



## Review of Hila Naot, *Raft on the Open Sea—Man and the World in Jan Patočka's (1907–1977) Phenomenological Philosophy*, (in Hebrew) Jerusalem: Carmel 2020, 536 pp. 107 shekels

Oded Balaban<sup>1</sup> 

Accepted: 29 May 2021 / Published online: 30 June 2021  
© The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Nature B.V. 2021

The book is a study on the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka (1907–1977). He is a phenomenologist who, despite adverse political circumstances under the communist regime, managed to defend theses very close to Edmund Husserl's *Ideas I*.

Patočka argues for a phenomenology that goes beyond *epoché*, that is, beyond the suspension of judgment on the world to introduce the analysis of the transcendent sphere of the world. In his doctoral thesis, he started to write about this issue, with a significant title: The natural world as a philosophical problem. Patočka sustains a transcendental phenomenology and approaches Eugen Fink, with whom he maintained a lifelong friendship, while Husserl was a permanent point of reference for him. For Patočka, the giving of the world takes place entirely within the interiority of transcendental subjective life. It is within this interiority that the world becomes external and starts shaping its different objectivities. Humans look inside themselves to develop their knowledge of nature.

According to the author, Patočka's philosophy develops as a philosophy of man as it relates to the non-human, to nature. That is, human history and world history are the same histories. Any different view would be a view that explains the natural world independently of the historical development of human knowledge. It is to maintain that humans can conceive of something that does not pass through the sieve of their cognitive capacity; it is to place oneself under an extra-human point of view. According to Patočka, humans mediate all knowledge of the non-human. The non-human then becomes part of the phenomenological description of consciousness, as the other of itself. The non-human is an "immanent" exteriority. That is why the more humans develop their self-knowledge, the more they develop their knowledge of nature.

The book has four parts.

The first part (*Prelude: Between Man and the World*) deals with the relationship between man and the world, which underlies Patočka's thought.

---

✉ Oded Balaban  
balaban@research.haifa.ac.il

<sup>1</sup> Department of Philosophy, University of Haifa, 3199911 Haifa, Mount Carmel, Israel

Here the purpose is to distinguish between two basic modes of conception and the extent to which this distinction clearly expresses the nature of the relationship between man and the world.

This part serves as an introduction to the following parts because it opens up a perspective under which the author examines the topics discussed throughout the book.

In the second and most ramified part (*Rhapsody: Man*), Naot discusses issues related to the human being: the possibility of general human nature and its possible meaning, individual identity, and issues concerning body–mind questions. These three issues are characterized by one common aspiration that characterizes Patočka's inquiry: to find within and through them the universality of man, but one that includes or implies the singularity of each individual, namely, the problem of human diversity, without falling into an abstract determinism that emasculates human freedom.

The third part (*Fugue: The World*) focuses on the question of the world and Patočka's attempt to clarify the conditions that enable the emergence of ontology as a study of beings. Just as in the field of anthropology, so in the ontological study of Patočka, one can identify the search for a unifying principle, which allows searching for the being as infinitely articulated into infinite beings. Furthermore, just like in the second part, here too, Naot tries to shed light on the mutual dimension of the structure of the world and the subject of which the world is its object.

In the concluding part (*Finale: Between Man and the World*), Naot returns in a spiral motion to the subject of the relationship between man and the world. She tries to reestablish the nature of the relationship between subject and object.

The book deals with all the themes of Patočka's philosophy without losing the depth of analysis. Since I obviously cannot refer to all of them, I will consider only one theme that is central to his philosophy as expounded by Naot—the relationship between the subject and *its* world (326ss).

The key to understanding the subject and the starting point of all philosophizing is appearance, namely, what appears to the subject. It is not an illusion but a real appearance. The problem arises when we try to be more exact in the use of our terms. In this case, we need to distinguish between the field of appearance and what appears in that field. These are two different issues. There is a relation of dependence between the field of appearance and what appears in it, without in principle losing their relative autonomy.

What appears before the subject is not independent of the subject. It is immanent to the subject, since being subject means being oriented towards something other than itself. Without this presentation of something other than itself, the subject would cease to be a subject. What appears, then, differs both from the subject and from what is independent, from the *thing in itself*, to use a Kantian term. According to this logic, it is necessary to distinguish between object and thing-in-itself, or between objective and absolute. Indeed, we can only refer to what depends on our perceptual capacity, to the field of appearance. However, phenomenologically, experience attests that if something appears, something does not appear. A phenomenological description shows that not everything is appearance but that there is something else that is the origin of what appears, or at least actively participates in the

formation of appearance. The alternative would be a *creatio ex nihilo*. Experience experiences the existence of something that transcends the subject–object relation, the existence of a substratum, such that experience implies an addendum that prevents it from being mere subjective experience. The objectification of the content, its appearance as independent of the subject, is a function of the subject, which does not yet have any dependence on an absolute being—it does not imply that an ontological status of the perceived is given. While we experience a substratum, it is not and cannot be determined by the objective and subjective structure of experience. Nevertheless, it is the “external” condition of that relation. It is the invisible foundation of the visible appearance. That is why Patočka does not identify the structure of appearance with any entity. No structure, objective or subjective, can serve as a substrate of appearance. However, the appearance must have a substrate.

That substrate can be understood in two ways. One is the way Patočka understands it as we describe it. Another is to understand it as the principle of substance. This principle is not ontic at all but is fully a phenomenon of consciousness that needs the presupposition of substance in order to understand the phenomenal world. The presupposition of substance is true both of everyday thought and philosophical reflection from Plato and Aristotle to the modern era. In this sense, we need the idea of substance as that to which thought refers when saying, for example, that I see what I touch and touch what I see. How is this possible, indeed, if the content of what I touch is the soft and the hard while the content of what I see is color? How is this possible when it must be clear that color is untouchable and hardness has no color? It is understandable only under the assumption of the consciousness of a substance to which that phrase (I touch what I see and I see what I touch) refers, to the substance as that which imperceptibly permits perception as consciousness perceives. For the reference is neither to the content of color nor to the content of elasticity. Patočka comes close to this idea but does not end up making it clear. He comes close to this idea when he states that being in the world must be transformed into the invisible substance that constitutes the world for consciousness (cf. p. 327).

The book is highly recommended to the Hebrew reader, and one must hope that it will eventually be translated into English. It is not superfluous to point out that the author has mastered Patočka’s philosophy and secondary bibliography.

**Publisher’s Note** Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.