 and facing impending mental and physical decline, concluded that "for him death was [now] more to be desired than life" (*Apology* 1). In such a situation, risking one's life means rather little; but, on the other hand, dying in an act of political resistance would be a noble and inspiring act that would endow his thought with an aura of utmost seriousness to the point of death itself. This is not to deny the immense courage

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[12] However, Mensch (2016, ch. 7) attempted to work out an ontological grounding of human rights on the basis of Patočka's phenomenology.

[13] These can be found in *CW* 12, 425 – 448. English translations of two of them are in Kohák (1989, 340 – 347), and another is available as Patočka (2017).

[14] Patočka's death has been compared with deaths of the "God-men" Socrates and Jesus (cf. *CW* 7, 333 / Patočka 2016, 179). Here it should be emphasized that Patočka characterizes the "God-man" as a *myth* (*CW* 7, 333), and myth is the truth of pre-philosophic (and hence *sub*-philosophic) life (*CW* 2, 188 / Patočka 2002, 43). Even more importantly, the myth of the God-man is for Patočka "the greatest *Platonic* myth" (*CW*, 262 / Patočka 2002, 128; emphasis added), and the Christian version is hence derivative of it.

and mental fortitude Patočka had to exhibit in order to become such a prominent oppositional figure; nor does Xenophon intend to belittle Socrates by the account of his reasoning in the face of death. Be this as it may, by his engagement with Charter 77, Patočka's deeds matched his words, his *ergon* matched his *logos*, and he showed his audience what he expects of them by his own example. He showed "that there are ideas for which it is worthwhile to live and to suffer," as Ludwig Landgrebe quotes him in his obituary (1977, 287) – and even to die for.

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