

MOVEMENTS OF HUMAN EXISTENCE AS A POSSIBLE BACKGROUND FOR THE STUDY OF A SPORTING LIFE

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Submitted in September, 2005

The paper deals with movements of human existence and tries to describe a special “topography” of them – with permanent attention to the whole of human existence. We promote calling the scene of these movements a *homodrom*. To gain a wider background for a context of sport is a secondary aim.

Firstly (I) we analyse two extreme attitudes concerning our possibilities of creating concrete and personal projects of our way of life: represented by mythological Moerae on the one hand, and especially by existentialists with their concept of “empty freedom” on the other hand. A balanced position is given by Czech philosopher Jan Patočka against the background of Heidegger’s well-known Dasein analyses (II). It seems to be the most complete view concerning a movement of our existence. He divided this specific movement into three stages:

1. the movement of *self-anchoring*, an instinctive movement of our existence,
2. the movement of *self-prolongation*, the movement of our coming to terms with the reality we are involved with,
3. the movement of *self-gaining*, which can be described as “living in the truth”.

We try to analyse this structure subtly. All three movements are also viewed in a modality of relation to other people.

The next part (III) shows a special “topography” of human existence in its dynamism. Here we follow especially a “vertical transcendency” and pay attention to both zenith and nadir experience.

Further we list some factors with a stronger influence upon our personal homodrom: *existentials* as “categories” of human existence, *EHEs* (exceptional human experiences) and other deep *experiences* of various sorts, *horizons* of external influences – horizons of time, of sense, horizons of social influences etc., *values* and their hierarchy. We use them in a context of *sport* (IV). Special attention is paid to the term *metanoia* and we judge two important turning points in a athlete’s homodrom. Related questions are opened instead of a conclusion (V).

Keywords: Movement, human existence, homodrom, metanoia, sport and existence, Jan Patočka, experiences, nadir experience.

INTRODUCTION

A human being is both a source and a receiver of many movements. Our life is a multilevel movement! But I’d like to look at human life as a whole and to follow the very special movements of human existence. Let the scene of these movements be called a *homodrom* – to show that whole of human existence in its dynamism and special “topography”. In this we are inspired by so called *biodromal psychology* (bios = life + dromos = journey), started in 1933 by Charlotte Buhler with her *Lebenslauf Psychologie* (also known as *Life-span Psychology*).

I. Room for human freedom

“Our life is a movement, the *cast* of which escapes us” (Patočka) – yes, but we are also a cast *project* (see Heidegger’s “der geworfene Entwurf”) and we must carry and perform our “stay” (Dasein). Have we free will to give proper form or order to this special, concrete and personal project? What are our limitations? Here we speak naturally both of room for human freedom and a general framework for the above mentioned movements of human existence.

There were two extreme attitudes in history:

1. One from ancient Greece, represented by the mythological Moerae, individual and inescapable destinies which followed every mortal being (according to

Homer), or goddesses and daughters of Night (according to Hesiodos). They were three:

Clotho – the “spinner”, who spun the “thread” of life, *Lachesis* – she dispensed this thread; she was also chance, the element of luck that one had the right to expect,

Atropos – she cut the thread (thus determining the individual’s moment of death); she was an inescapable fate, against which there was no appeal.

We can see human destinies were seen as determined, and in particular the span of a person’s life and one’s allotment of misery, luck, etc. The whole of one’s life was shadowed by them; they also possessed the gift of prophecy. Zeus commanded them to see that the natural order of things was respected. One could displease the gods in two ways, either by offending the moral law or by attaining too much happiness or riches in which case one excited their jealousy (*ftionos*).

2. A modern one, represented especially by existentialists. They say we have free will – the freedom to determine ourselves, undetermined by anything else. Yet our existence is “empty freedom” (Sartre) and we must create ourselves from the beginning in the moment of choice. Of course, here is no room either for fate/destiny or for tradition, personal biography, etc.

We shall argue for a balanced position, knowing that we are never *tabula rasa* (a blank tablet), but at the same time we are never *tabula scripta* (an imprinted tablet). Our paper will follow some basic concepts from Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit*, enriched with the special views of Patočka concerning movements of human existence.

II. Three movements of human existence

Patočka uses background from Heidegger’s analyses, but often exceeds his output. His view was not only a partial study of human existence – Patočka’s position was more radical: human existence is a movement; it is a being, to it a movement belongs fundamentally. This specific movement is interpreted as the basic shape of our relation to the world. Patočka underlines the process-character of the being that we are.

He divided this specific movement into three stages:

1. The movement of *self-anchoring*, an instinctive and affective movement of our existence with an orientation based on pleasure. The other possible metaphor is “sinking roots”. We try to find our place in the world, the “anchor/roots of our existence” and not to be homeless. Sometimes we are successful, sometimes not. In relation to it, our life is a set of moments – various moments of happiness and unhappiness. It means that we are under the rule of *contingency*. Life in the sphere

of the first movement is determined by all manner of contingencies – biological, situational, traditional and individual.

2. The movement of *self-prolongation*, self-sustenance, self-projection or self-reproduction, the movement of our coming to terms with the reality we are involved with. We follow our own interests, we identify ourselves with a certain role. This movement is carried out through *work* – when we must face “hard” (material) reality – and/or through *fight* in the case of social reality. The second movement is one by which humans reproduce their vital process. This process evidently has ascetic features. Self-prolongation involves some loss. Patočka is here inspired by the concept of “alienated work” (Hegel and Marx).

3. The movement of *self-achievement*, self-gaining, self-transcendence when I overlap with the world of momentary facticity. It is also an attempt to integrate into our lives our finitude (forgotten in movements 1 and 2). It is a movement in which I must relate to the world as such – not to things in the world. Patočka describes this stage as “living in the truth” as well.

We can also see a specific synthesis of hedonism and asceticism (Bednář, 2004) in this third movement!

Yet we need to beware of the dangers of fanaticism and overzealousness in following a “vertical line” causing me not to see my finitude. In this case the third movement is again only self-prolongation and I do not live in the truth.

Patočka wakes us up to possible misunderstanding: these three movements cannot be seen in some time succession – they are “a polyphony of three voices” (1998). We should be a bit more careful here and speak of “polyphony of more voices”, de facto two or three voices – not all people are obviously able to achieve the 3rd stage!

All three movements are also viewed in a modality of *relation to other people* – they are shared, because they are put into practice in dependence on others and in specific relation to their existence. It is seen especially in the first movement, by which humans are “beings for others” (Patočka, 1998). The second movement also involves a wide realm of interpersonal relations – yet mostly in a negative form (fight, conflict, suffering and very often a final feeling of guilt). The third movement has an energy of integration and my experience becomes a part of experience of the others. Since the world of things is integrated as well, we can interpret structure into this dimension – in a terminology that uses the philosophy of dialogue – as “I-thou-it”. Each movement has also its inevitable *referent*, that to which the movement relates. As moving beings we are drawn to something that is motionless. See TABLE 1 for more details and relationships.

TABLE 1

№	Essence	Direction	Ideal	Transcendence	Time	Boundary situation	Structure	Referent
1	Self-anchoring	• pleasure	• hedonistic • aesthetic	none	the past	contingency	I-THOU (IT)	the earth
2	Self-prolongation	• labour • fight • reproduction	• ascetic	horizontal	the present	• conflict • suffering • guilt	I-IT (THOU)	the earth
3	Self-achievement	• truth • freedom	• spiritual • authentic	vertical	the future	• finitude • death	I-THOU-IT	the absolute

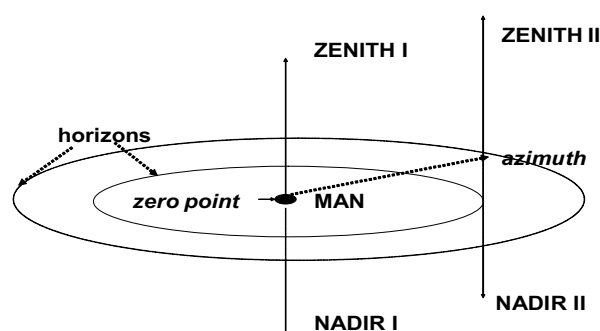
III. Topography of a homodrom

1 A basic scene

“Our being is always on the way, we have a spatium before us” (Patočka, 1998). Let’s look at the spatiality of our existence in greater detail – but targeting the whole! We can use the term *homodrom* specifically here – to show a *special “topography” of human existence* in its dynamism. I’d like to recall here some limitations in visualization of these topics and metaphorical (symbolic) features of their presentation (Jaspers and his “ciphers of transcendence” and “signs of existence”). To use “upper/lower” or “top/bottom” for “positive/negative” or “good/evil” is traditional and we shall repeat this approach. Yet not fully for the spiritual dimension of our homodrom which we should like to explore. Let this dimension be joined with the vertical as traditionally, but we must remember: it has both “higher” (altitude) and “lower” (depth) parts! And we cannot regard the “lower” part as only negative – at least for our spiritual development. We can find inspiration for this approach in literature: Homer’s Odysseus or Dante in his Divine comedy gain full knowledge or truth about themselves and recognize their own lives as self-consistent only after a “visit” (maybe through “alta fantasia”!?) to “the underworld” or “hell”. We can speak better of a *bottom of our existence*. The Bible is also full of these examples: Abraham as a sacrificer of his son, suffering Job, Jonah inside a great fish (“in the depths of *sheol*”), crucified Jesus Christ, etc. John S. Dunne (1973) speaks of (spiritual) *nadir*. It will be useful to create and use a new term “nadir experience”. And if nadir, then *zenith* (shown in Fig. 1). It can be represented, for example, with the Paradise in the last part of Dante’s Comedy, and with *peak experiences* of any sort according to Maslow, etc.

Fig. 1

Topography of a homodrom



2 Targeting azimuths on a horizon

Fulfilling any daily task we have a specific target before us – an “azimuth on a horizon”. Our starting position can be named the *zero point*. Our orientation to the world is led from this “point” – in reality it is our body. We (each of us) give criteria and benchmarks to the world around. According to some directions of ancient thinking we can be described as *homo mensura*. When the task is fulfilled, a new one is seen before us – a new “azimuth” and a new horizon. And we start from a new “zero point” – again and again. This is common human experience (“the things of life”) and to live according to this reduced scenario would be typical self-prolongation – Patočka’s second movement. Adding some “stopover on the way” we have the first movement according to him. Yet we are speaking of zeniths and nadirs as well – these are our opportunities to enter new dimensions in our lives. We can speak of the “third dimension”, “third movement”, “spiritual dimension”, “vertical transcendency”, “living in the truth,” etc. It is our chance to change zero points into “full or filled points” (it sounds better in German: Nullpunkt → Vollpunkt). The Bible speaks often of “fullness” – fullness of joy, of truth, of love, of humanity, of deity, etc. Very fruitful can be the expression “fullness of time” giving our topic a *temporal* dimension. Both Hebrew and Greek have a special word for this special form of time: “eth”, respectively “kairos”. It means the right or opportune moment; the moment of action. Time is comprehended often as “occasion” here, as if “waiting” for

loading or filling – up to a “fullness of time”. “There is a time to search (and a time to give up)” (Ecc 3,6). We can add: “There is a time to use opportunity (and a time not to)”. In our context we can see our lives as series of opportunities to stop following “the things of the world” and to search in a spiritual dimension, following the proper “vertical”. It is the goal intended to be attained – and which is believed to be attainable. Yet the count of opportunities is not endless.

We should like again to underline the importance of “nadir” (it is also on a vertical!) – it is a route to escape concern with “the things of the world” and to negate them as well. To arrive at a zenith, the whole spatium must be heart-felt and deep – each azimuth has its own nadir and zenith. More explicitly we must try to find and see a wider context in our acts – all have links and a deeper meaning. The apostle Paul also calls for a better comprehension of “the width and length and depth and height” (Ephesians 3:18 according to NKJV).

3 “Zero points” with influence upon personal projects

A. Some “zero points” are more important for our life – those in which we have the ability to use *kairos*. We can consider some powerful factors with a strong influence upon our personal homodrom here:

- a) *Existentials* as special “categories” of human existence with power to constitute it (Heidegger, Fink, & Jaspers). We can divide them into two groups (TABLE 2) – the first one relating to “zenith”, the second one relating to “nadir” or everydayness¹.

TABLE 2

- project “leap into authenticity”
 - creation
 - joy
 - resoluteness/strong-mindedness
 - game
 - love
 - authentic temporality
 - sense/meaning and understanding
 - “fallenness”
 - vague “the they/theyness” (*Das Man*)
 - labour/work
 - anxiety
 - fear/dread
 - governance/power
 - death
 - inauthentic temporality
 - “being-there” (*Dasein*) like non-sense (the absence of meaning)
- b) *EHEs* (Exceptional Human Experiences) and other deep *experiences* of various sorts: optimal, limited,

plateau or peak; a state of “flow”, of “zone,” etc. Today there is even the Exceptional Human Experiences Network (EHEN) on web sites with the list of some 200 EHEs. We can name some of them, interesting for our context: synchronicity – accelerated thinking – peak performance – hyper-acuity – intuition – meaningful coincidences – serendipity – aesthetic experience – lucky hunches – inspiration – guru-person encounter, etc.

- c) An optimal combination of these factors (both existentials and EHEs) can lead to metanoia. It is usually translated as conversion, turning or repentance, but the original meaning is broader:
- * turning around and facing a new direction;
 - * a radical revision and transformation of our whole mental process – a “new mind”;
 - * a new-minded way of looking at life;
 - * a mission to break down barriers that keep people from getting the help they need;
 - * a change of mind + a change of heart.

B. A man with a “new mind” (the best, if combined with a “new heart”) is ready to create personal *projects* of higher quality and life-long dimension. We are going to speak only about some basic presumptions here²:

- * they can only be strictly personal ones – there is no sample or model forever and for everybody;
- * each project has its own specific context;
- * each project has its own specific limitation.

Though individuality and personality is underlined here, we do not live in isolation. Then we must consider external influences as well, especially:

- a) *horizons* of external influences – horizons of time, of sense, horizons of social influences, etc.;
- b) *values* and their hierarchy. It is not so important – from our point of view – if a “luminous realm of values” exists outside of us (e.g. according to Scheler), or if a universe has no objective values (e.g. according to Sartre).

A concept of personal projects is made up of a lot of related factors and topics. The real art of life then is to integrate them – to be a good “personal and project manager of oneself”.

IV. A context of sport

Now we have a proper scope for better judgment of relations between sporting lives and the whole of human existence. Speaking of athletes, we mean people for whom sport became a very important part of their homodroms – not products of McSport (our special

¹ Only our selection is presented here; notice please the “horizontal” logic as well.

² We try to solve this topic in the set of articles, published in the Czech language during the last 6 years.

term for some parts of Crum's classification of sport) which generate instant goods but with a limited guarantee period... Only independent and integrated athletes have the chance to achieve the 3rd stage of Patočka's classification! Using doping (e.g.) is a lie about human possibilities and cannot lead to "living in the truth".

Now we shall look at the above described factors (part III) from a sporting point of view.

* The field of sport (especially in the whole life perspective) faces almost all *existentials* (III/Aa): *love* for sport ought to be a basis for engagement; strong involvement in the sphere of *games* is one of the fundamental features; "acquaintance" with *death* is – unfortunately – more and more frequent in modern sport; fight ("hidden" under *resoluteness*) – of course, this old *agon* is the own substance of sport; *work* through training is daily bread for elite athletes; *joy* (and fun) is one of the main targets of sport; higher readiness for *authenticity* ought to be a typical feature of athletes, etc.

* Sport is an immediate arena for *EHEs* (III/Ab): athletes can be considered as peakers; they know how to "swim" in the flow (of experience), etc. We can show a lot of examples of our "nadir experience" – most of them associated with the phenomenon of defeat or failure. The idiom "to touch bottom" can be mentioned here as well. Sportspeople in games have usually only fractions of a second for gaming solutions and decisions – accelerated thinking can be experienced, when a strong "gaming wit", intuition and other body-mind conditions are combined.

Acting within the so-called "zone" of peak performance (Douillard) is especially interesting here. The effortless "zone" means calm experience in the midst of stressful situations, experience of body-mind integration, an absence of any pain, feeling of facility, etc. Douillard (1994) itemizes a lot of examples of this experience – both among elite athletes and "common" ones. It is also known as "runners' height".

* We can see at least two important turning points in an athlete's homodrom – two opportunities for *metanoia* (III/Ac) during a sporting life:

- a) the moment, when he/she "falls into sport" (falls in love with sport) and makes the decision to perform sport activities as a very important part of his/her life;
- b) the moment, when he/she cannot continue in the existing line of engagement in sports (e.g. when it is not possible to remain in the field of elite sport; when it is necessary to end a so called "career," etc). It does not matter – from the point of view of our analysis! – if he/she makes a decision to leap into a new "common" life throwing off a sportive past, or *not* to leave an area of sport, yet to transform it and involve sport in a new project(s), incorporating it into a new context.

Whilst (a) is usually easier and there are a lots of helpers-tempters – we can guarantee that during the process of (b) one will be alone. Maybe it could be a task for pedagogical kinanthropology: how to help athletes to get across to a new life – a life where sport will not be № 1?

* Concerning *horizons* (III/Ba), it seems apparent that athletes have a good feeling for time and its influence upon their sporting life. Trouble can start at the moment of interconnection of "two sets of time" – time in the field of sport and time of homodrom as a whole.

On the other hand we can expect a lower perceptivity for horizons of meaning, especially if we speak about the meaning of life.

* In the sphere of relationships between (general) *values* (III/Bb) and sporting ones see Kretchmar's chapters 6 and 7 of his Practical philosophy of sport (1994) – the values of fitness, knowledge, skill and pleasure are especially analysed. We hope our paper opens also other realms of values, usable in the field of sport and enabling us to overbridge sporting and "other" lives.

And it is also a final task for us, teachers and/or philosophers of sport how to help unify and optimize both "worlds" – both types of life. Maybe we ought to become logotherapists and/or metanoia's psychotherapists – rather than to work only in the field of P. E.

V. Related questions to be discussed in our context (instead of conclusion)

Can *metanoia* only be singular, or it is possible (or necessary?) to experience it repeatedly?

Can we consider the optimal "speed" of our lives? Can sport activities accelerate movements in our homodrom?

Can Kant's *categorical imperative* (the formula of the end itself) be useful for our personal "project management" in the field of sport?

Can sport generally help us to form our personal (existential) projects? How and under what conditions?

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**POHYBY LIDSKÉ EXISTENCE
JAKO MOŽNÝ ZÁKLAD
PRO STUDIUM SPORTOVNÍHO ŽIVOTA**
(Souhrn anglického textu)

Príspevek se zabývá pohyby lidské existence a snaží se popsat jejich zvláštní „topografii“ – přičemž pozornost je vždy věnována celkové lidské existenci. Prostředí těchto pohybů navrhuje nazývat *homodromem*. Sekundárním cílem je získat širší základ pro kontext sportu.

Zprv (I) analyzujeme dva krajní postoje týkající se našich možností vytvářet konkrétní a osobní projekty našeho způsobu života: na jedné straně je představují mytologické sudičky a na druhé straně zvláště existencialisté se svým konceptem „prázdné svobody“. Vyrovnaný postoj přináší český filosof Jan Patočka na pozadí Heideggerovy proslulé Dasein analýzy (II). Zdá se, že jde o neúplnější pohled týkající se pohybu naší existence. Tento specifický pohyb rozdělil do tří fází:

1. pohyb *sebezakotvení*, instiktivní pohyb naší existence;
2. pohyb *sebezbavení se*, pohyb kdy se směřujeme s realitou, s níž jsme v kontaktu;
3. pohyb *sebenalezení*, který může být popsán jako „prožívání pravdy“.

Tuto strukturu se snažíme pečlivě analyzovat. Všechny tři pohyby jsou také nazírány skrze vztahy k dalším lidem.

Další část (III) ukazuje zvláštní „topografii“ lidské existence ve své dynamice. Sledujeme zde zvláště „vertikální transcendentnost“ a pozornost věnujeme jak zkušenosti se zenitem, tak i nadírem.

Dále uvádíme některé faktory, které mají silnější vliv na náš osobní homodrom: *existenciální* jako „kategorie“ lidské existence, *EHE* (Exceptional Human Experiences, tj. výjimečné lidské zkušenosti) a další hluboké *zkušenosti* různého druhu, *horizonty* externích vlivů – horizonty času, smyslu, horizonty sociálních vlivů atd., *hodnoty* a jejich hierarchie. Používáme je v kontextu *sportu* (IV). Zvláštní pozornost je věnována termínu *metanoia* a posuzujeme dva důležité zlomy na homodromu sportovce.

Místo závěru jsou otevřeny související otázky (V).

Klíčová slova: pohyb, lidská existence, homodrom, metanoia, sport a existence, Jan Patočka, zkušenosti, zkušenost nadírem.

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Bednář, M. (2004). Askesis and Hedone in the field of sport – polar or dialectic relation? In D. Macura & M. Hosta (Eds.), *International conference on philosophy of sport: Philosophy of sport and other essays: proceedings book* (pp. 109–112). Ljubljana: Faculty of Sport and Eleventh Academy.

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