

Individuation and Movements of Existence in Jan Patočka Horizon of Education

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Abstract

Jan Patočka addresses the concept of individuation in relation to the three movements of existence. This article argues that education functions as a process of individuation, requiring educators to engage with the third movement of existence in order to summon learners' potential in their search for truth, autonomy and responsibility. The article is structured into three sections: *Education in Patočka*, *Individuation and the movements of existence*, and *Pedagogical implications* of the third movement, characterized by the open soul, as the horizon of education.

Keywords

individuation; movement; care for the soul; existence; education (Bildung); educator; authenticity; inauthenticity

Introduction: Education in Patočka

For Patočka, education is a cultural process situated within a natural framework where maturation and learning converge, grounded in experience and habit.¹ This process encompasses both biological determinations and social purposes within an intentional structure that engages with the question of life's meaning, as a way of life that holds value for both the educator and society as a whole.

Describing the nature and essence of education, along with its subsidiary, pedagogy, is fundamentally a philosophical task. This essence "(...) arises precisely where the process of education ceases to be unconscious, entirely natural, and where it becomes a problem" (Patočka 1939, 378). Patočka identifies key invariants: the presence of adults (more educated) and younger individuals (uneducated or less educated) in an intergenerational relationship of co-ownership.

The *pedagogical situation* unfolds within an agonal field of struggle and tension, where the educator's guidance contrasts with the pupil's natural abilities, passive dimensions, and

¹ This article is part of the research internship on a phenomenological psychology of individuation, carried out at the Jan Patočka Archive of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic (October – December 2023), with the support of the University of Antioquia. I express my gratitude to the hosts Prof. Dr. Vera Schifferová and Dr. Jan Frei.

resistance. The outcome of this process – and to a large extent, this challenge – is the expression of individuality, “where the newness that every person somehow brings with them is manifested. It is a life not marked by merely passive repetition of the content from previous generations, but rather one where these contents are revived in a new way, with a truly living vitality, even if this entails negating the achievements of predecessors” (Patočka 1939, 411).

The educator is required to possess a high level of emotional disposition towards what imbues life with meaning, striving to preserve this not only for themselves or for the individual pupil in front of them, but also for society. The educator serves as a guardian: “(...) lives with the concern and feeling that humanity, in its highest achievements, may be threatened, and that it is necessary to defend it in some way” (Patočka 1939, 423). This role is founded on a threefold expression of “love” and “enthusiasm”: for humanity (the universal), for the community (the particular context), and for the individual learner, including their uniqueness (Patočka 1939, 423).

Thus, the process of individuation, under certain conditions, can lead to a transformation in the learner, potentially surpassing the teacher as the learner discovers his or her own path (Patočka 1939, 411). Through his or her individuality and critical stance, the learner understands and incorporates the highest values (Patočka 1939, 424). This process is not solely cognitive; it also involves an engagement with the movements of existence.

Individuation and movements of existence

In Patočka’s work, the concept of *movement* refers to the dynamics of being and its becoming: a process that begins in the *real*, associated with the natural, and not only on a perceptual level dependent on a subject. It involves an “‘indirect objectivation’ of which movement is the decisive occurrence” (Patočka 2015, 72).² There exists a prior totality, characterized by a non-individuated phase that refers to the *real*, as it has not yet been shaped within an organized world. This phase is *potential*, in a state of becoming and possibility: “individuation (...) means movements in a world which is not a mere sum of individuals, a world that has a nonindividual aspect, which is prior to the individual” (Patočka 1998, 178) and is, at the same time, that “which rules in all particulars” (Patočka 1998, 169). Thus, the world is more than a sum of individualities or a totality given to the senses for comprehension, there is always unveiling and concealment.

Only humans are aware of their own individuation, they cannot be indifferent to their own being or to being in general—in Heidegger’s terms.³ We relate to both things and the whole:

² Patočka draws from Aristotle the concept of movement in terms of a process and realization; however, he finds this notion “still too static and objective” (Patočka 1998, 146) and argues that it needs to be radicalized in order to understand existence as embedded within the world. Similarly, he adopts the concept of *arché*, the *physis* of the pre-Socratics, as a *beginning*, a whole from which beings emerge and to which they return.

³ Vargas-Guillén identifies in existence a fifth approach to phenomenology, as proposed by Heidegger through his hermeneutics of facticity, and he sees in Patočka the dynamics of existence, manifestation, and asubjectivity. However, “Patočka extends Heidegger’s position, it is not merely ‘the modest sense of existence’ resulting from

existence as movement differentiates itself from the whole, yet it aspires to reconnect with it: “humans are capable of encountering being as things are not. The openness for being, understanding being and, on the basis of that, the possibility of encountering things, with existents as existents” (Patočka 1998, 170). The human being is, therefore, a “universal being” (Patočka 1998, 170).

Patočka links aspects of movement in Aristotle, as an ascending path leading man to knowledge, with a modern understanding of existence (particularly influenced by Heidegger and Jaspers): “a movement of existing, is a being that understands itself (understanding possibilities in realizing them); it is a being that makes possible clarity, understanding, knowledge, and truth” (Patočka 1998, 156); however, it can be experienced as a path of realization or decadence.

The three movements identified are: *reception* or *rootedness*, *defense* or *self-prolongation*, and *truth*. The first movement, although in a rudimentary way, can be sustained independently of the others, but not vice versa. This movement of *rootedness*, *acceptance*, *anchorage* or *reception*, characterized by a predominance of corporeality: “is a movement of instinctive-affective harmony with the world” (Patočka 1988, 148); it signifies the arrival in culture and the reception of parental instances that provide the basic care necessary for the survival of the “human puppy”. “The movement of acceptance consists in (...) which an existence ‘positions itself’ with respect to the lightning of individuation, of entry into the universe” (Patočka 1996, 29–30).

This is the moment of “anchoring or rooting” (Patočka 1998, 156) that emerges from an *a priori* – a real, the world, nature itself, the organic – that works in each individual in their care for others while fostering progressive autonomy. This stage cannot be expected to represent authenticity, in existential terms; Patočka describes it as an “original inauthenticity” (Patočka 1998, 150) where the individual is submerged in or driven by an “aesthetic ideal”, with the immediate pursuit of pleasure hindering fidelity to oneself. While “instinctive-affective (...) at first dominates our life almost exclusively, then subsequently is modified by other movements, tinted and increasingly articulated by them” (Patočka 1998, 143), this sets the stage for the unfolding of other potentials in the second movement.

The second movement is one of “self-extension” (...) “not merely one of personal or community self-extension but rather one of constituting our inorganic body, extending our existing into things” (Patočka 1998, 150). This movement is associated with labor (drawing on Hannah Arendt’s concept) as it signifies a departure from the protection of the hearth (Latin *lar*), the initial space of socialization. However, the conditions of survival persist, marked by “conflict, suffering, guilt” (Patočka 1998, 150), from which no one can escape. These characteristics define the “limit situation” of this movement: the human being exists in a state of “blindness”, where “existence in this entire realm is an *interested* one” (Patočka 1998, 151),

self-annihilation, but rather ‘the possibility of salvation (...) an absolute vocation for truth, grounded in freedom, that paves the way for absolute responsibility for the meaning of the world’” (Vargas-Guillén 2024, 163).

focused on the functional activities dictated or imposed by social roles. In this state, there is no awareness of existence, of being actively engaged in it.

The inauthenticity of this movement is characterized by a repetitive engagement with the present, and is described as “self-depriving self-extension, self-repeating” (Patočka 2015, 75). While this movement is rooted in the present and involves personal defense, it also encompasses the search for immortalization as a species and the preservation of one’s own culture.

In this stage, the pleasure principle and the satisfaction of drives begin to be modulated by repression and by “intelligence”, involving secondary processes. This transition reflects a shift from a purely perceptual relation to things: we move from the immediate to the mediate, where “instinctual goals become conscious, habitual” (Patočka 1998, 158). The ideal of this stage is “ascetic” (Patočka 1998, 159) as the individual faces the choice to either distance from themselves, or turn towards self-knowledge and reflection on the possibilities for his own individuation and relationships with others. This entails a shift from being in a state of “always together in the mode of against one another” (Patočka 2015, 70), to embracing other forms of care and cooperation.

The third movement is that of *truth*, described as “self-winning through self-surrender and dedication” (Patočka 2015, 72). It involves opening one’s eyes to realities previously unseen, it is “an attempt to break through our earthliness” (Patočka 1998, 151). As he notes in *Heretical Essays* (1996): “Scales fall from the eyes of those set free” (Patočka 1996, 40), allowing individuals to perceive what was once hidden. With newfound time and energy previously consumed by necessities of survival and labour, individuals can now turn their focus toward the spiritual. Acknowledging their finitude and earthly existence, they integrate these dimensions into their lives rather than being blinded by them, which is a form of inauthenticity characteristic of the previous period. In this movement, they gain the potential to project into the future and to integrate themselves into the whole: “existence, in the sense of the third movement, is neither a matter of sinking roots in the world nor of the prolongation of being but rather a task for all of life in its integrity” (Patočka 1998, 151); it is “the realm of spirit and freedom” (Patočka 2015, 72).

Here, individuals confront the *limit situation of finitude*, a reality they had previously been unaware of: “The very ground, the earth on which it was standing has quaked (...). It discovers here its existence not as accepted and anchored but rather as naked – and it discovers at the same time that earth and heaven a *trans*, a beyond” (Patočka 2015, 71).

The third movement is the ascent of the *open soul* (Patočka 2023a), characterized by a transformation of perspective – metanoia – or *conversion* of the individual who fully embraces their freedom and responsibility towards themselves, others and the world as a whole, leading to a “mutually interpenetrating inwardness” (Patočka 2015, 72).

Pedagogical implications

While Patočka emphasizes individuation in the first movement, which is more anchored in corporeality, the relationship among the three movements is dialectical, forming “the unity of our vital reality” (Patočka 1998, 163). Patočka consistently warns of the risks of decadence and self-forgetfulness: “To say that life can overcome its fallenness is not to say that it will necessarily do so. The discovery of finitude holding sway over life, of life as endangered, can also become a means of the external control of life: (...) especially command and domination” (Patočka 2015, 71).

The phenomenological perspective, rooted in experience, challenges determinism and explores human possibilities, capacities, and potentials. It relies on the “plasticity” of the human being to orient action in different directions, accepting pre-established goals while simultaneously participating in the “co-creation” of new possibilities and meanings (Patočka 1939, 418). Just as the soul has both an upward and a downward slope, training serves as a path leading to the third movement of existence, characteristic of the open soul:

When Klaus Schaller asked Jan Patočka in which movement of life we might find education, Patočka responded that it was in the first movement of acceptance, but the essence of education is to come to the crisis of human life and to a turning from subjective preoccupation to a subjective openness, meaning not only to give man the means to manage the tasks of the second movement, but to open him up to the human privilege to live in truth (Svobodová 2020, 98–99).⁴

Patočka (2023) identifies “layers of intentionality”, some of which are unconscious and profound. An educational process encompasses biological determinations (such as maturation and development), alongside the realm of experience. This process is enriched by an education that begins in the world of life, allowing each student, within their unique context, to progressively achieve autonomy, freedom, and responsibility.

The concept of individuation is essential to the issue of formation, as it involves examining the movements of existence at its deep layers of passivity. This study traces the constitution of meaning from the pre-predicative and implicit stages to more complex expressions through a reflexive or self-conscious function, expressed particularly in the third movement characterized by the quality of the open soul.

Education shifts from passivity to activity through an existential and spiritual process, rooted in “our original drive [...] the natural reflective tendency of our drive into things” (Patočka 1998, 173). Rather than merely observing life from a cognitive perspective, life is realized and lived within the sphere of *praxis*. The educator embodies this praxis, practicing *epoché* to unveil

⁴ As the author points out, see: Letter 4/69 Jan Patočka to Klaus Schaller, 11.8.1969, in Patočka *Korespondence s koleniologií II*. Edited by Věra Schifferová and Ivan Chvatík. Prague: OIKOYMENH, 2011, 126. Svobodová (2020) studies the movements of existence as a process of transformation and self-realization leading to the *care for the soul*, to an authentic life that extends to the social, in an attitude of dialogue and truth, of existential and metaphysical responsibility. Patočka witnesses both with his teaching and his life, to this open soul, which leads to the immortality of the soul, to the spirit.

potentials and engage with the phenomenological “*I can*”. Beyond imparting knowledge, the educator conveys a sense of wonder, a desire to learn, and an openness that counters the threats of instrumental education, characterized by mere repetition and a loss of meaning.

From an existential perspective, formation offers a return to the psychic powers, *tês psychês epimeleia*, that allows to navigate the dark night of individuation – especially in its most challenging moments – and to discover the clarity and luminosity that come with the experience of meaning. This process is fundamentally about being, revealing itself – in Patočka – through a phenomenology of history that begins with the concept of human and universal humanity, intricately connected to the historicity of the communal – *polis* (cf. Hejduk 2023).

A process of formation is, therefore, an *opening of the soul* – confronted with *corruption*, the birthplace of nonmeaning – and a courageous effort to shape the meaning of a common project that enables us to *live together; to be-with-others*. It embodies an aspiration – never fully realized – towards community.⁵ Both the lived body and self-consciousness are phases or dimensions that are always present in the becoming of being during individuation, moving from more determined states (such as welcome and defence) towards truth, freedom and responsibility. In a successful process, the struggle or tension between educator and learner results in overcoming repetition and transcending the teacher, allowing for the unfolding of potentials and authentic living within a shared, common horizon.

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⁵ In our recent research, we find in pedagogy a link between philosophy and psychology. Individuation is itself a process of formation, of education, to put it with Patočka and his work on Comenius: a “pedagogy of conversion” (Schifferová 2023, cf. Duque, 2023).

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