

The New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy

Volume XIV 2015

Religion, War and the Crisis of Modernity.

A Special Issue Dedicated to the Philosophy of Jan Patočka

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Aim and Scope: *The New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* provides an annual international forum for phenomenology and phenomenological philosophy in the spirit of Edmund Husserl's groundbreaking work and the extension thereof in the phenomenological tradition broadly conceived. The editors welcome the submission of manuscripts containing original research in phenomenology and phenomenological philosophy, contributions to contemporary issues and controversies, critical and interpretative studies of major phenomenological figures, investigations on the relation of phenomenology and phenomenological philosophy to the natural and human sciences, and historical studies and documents pertaining to phenomenology and phenomenological philosophy.

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Edited by

Ludger Hagedorn

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In memoriam

Krzysztof Michalski (1948–2013)

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Editors' Introduction

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This issue of the *New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* is dedicated to the thought of the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka (1907–1977), a figure who has become increasingly influential in phenomenological circles in recent years, as well as widely known and read outside of academic philosophy. The growing interest in his work should perhaps come as no surprise, for in a way, Patočka's probing reflections on politics, civilization, religion, war, and the crisis of modernity from the middle of the last century only really obtain their full meaning in the globalized world of today. And indeed it has become clear to many that Patočka's engagement with the question of the meaning of Europe, basic to his thought, and the reprocessing of its intellectual heritage it requires (a project he even calls "post-European"), represents an important pre-history to current debates about globalization and post-colonialism. It has also become the belief of many that these reflections have the potential to enrich such debates, perhaps even correct some of the ideological impasses that plague them, thus revealing Patočka to be a thinker whose ideas are "untimely" in the very best sense of the word.

As a student of Husserl and Heidegger, Patočka's philosophical background is phenomenology; but perhaps of equal importance to his thought is a profound, even heretical challenge to the modern secular marginalization of religious life, and more specifically to the Nietzschean critique of religion that sanctions it. Thus reflections on the philosophical and political meaning of religion represent a crucial aspect of Patočka's writings on the intellectual and cultural legacy of Europe: he is one of the few thinkers who not only analyses the cultural and scientific dimensions of the crisis of modernity, but explicitly calls for a reassessment of religion which, in the European context, means above all Christianity. Yet Patočka is no Christian apologist, speaking from the vantage point of faith; he remains always a philosopher, and in fact from his earliest writings to his last, there is a consistent strain of ideas that are as provocative and heretical to the Christian tradition as they are to the triumphant secularism of modernity. It is because of this double heresy of his philosophical project that Patočka stands out as an important forerunner as well as a critical counterweight to the contemporary resurgence of the theme of religion in scholarly and intellectual discourse.

In this way Patočka's sometimes intimate engagement with Christianity does not make him a Christian philosopher. In his philosophy of history, he speaks of the

“post-Christian epoch” as the European reality from at least the twentieth century, and it seems that this is something he takes as given, without any undertone of triumph or regret. He considers religion, especially Christianity, mainly with respect to its intellectual potential, that is, as a potentially profound challenge to philosophy and its continuing allegiance to Greek (“metaphysical”) patterns of thinking. Moreover, even though reflections on the philosophical potential of Christian ideas permeate his work, they are neither elaborated systematically, nor formulated as an explicit doctrine. Thus any philosophical project inspired by Patočka’s thought would still have to address questions such as the following: Why reconsider religion at all, in a decidedly post-Christian epoch? What philosophical challenge does religion actually pose? What could be the meaning of a “return of the religious” when—at least in the European context—religion seems to have ceased giving life and offering “meaning”? Philosophically questioning religion today, we often seem to be gesturing at a mere phantom, some gruesome shadow in that empty cave Nietzsche speaks of in his *Gay Science*.

Yet perhaps it is precisely the shadowy nature of religion in the secular world that might be the real question for philosophy. On the one hand, from inside the religious view of the world, public pressure on religion is felt to be repression, a denial of its right to exist. This paves the way for all kinds of radicalizations and simplifications. A religion deprived of its cultural rootedness is more likely to fall prey to the stubborn insistence on its own dogmatic supremacy, which it enforces by almost any means. In a recent book, the French political scientist Olivier Roy described this attitude as *sainte ignorance*, “holy ignorance.”¹ On the other hand, in the terms of the secular-scientific view of the world, this development once more confirms reservations about religion, leading to the outright denial of the meaning of religion today. This pushes religion even further into seclusion, which in turn reinforces its dogmatic self-immunization, thereby corroborating its apparent incompatibility with the modern world, thus reaffirming the vicious circle of ignorance. Yet this also alienates the secular world itself from a great many of its historical and cultural sources; as a result, the dominant intellectual landscape of our globalized world is ever more becoming a “wasteland of sense and truth,” as Jean-Luc Nancy put it—and this from his point of view as a philosopher, not as a believer or non-believer. It seems therefore that it should be the task of philosophy today to work towards the “mutual dis-enclosure” of religious and secular-scientific worldviews.

Such an approach evolves out of a phenomenological perspective that suggests “bracketing” ideological debates in order to focus on underlying structures of meaning (*Sinnstrukturen*). Especially in the context of debates about religion, this approach allows for the clarification of religious attitudes and implications free from the constraints of short sighted dogmas, above all those of theism and atheism. It is not simply a matter of the logical proximity of the two terms “theism” and “atheism” (one is simply the negation of the other), but rather the dogmatic character of each point of view that retains the essence of what it negates. If, as Jean-Luc Nancy holds, “all contemporary thinking” will come to be seen as “a slow and heavy gravitational movement around the black sun of atheism,”² then this diagnosis mainly aims at the often privative, reductive and defective character of atheism, which remains blind and deaf to religious “input” even against its own will. The claim does not therefore entail an affirmation of theism, it rather points to an inability and a will to think beyond, or in-between, the old dichotomies.

One of the concerns of contemporary phenomenology has been to overcome this biased understanding of religion, and here we can cite the work of Jean-Luc Marion, Richard Kearney, Anthony Steinbock, John Caputo and others. It is important to stress that these debates are firmly grounded in the phenomenological tradition, and in this respect Patočka is without a doubt an important figure. In recent years, the reception of Patočka's writings has been particularly intense in French phenomenological circles, where today he is one of the most debated thinkers in the continental tradition. The situation is different in the English-speaking world, partly given the simple fact of a lack of access: so far there are only a few translations of Patočka's writings available in English, in contrast to the more extensive editions of his work in German, and above all in French, in which almost the complete *œuvre* is available, thanks in large part to the extensive efforts of Erika Abrams. The intention of this issue of the *Yearbook* is to improve this situation by offering the reader a profile of Patočka's philosophy through the publication of a selection of some recent scholarly articles on his work, accompanied by several significant primary sources appearing for the first time in English.

The authors contributing to this volume count among the best known scholars and experts in the field, representing the Patočka-Archives in Prague and Vienna, as well as the Husserl-Archives in Leuven and New York, along with a number of other institutions that have become closely associated with contemporary phenomenological research in recent years. Together they represent a small but significant sample of an international field of Patočka studies that has emerged in the past two decades, and which continues to expand.

Part One and **Two** of this volume are explicitly dedicated to the topics of religion, war, and the crisis of modernity. **Part One** includes an original English translation of the essay "Time, Myth, Faith," written in the 1950's, one of Patočka's earliest and most explicit reflections on religion and historicity. It is a remarkable document of Patočka's "philosophized" understanding of faith as a genuinely liberating existential moment that opens the space of historicity. This piece is followed by a republication of Erazim Kohák's translation of Patočka's 1973 Varna Lecture, "The Dangers of Technicization in Science according to E. Husserl and the Essence of Technology as Danger according to M. Heidegger," a later text on the essence of technological civilization that includes an important reflection on historicity and sacrifice. Four interpretive essays accompany these texts of Patočka's in **Part One**, exploring the themes of sacrifice, myth, faith, and history, situating them within the broader spectrum of Patočka's work: Claire Perryman-Holt on Patočka's later philosophy of technology; Ludger Hagedorn and Eddo Evink on Patočka's engagement with Christianity; and James Dodd on the relation of sacrifice, war, and historical existence in Patočka's later writings, above all in the *Heretical Essays*.

Part Two contains the first appearance in English of one of Patočka's truly remarkable studies, "On Masaryk's Philosophy of Religion"—an unfortunately misleading title that does not cover in the least the width and scope of this extraordinary text. This study is dedicated to the crucial question of meaning in a nihilistic age: what gives life meaning after the demise of religious and metaphysical ideas? Written in late 1976, the text was completed just before the philosopher's commitment to the civil rights movement *Charter 77* that was to significantly change, and ultimately cost him, his life. As his last completed major work, and the first to be circulated in *samizdat* after his death, it turned into something like Patočka's personal legacy. Here too a selection

of essays interpret and situate this text within Patočka's work as a whole: Ivan Chvatik describes the place of "On Masaryk's Philosophy of Religion" in Patočka's intellectual biography, while Nicolas de Warren, Ludger Hagedorn, and Lúbia Učník explore the remarkable reading of Kant and Dostoevsky that plays such a central role in Patočka's essay.

Part Three contains an English translation of the correspondence in German between Patočka and the then young Polish philosopher Krzysztof Michalski between 1973 and late 1976, just before Patočka's death in March of the following year. These letters contain, on the one hand, a philosophically inspiring discussion of Heidegger, while on the other hand they represent a revealing document of the political and cultural situation in 1970's Poland and Czechoslovakia, essential for an understanding of the conditions under which Patočka pursued philosophy. We would like to dedicate the publication of these letters to the memory of Krzysztof Michalski, founder and rector of the Institute for Human Sciences (IWM) in Vienna and professor of philosophy at Boston University, who died in February 2013.

Part Four contains a selection of essays by Michael Staudigl, Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback, Christian Sternad, and Jean-Luc Marion that together illuminate the relevance of Patočka's thought in contemporary French phenomenological philosophy, in particular with regard to what has been called its "theological turn." Given the ongoing debates regarding the place of religion in (post-) modern society, these articles, together with the others, all strive to address a contemporary intellectual desideratum through the exploration of the resources, inspiration, and insights of Patočka's philosophy.

Notes

- 1 Olivier Roy, *La sainte ignorance. Le temps de la religion sans culture* (Paris: Seuil, 2008).
- 2 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure. The Deconstruction of Christianity*, trans. Bettina Bergo, Gabriel Malenfant, and Michael B. Smith (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 18.

Part I

Myth, Faith, Sacrifice and History

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1 Time, Myth, Faith (1952)

Jan Patočka

Translation of “Čas, mythus, víra,” in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 1: *Pečé o duši I*, ed. Ivan Chvatík and Pavel Kouba (Prague: Oikoumene, 1996), 131–136; and continuation of the manuscript in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 3: *Pečé o duši III*, ed. Ivan Chvatík and Pavel Kouba (Prague: Oikoumene, 2002), 644–653. Translation by Ludger Hagedorn.

Keywords: myth; philosophy of religion; phenomenology

All problems concerning time, concerning its character and objective meaning, as well as the structure and the consciousness of time, admittedly belong to the most important questions of modern philosophy. Sometimes it is held that modern philosophy differs from the old metaphysics exactly by its awareness of time. The ever more decisive historicizing of the modern worldview seems to confirm this. Nevertheless, the problematic of time is no less meaningful for questions of religion.

It is not our intention here to suggest a solution to questions concerning the essence of time. We would only like to differentiate certain temporal structures and to outline a schematic picture for the most important temporal phenomena.

We distinguish first of all the temporal world, that is, the ordered aggregate of all realities within the dimension of time. All events have their precise localization in this world, and all realities a determinate extension. This temporal world as such can be conceived in itself without any kind of succession. All its relations are relations of order, referring either to events of the same or a different date. What we have in the temporal world is in full analogy to the known three dimensions of the spatial world. The relations of order are thus transitive, and the direction of our movement within them is indifferent.

Another important phenomenon of time is its successiveness, a specific trait with which we are experientially acquainted. The successive character of time is experienced in the form of a decisive cut that runs continually, without ever leaving out a single point, through the temporal world as the aggregate of all ordinal positions and thereby divides the whole range into two parts: into the class of those moments already passed and the class of moments that have not yet been run through. Each of these cuts has its two classes, each has its past and its future. Successiveness is therefore essentially asymmetrical, and that asymmetrical character is usually what is meant when speaking about the so-called “irreversibility” of time. But in fact it is more than mere irreversibility, because this succession establishes a relation that is essentially asymmetrical and unidirectional. It is this successiveness that makes the temporal phenomenon fundamentally different from the spatial.

All physical laws may be formulated as laws of a temporally ordered world. Insofar as physical processes can be described as unidirectional phenomena (as for example the increase of entropy), this unidirectional character does not rest on the temporal form as such but on its content.

Succession is indispensable for the emergence of the consciousness of time. Without a real successiveness there would be no awareness of change, and consciousness would stand still in an eternal Now. On the other hand, however, it is not sufficient for the emergence of the consciousness of time that consciousness itself is something successive. The successiveness of consciousness is something other than the consciousness of this successiveness. The mere fact of experiencing at each moment a different cut in the temporal world already indicates a certain succession, but only when this experience is joined by an awareness of antecedent cuts as distinct, can something like a temporal consciousness, i.e. a consciousness of the succession, emerge. It is no surprise, therefore, that the study of time-consciousness had for a long time been focused exactly on studying this consciousness of succession. There were extensive observations and speculations dedicated to the question of how the lived pasts (past presents) are preserved in the actual present. Related to this, there was talk about the “creative character” of inner, lived time that comprises past and present in a special indivisible unity and thus constantly enriches itself. Against this, other thinkers argued that the past is not retained without modification, but that its manner of givenness changes. These observations lead to the emergence of a two-dimensional scheme of time consciousness, the first axis of which contains an array of expired moments, whereas the second contains the array of the current, present moments that fall gradually into the indeterminate. Only such a series of “retentions” and “protentions,” encompassing the current present, form the “temporal horizon” to which conscious recollection can then return and out of which it can recall what is needed.

But is this really an already fully developed representation of the consciousness of time, comparable to what we know from human experience and as it manifests itself in some of the most important and most meaningful phenomena of our life? For a continuous and exceptional consciousness of time is characteristic of human life. We plan our life according to time: for every day, for every period we employ a certain time that is embedded in the perspective of an ensemble of the phases of life. These phases of life represent something like rhythmic waves undulating beneath the grand interests and historical destinies of individual human societies or humankind as a whole. The finite segment of time that is the life of every individual human being emerges from this ground, as something susceptible to fulfillment or non-fulfillment, and which may lead to an overall “success” or to catastrophe. It is at the same time shaped by this grand becoming, but may also take part in shaping it as well. Likewise the consciousness of time proper to humanity was defined early on by its historicity. But is this historical time a mere consciousness of succession that, through retention, maintains the past as accessible to our conscious regard? Or do we have to do here with another, deeper structure of time?

Undoubtedly, animals also have an awareness of succession and a successive consciousness. Yet the fact remains that animals nevertheless live a-temporally; they do not plan and project time; they do not live in temporally structured tasks; they do not have a real destiny. Animals live within the limits of a narrow present. Even if this present contains a perspective open to the “past” and the “to come,” animals are fully absorbed by the actual. If there is however no dissolving this bondage to actuality,

there will be no deeper relation to time in its broader scope: there can be for example no critical, repudiating attitude towards that which already is (that is to say what has been), and there can also be no resumption of the past. It is therefore quite comprehensible that some thinkers take this negative relation towards what is achieved and given as the essence of the consciousness of time in this human, historical sense. The characteristic of historical time is the negation of the past through a projection, a program of the future (and insofar as the past was once also the future and characterized by a similar negation, it contains moments related to the current negation that offer the possibility of a reprise). The current conflict between the future and the past contained in the present thus becomes the real source of human historicity, and the future, the moment of the new, emerges as the main engine of human, historical time. Historical time is here understood as something creative; it is the creation of something new. In order to fully grasp the specifically human form of time consciousness, it is therefore insufficient to refer to succession and its continuity. There also has to be discontinuity, expressed by a radical “no” towards that which is merely given and received from tradition.

One also has to ask a further question: does our consciousness of time, above all of the future, rest on the human need and capacity to create something new, or on the contrary, does the possibility for the creation of something new rest on our consciousness of the future?

According to the view we are describing, the future, as the negation of the past, is the motive force for the dissection of the present, but it is not clear whether this negating future itself is in fact only a secondary phenomenon. The primary phenomenon from which it is derived is future in its “entirety,” because the negating future can only be understood on the basis of the future in its entirety, but the inverse is not the case, the latter does not comprehend the former.

The whole of temporal succession, the course of the temporal world can be grasped in two possible ways. First, one can regard the whole stream as nothing but a continuous conversion of one form into another, an ever further modification of what is already there. This view allows for little more than a simple passive acceptance of the flow unfolding in manifestation, at most, a curiosity for its ever-new transformations. However, curiosity and disquiet are indicators of some kind of dissatisfaction entailed in this overall attitude towards time, thereby linking it with its opposing counterpart.

The second basic form of the understanding of the temporal order as a whole is characterized by resistance against this helplessness and surrender to an inaccessible past, affirming a deep conviction that the most essential, principal thing is never contained in this progress of time. The main thing, that which is most important, is always ahead of us, independent of how far we have already advanced. But precisely its absence may give shape to our tomorrow, our concrete future.

These two fundamental and important phenomena belong among the characteristic traits of a consciousness that extends beyond the animal bondage to the present. Even if we were not acquainted immediately with one or the other in our actual experience, they remain intimately connected with one another: the consciousness of authentic future is the *overcoming* of the simple consciousness of the past.

This is why a truly human reflection of time is not possible without the impingement, or better, the call of something that lies beyond our experience, that is, beyond the succession of time traversed by all reality. It is no paradox to say that the human consciousness of time essentially entails a relation to something outside the whole of

the temporal world and of the temporal flow. The contact and the relation to this absolute alterity are characteristics of human time. It is only this that makes plausible certain typical features of historical time, that is, the time of human life in society, above all its heterogeneity. Historical time does not flow *aequabiliter* like biological succession or Newton's absolute time. It is marked by moments of contact with this alterity, ultimate and decisive, which can never be contained within time, but which nevertheless may shape time and give it meaning. Historical time is consequently characterized as preparation for "the right time," for "the right moment," or the "fulfillment of time" that will equally be the consciousness of human meaningfulness and the fulfillment (actual or illusory) of human life.

Since ancient times human beings have had an awareness of the wholly other, the *heteron*. This consciousness is without any doubt already innate to mythical man. However, the passivity that characterizes mythical experience leads in effect to a singular way of interpreting it and thereby to its neutralization. Mythical man is passive and powerless. He interprets his life as the work of powerful outside forces that exert their determining or co-determining influence wherever human life appears. Life is what is received from this "outside," waiting for its favor or its disfavor—to live is to be weighed on an alien balance. In accordance with this, mythical life is a living out of the past, out of that which already is: the past determines all becoming. Hence it also follows that the *heteron* cannot be perceived in its true character of being directed towards the future. On the contrary, as extra-ordinary and decisive, it is placed in a mythical beginning in the form of an event, a fate, or a decision that gives its special imprint to everything that comes after, that explains and gives meaning to everything that follows. The primordial mythical epoch, the wholly other time, fundamentally different, the world when it was young (or, from a different point of view, old) contains the key to everything that has subsequently really happened. States and mythical palaces flourished and declined in accordance with what happened in the counsels and the battles of the gods. If order and "law" had been introduced into the world, this was only because Zeus had brought to an end the anarchical era of the first chaotic divinities and the likewise chaotic happenings; it was because he had tamed primeval chaos. In comparison with the primordial mythical epoch, which had decided everything, we live in a sphere of repetition and imitation, in a world in decay and deprived of autonomy. This continuing decadence is curbed by the periodic reestablishment of contacts with the primordial world, contacts that revitalize its effective meaning for us, renewing the assurance of the beneficial significance of its favor. In these moments the world enters a new spring through more than simple memory. This is where festivals have their source, where heroes equal to those of ancient times are born and great historical events shine forth.

So in what resides the essential shortcoming, the essential failure of the mythical consciousness? It is above all not due to the fact that it marks qualitative differentiations, essential caesuras in time; nor that mythical consciousness lifts itself out of dead monotony, the senseless duration and repetition of that which is normally and without any question taken to be ineluctably real; nor in the fact that it does not resign like those who, *blasé* or pathetic, suffer from the lack of any belief in a possible renewal of life. This false repetition, this false perpetuity is a condition that does not know real eternity; it is an evasion of the call of the authentic future.

The failure of mythical consciousness is also not to be seen in placing the future in the "wrong" position in the temporal world, since it only needs a mere shift of accent

to replace the achieved past with an eschatological world, a world in which human (often all-too human) desires find their fulfillment and which figures as a symmetrical counterpart to the original epoch, to the primordial mythical world.

Is it not much more the case that the shortcoming of mythical time consciousness needs to be seen in the simple fact that it places in time something other than our human response to an unconditional call, that it attempts to render commensurable that which is, in its essence, *incommensurable*? And does not genuinely authentic human experience then consist in an act of faith that, regarding reality in the most sober of its aspects, without the least idealization, the least illusion regarding our capacities to understand it in its entirety, does not lose sight of the absolute demand and its incommensurability?

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The¹ concept of historical time as exceeding, according to its essence, the objectivity of the sciences refers, as Heidegger made clear, to different forms of “temporalization” (*Zeitigung*) of human life and, consequently, to historical becoming.

In opening a breach in objectivity, in the given, in manipulable and controllable thingliness, man receives the possibility but at the same time is confronted with the necessity of making a decision, of asking the question regarding meaning as a whole and of being himself in an integrated manner. The being of man as complete being is life in truth. And life in truth is therefore a life in time, a life of inner tension of human, historical time.

It is possible to grasp time as a constant horizon embracing every individual event of our life and in which sinks every individual event one after the other. This gives a rather static image of time. Yet time is also a becoming that manifests itself as a struggle of its different dimensions, a struggle for preeminence and superiority over the other dimensions.

The reign of the present is a reign of objectivity. Here present and past become a series of presents. Time appears as a series of “nows.” Taken to its conclusion, this conception entails the suppression of all succession and the reduction of all becoming to a single static “now.” In this perspective, all being in the actually given present must already contain all its possibilities; there is in principle nothing new under the sun; the world is purely objective in the sense that it can in principle contain nothing that is foreign, that cannot be determined by our categories.

The conception oriented by the primacy of the past sees the whole of human life, the entirety of temporal dimensions, in the shadow of a past that has an absolute preponderance over the other modes of temporality. The present that man takes and which appears to be solid, is in reality inconsistent—not on account of its caducity (because it is insufficiently present), but precisely because it is governed by an event that has already taken place and can in no way be undone. This predominance of the past is the source and internal drive of the consciousness of guilt that permeates human life. Guilt is not some concrete failure, occurring in some concrete situation. On the contrary, failure as such is nothing other than the occasion that serves the dimension of the past in its manifestation and affirmation of its ascendancy over us.

Myth has its source in a conception of time that gives primacy to the past. The most general characteristic of myth, namely that it puts us under the absolute supremacy of one or more higher beings, is based on this orientation towards the past. The past is that part of the non-objective universe that comes closest to objectivity. Certainly, it

exceeds objectivity in that it is a fact that nothing can undo or obscure, reconvert into a mere state, into something present and controllable. However it is also a fact that is frozen, petrified, irrevocable. The past is not at our disposal; most of it entirely escapes our powers. We can, to a certain extent, only reconstruct what happened, but it is impossible to make the past present. On the other hand, the past is completed, solid—precisely in virtue of its absence in our present, the past is a *fact* in the literal sense of the word.

The tension of mythical consciousness, determined by the past, thus arises from different aspects of this apperception of being in relation to the past.

1. Myth nowhere comes close to a real question, but remains bound to mysterious and monstrous images. Everything in myth is reality, exteriority, a representation that one encounters; nothing is construed intellectually. Myth is narration and possesses, in the frame of its narrative, universal knowledge—“answers precede questions.”² Myth contains truth in the form of an image. This is that wherein resides the “fantastic,” imaginative aspect of myth which is often stressed as what distinguishes it most from the simple observation of reality. However all of reality is fully in view in this optics; the whole of reality for myth is epic narration. Consequently the “imaginative” flows over into reality and reality back into the imaginative without a clear-cut line of demarcation. *Mystery is everywhere* in myth, it does not have a special and particular place. Not only is mystery not a specific category that would be differentiated from something else, it is a general character of the universe, a pre-comprehension of the universe as uncontrolled and uncontrollable. There is “meaning” in everything recounted in myth, but this meaning is never an idea that could be formulated on its own, it is something that remains indeterminate. Myth is made up of presentiments and suggestions; it does not say anything definite and universal.
2. Myth does not differentiate between past and present, between imaginative and real, it has a lack of distance between subject and object. Yet, precisely because it still moves on the ground of non-differentiation, on the ground of something older that absorbs all determination, myth is eminently suitable for the fantastic projection of human desires. It thus also lends itself to anthropogenic illusions. The oldest desires of man appear in myth in the shape of realities that, in most cases, are not even human but super-human.
3. On the other hand this function of myth indicates a deep pessimism in regards to man. Myth emphasizes the passivity of man and his ineffaceable consciousness of guilt, from which he cannot be redeemed by anyone other than the gods themselves. Mythical wisdom is the wisdom of suffering that teaches men to endure their terrible, irrevocable, inescapable fate.

The understanding of being oriented to the past is therefore necessarily a particular form of decadence on the verge of awakening. It is characterized by an absolute unity of non-objectivity and objectivity, with a preponderance of the non-objective that only takes the *form* of the objective—the form of factuality, of representation and narration as a series of representations. Man is delivered to the mercy of this non-objective in the form of the objective. He cannot come to terms with himself, he cannot affirm his freedom or aspire to a meaning of his own. All meaning is given once and for all—it is an extra-human meaning that he can only, at most, anticipate. Nothing paralyzes

more, nothing bewitches more, nothing has for him as total a sense of condemnation more than this non-objectivity in an objective form: non-objectivity confronts him with the absolute, but in that this non-objectivity takes objective form, thus characterized by universality, he sees nothing of the distinction, nor the refuge for his possible freedom. Therefore myth is not nihilistic, but it annuls *man* with the conjoined forces of non-objectivity and objectivity.

Myth ignores human freedom, except as a metaphor or among semi-divine beings. Homeric myth attains its apogee in the person of the demigod Achilles, who is actually free in the sense that he determines his own life through a choice among a number of given possibilities.

By contrast, in the conception determined by the primacy of the future, man is free: it is he who decides his life by choices that are always possible, and if he errs in making the right decision, other possibilities always remain open to him. The absolute weight of the past is thereby abolished, but this conception is no less historical than the one oriented to the past. Just as with the conception oriented to the past, so here too is the knowledge of an absolute to which things and all other realities are subordinated, and man is not granted the premier place, the highest rank in the order of beings.³

The conception in which the future takes priority can be realized only as *faith*. Faith however is the belief that no decision is ultimate and irrevocable. Faith is essentially the belief in life. And to believe in life is essentially to believe in eternal life.

It is evident that eternal life is not simply a life that continues infinitely. The belief in the continuation of this kind is contained in the mythical world, as the continual repetition of that which was or is already. Eternal duration believes in a particular value of that which has been already and in its right to repeat itself. The conception oriented to the future believes, on the contrary, in the importance and the necessity to abolish that which “is,” in the possibility of its being shaken by what “is not.” Thus faith is simultaneously the belief in (eternal) life and the belief in that which (in the present sense of the term) “is not.”

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However, what are the reciprocal relations of all these temporal structures? Which of them is predominant in the universe? What is the significance of the plurality of temporal structures?

Assuming the predominance of the temporal world, succession would not be annihilated, but it would be nothing more than formal. Concrete evolution, history, becoming would be relegated to static structures that would be *de facto* “contemporary,” because external to all succession. But succession itself, consisting of nothing but a merely formal structure, would also lose all significance.

For historical structures to have a meaning, historical time needs to be a reality in the same way as the temporal world—this indeed is the condition for the possibility of meaningful historical structures. It does not suffice to consider the world only as a structure; one needs at the same time to see it as a becoming, not only in the formal sense of a series of ever-new moments, but also on the level of content.

This however is only possible on the condition that reality (at least for us) is not closed, that it does not form a completed whole that we would be capable of canvassing in one view, even if only “in principle,” in broad strokes. It is necessary that as a part of this reality there is also a being, or several beings, who, essentially, base their lives on openness, who live and experience openness in relating not just to the universe,

but also to that negativity which exceeds and overcomes the objective totality of the universe.

Modern science (microphysics) has shown that the spatiotemporal framework is insufficient to grasp elementary natural processes. The “temporal world” in the sense of Jacoby is not universal.⁴ Our analysis would suggest that there is another crack becoming visible at the other end of nature, in man, through a fissure opening up in the human experience of time that is based on a relation to what is beyond objectivity.

Yet the “temporal world” of Jacoby is also in contradiction with the causal structures of the world, as analyzed by Hans Reichenbach.⁵ He shows that the deterministic hypothesis (which excludes an essential difference between the temporal dimensions) is an extrapolation exceeding the limits of the “implicative form of the causal hypothesis”⁶ (if A, then B) which, as such, cannot guarantee the perfect fulfillment of A—a condition indispensable for the fulfillment of scientific requirements of precision.

The primacy of the present—the emphasis on the present dimension and the re-absorption of all other temporal dimensions into the present moment—leads to a conception that has found its clearest and most complete expression in Jacoby’s metaphysical objectivism. But this objectivist and metaphysical conception is, without any doubt, a-historical. Therefore, immediately there emerges the great metaphysical problem concerning the meaning of history: does history have an actual meaning? Is there indeed something like a historical being and a historicity of being, or is history a “pure phenomenon”?

Myth and faith both allege from the very beginning that the historicity of being is not pure and simple semblance but that it belongs to the essence of the universe of being. Of course, myth and faith each emphasize a different dimension and hence a different trait of his historicity. Myth sees the real activity outside of man, what remains to him is only pathos and guilt. Gods are the *dramatis personae*, all possibilities and all solutions rest in their hands. Faith emphasizes that the *dramatis personae* include something extra-human as well as man himself. Far from being a simple object whose only role in the drama is confined to pathos, man freely co-determines his existence. This and nothing else is the meaning of “synergism,” which is not a fantasy or the construction of some modern and fashionable philosophy, but an essential property of faith and its “conviction” regarding human freedom. Thus the content of human faith is the “redemption” of man. God and man act together in the redemption of man—a redemption that can only happen with the sacrificing of everything in man that cleaves to the relative meaning of beings and, above all, to *his own* relative being.

Both of these two conceptions leave man outside the center of the universe of being. It was only at a very particular moment in the history of thought that man could become the center. This moment has already been characterized: it was the moment when modern science, backed by its practical successes, spread the conception of being determined by the primacy of the present so forcefully that one began to take it for absolute; but when also metaphysics, as a doctrine of the whole, still had not been fully forgotten and pushed aside. Out of this arose a singular version of modern hypercivilization, in which man was put in the place of the absolute, yet man as historical man, that is, man freed from his individual egoism in the name of something larger, but something that was once again empirical, namely his social being.

At that moment it was possible to believe that all dimensions of time could indeed be reduced to that of the present. It was possible to believe that all previous human

struggles—struggles for the future, for his freedom, struggles between myth and faith—are thoroughly overcome, that they have been settled forever by a kind of disenchanting everydayness, a wedge that has been driven between both historical dimensions. It was possible to believe that myth and faith are, in fact, manifestations of un-freedom—un-freedom obviously taken differently than in relation to the absolute, that is, as un-freedom within the frame of the relative. Myth and faith would here allegedly serve as fantastical projections of man's factual and relative un-freedom, un-freedom with regard to the things of nature and society, to the extra-human and the human world. Yet man has allegedly learned how to master his practical and relative un-freedom, so that he has become factually free, master of nature and society as well as the creator of meaning. Consequently, if there is any meaning in speaking about the absolute, then this absolute can only be man, since there is only a human, historical absolute. (The point in which this tendency culminates is reached in the idea of the dialectic, with its intertwining of historicity with the idea of the system and the overcoming of historical dimensions by the dimension of a present "eternity.")

This whole complex of ideas is characteristic above all of the philosophy of the nineteenth century that represents the final phase of metaphysics. However, it was in the course of this century that it became clear that none of its preconditions had been met: relative meaning turned out to be non self-sufficient, science for example was unable to actually capture the entirety of the universe, human action could solve partial difficulties, but was incapable of mastering the universe, and so it was also not possible to fully reduce temporal dimensions to the present. Science itself, the organ of the relative, correlatively points to the absolute and thereby serves as its indirect proof; it distances itself from that kind of objectivistic metaphysics with which modern philosophy had wanted it to be identified. Thus it becomes obvious that the aspirations of modern philosophy—the human being as the absolute, absolute empowerment over being in its universal extension—are impossible, that they are impossible because they are just as incompatible with the essence of science (1) as they are with the essence of philosophy itself (2), an impossibility demonstrated by the philosophical analysis of the essence of time and its dimensions.

Thus the two great syntheses of modern metaphysics—a perfected objectivism as well as a perfected subjectivism—fail. Man once again finds himself in an uncontrolled framework that he cannot transcend because this framework is itself what makes all his movements of transcendence possible. It follows that the dream of man's absolute "freedom" within the relative, a relative elevated to the human absolute, is a mere illusion: we are not and we will never be the masters of creation and the creators of meaning. What we can do at most is give meaning to our own life. We can, to be sure, always move further, extend and surmount our limitations, but at the limit of our possibilities we again find the very same possibilities with which man had been faced at the very beginning—the possibilities of myth and faith. All this does not mean that the historical distance we have covered has been simply a vicious circle. On the contrary, man has won along the way the faculty of *differentiation*. We can no longer relegate all truths to the same level, we can no longer close our eyes before the fact that neither mystery nor objectivity are omnipresent, and that myth and faith are not on a par with science, whereas philosophy in turn cannot be assimilated to any of them.⁷

Notes

- 1 From here on, the text continues from Patočka's manuscripts.—Eds.
- 2 “In those long conversations that the soul has with itself in its solitudes, mute and secretly given answers precede the questions. The answers are eternal, the questions are waiting for their time, in order to be clothed by light and sound.” Otokar Březina, “Tajemné v umění” [Mystery in art], in *Hudba pramenů a jiné eseje* (Prague: Odeon, 1989), 9.—Eds.
- 3 The highest position in being might be allocated to man only in a view oriented towards the present, and only as long as it still preserves a memory of the absolute, i.e. within the metaphysical conception. However, a conception related to the present should in fact not know any absolute, nor any essential differences between different “modes” of being, no “higher” or “lower” beings: everything is “given” in the same way.
- 4 Cf. Günther Jacoby, *Allgemeine Ontologie der Wirklichkeit*, vol. 2 (Halle: Niemeyer, 1955), 575.—Eds.
- 5 Hans Reichenbach, “The Causal Structure of the World and the Difference between Past and Future” (1925), in *Selected Writings: 1909–1953*, vol. 2, ed. Maria Reichenbach and Robert S. Cohen (Dordrecht: Springer, 1978), 81–119.—Eds.
- 6 Reichenbach, “The Causal Structure,” 81.—Eds.
- 7 That myth is a typical phenomenon of being directed to the past is implied by Romantic thinkers, especially Bachofen (as interpreted by Bäumler). For faith as a future-oriented conception, cf. Kierkegaard's *Concept of Anxiety*, [*Begrebet Angest* (Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gad, 1933[1844]); English: *The Concept of Anxiety*, trans. Reidar Thomte (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980)—Eds.]. Historically elaborated by Rudolf Bultmann, *Das Urchristentum im Rahmen der antiken Religionen* (Zürich: Artemis, 1949) [English: *Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting*, trans. R.H. Fuller (New York: Meridian, 1956)—Eds.].

2 The Dangers of Technicization in Science according to E. Husserl and the Essence of Technology as Danger according to M. Heidegger (Varna Lecture, 1973)¹

Jan Patočka

This is the translation of a 1973 lecture given by Jan Patočka in Varna, Bulgaria, on Husserl, Heidegger, and technological civilization. It originally appeared in *Jan Patočka: Philosophy and Selected Writings*, trans. and ed. Erazim Kohák, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 327–339.

Keywords: Husserl; Heidegger; technology; sacrifice

I

There are philosophical topics that can occupy a thinker for years and still their deepest significance can become clear even to him only afterwards—though then they can cast a new light on all of his previous conceptual efforts. We encounter an instance of this in Edmund Husserl, whose long career as a thinker devoted to the foundations of philosophy as a rigorous science went full circle from an initial concern with the relation of dator intuition to meaning isolated from intuition until it finally came upon the root of the crisis of the sciences in the draining away of meaning in fully formalized modern natural science, a crisis that in the end endangers not only science itself but all of our spiritual life and with it even our life itself. From their initial constitution, science and scientific philosophy represented an instance of life in truth and responsibility. Once they found themselves in a state of crisis, humankind lost the basis of a life based on insight.

Husserl's entire first work, *The Philosophy of Arithmetic*, revolves around the relation between genuine and nongenuine conceptions of number and around proving that arithmetic is an instrument reflecting our limited seeing ability, its goal being to substitute entailment for a direct grasp of multiplicities and their relations. If that is true, arithmetic could be based on the fact of limited human grasp of the ground and would really be nothing more than a gigantic technical tool. The task of the philosophy of arithmetic would then be to bring us to a clear awareness of its foundations in direct intuition. The quest for discovering a justification of the claim of mathematical infinity in finite seeing—that is something that, for all the profound differences, links Husserl's first work with his unfinished late work about the crisis of the sciences. For what constitutes the sole ground of dator intuition—which is the ultimate recourse of all truth claims—is, in the late Husserl, precisely the finite world of our life, defying idealization. Between these two stages of Husserl's scholarly career, however, there lies

the research in which one of the important themes that constitute the originality of phenomenological investigation is the relation between intention and its counterpart in seeing. Only so was it possible to develop the newly conceived investigation of reason which investigates degrees of evidence and their object correlates on a broader basis. In the course of this investigation, whose methodological apparatus and basic themes we need not explain here, it becomes evident that the meaning of higher-level objectivities such as judgments, multiplicities, theories, classes, stemming from our spontaneous mental activity, depends for the most part on operations with what is given; and in no case are these objects and objective contents as nonproblematic as they are treated in scientific practice. Thus a theory guided by a will to radical clarity absolutely cannot approve of them on the basis of their theoretical and practical successes, since just the significance of such successes remains initially in darkness. We have even to say that these exceptional successes carry with them the danger that they will be accepted nonproblematically and uncritically, for successes are most tangible in the realm of the application of mathematics to nature and just these applications give the impression that here we really find ourselves on the level of reality itself, with the directly given human context explained away for the most part as its “appearance.”

Husserl then seeks to show by a rigorous investigation that modern science, animated by a will to universal rationality, develops a formal mathematics that makes possible first an arithmetization of geometry, then the indirect mathematization of qualitative contents and a project of precise causality: in the course of it, each step achieves an exact and universal determination of experiential givens, reflected in practice in precise predictability, but at the same time each step brings about a special draining away of meaning because the procedures used in dealing with formulas are of a formal nature. With that such science becomes a *technê*, the art of a precise calculation of nature—which would not be bad in itself, were it done fully consciously, if humans were aware, at each step, of just what they are doing, cloaking the primordially given world, subjective and unprecise, in an ideational garb which transposes it into a precise universe of truths for all and so makes it calculable. The erroneous impression that we are thereby also reaching truth and ultimate true being in itself arises because the fundamental tools of rationality, mathematical concepts and theories, were from the start of this process of rationalization taken over from an unquestioned tradition, technically evaluated while the question of their meaning and origin remained forgotten; therewith we leaped over the entire realm of the working rationality which constitutes the transition from our subjectively unprecise life-world, operating within a natural inductivity, to the objectifying idealizations and so to being the truth for all.

Accordingly, we need to seek the root of the spiritual crisis in the draining away and shift of meaning brought about by the inevitable but falsely interpreted technicization—and here what can help is a radicalization of rationality striving for direct insight, embodied in the new phenomenologically proceeding philosophy and especially in the philosophical discipline devoted to the tasks of our life and to those activities which aim and lead to rigorous science and rigorous induction.

Heidegger's assessment of the situation shares many particulars with Husserl's, for instance the stress on the technical traits in the foundations of modern natural science. However, we believe that it differs from Husserl's view fundamentally in that Heidegger takes the draining of meaning which he decries for an inevitable part of the new meaning of being, characteristic of our time. In Husserl, technicization is

something negative, a certain *steresis*, a lack of meaning which can be in principle eliminated by greater attention to the observed continuities of meaning. A broader foundation of a new level, that of the effective transcendental subjectivity, could overcome this state of affairs. For Heidegger, things are otherwise. Precisely the technical procedures of certain and precise calculation belong to the modern way of uncovering being. A recourse to a putatively ultimate effective subjectivity as the final source of meaning inevitably transforms this source once more into a specific existent of its own kind, stripping it of the role of the originator of all meaning and the beginning of all clarity. A recourse to our life-world makes sense as a stage in the recourse to absolute subjectivity, but it is not radical enough to include in its field of vision that “within” man which is responsible for meaning, for clarity and truth.

Thus Heidegger begins where Husserl’s analysis ends, with the recognition that modern science has the character of a *technê*, yet science uncovers being precisely because it is a *technê*, in its very essence. It does so, to be sure, in a special manner, specifically, but, unlocking the immediately given with respect to a certain utility, it transforms what it thus unlocks, assembles the product and places it again at our disposal for further use. This procedure does not simply bring our life-world into a relation to a universal level of formal generalities, but rather it is something that generates such a level for the sake of transforming and assuring a supply of materials; this procedure brings about even a transformation of our very life-world: it is being rebuilt and transformed in its factual state and meaning. The draining away of meaning, for instance, is here carried over from the sphere of meanings into the realm of reality itself. A process of universal uncovering is set in motion which will pass over nothing: both things and people receive their “meaning,” that is, their place within the process. All and every one is set to a certain task, arranged for and placed on order. All and every one becomes a mere resource available for possible and actual orders. With that not only the autonomous nature of things but even the objective nature of the objective begins to vanish—the relation to the self-presenting I from which we cannot derive the characteristic of “being-on-order.” Thus apparently autonomous units are integrated into a vast network of relations in which they function rather than dwell, have an effect rather than repose, though in this sense they are: the very meaning of their being has been transformed.

Where, though, is any danger in all this? This great transformation, after all, can be viewed from its positive side. We have achieved greater transparency and manipulability of the world around us than ever before. For the first time in history, man has become truly universal, has become a planetary being. He can order virtually everything, at least as long as he can overlook that he himself, both as an individual and as the bearer of a certain role in a social context, now belongs among the resources that are “on order.” We do not see the great danger in, as is often said, “technology enslaving man,” as if we knew what man is, what his freedom and slavery mean. We discover the danger if we presentify for ourselves once more the Husserlian starting point of our reflections. Husserl saw the crisis of humankind in the contemporary man standing in danger of losing the dimension of a life in truth. For Heidegger, however, truth in the traditional sense—truth of judgments, as rightness—is dependent on a more basic truth which makes the truth of judgments possible by opening up a clearing in which what is can first appear. This clearing of appearance is not itself visible but enters in only in that which appears to us: it casts light but itself draws back because only so can it make possible the original opening up of truth without itself becoming one of the

things that appear among others. Modern technology, however, is, as we have seen, an uncovering by its very essence, a process of veracity in the sense of making truth possible. At the same time, technology as an agent generating change shows itself to be historical by its very nature as every profound manifestation of the truth. It stands out, however, among all the various manifestations of truth by setting in motion a universal uncovering which has not even an indirect and objectified awareness and knowledge of the ground of the uncovering itself. For this uncovering, by its very conception of what is, closes itself up against all that claims to transcend its sphere. For nothing but just the calculable resources that are “on order” can penetrate the unitary network of technically uncovered reality, including all that can be objectively grounded, showing no lacunae.

And therein precisely lies the danger. The uncovering that prevails at the essential core of technology necessarily loses sight of uncovering itself, concealing the essential core of truth in an unfamiliar way and so closing man’s access to what he himself is—a being capable of standing in an original relation to the truth. Among all the securing, calculating, and using of raw materials, that which makes all this possible is lost from view—man henceforth knows only individual, practical truths, not the truth.

If, though, we will but reflect philosophically on the reality that the technical world of supplies and orders arises and persists only on the basis of a certain mode of revealing, that in its essential core it *is* this way of revealing, we can glimpse a “saving” dimension: nothing shows as penetratingly the decisive power of original clarity, of the fundamental occurring of truth, as just the modern technology with its all-seizing and all-embracing network of orders and with its power of transforming meaning and so transforming things and people. And if, furthermore, we also glimpse the historical character of original truth, we cannot but grasp the hope that precisely this understanding of being, revealed at the essential core of technology, could be transformed once more, in such a way that the original clarity would turn again toward man and would speak to him. A mere possibility, however, will not solve the problem, and so Heidegger turns to reflect on the meaning of *technê* and so to the dimension of art.

Man, to be sure, cannot bring about something on the order of a fundamental transformation of the primordial clarity of understanding of being, since that clarity is no thing, since it lies abysmally below all interference and all manipulation and cannot be drawn, even minimally, into the sphere of what is “on order.” We could thus have no recourse but to see the possibility of change, hoping and waiting—if the very fact that the original clarity has been denied us did not suggest to us how to seek a way out of the purely technical world free of otherworldly illusions and of the arrogance of conceit.

The technical world is a world devoid of a metaphysics in the sense of a duplication of the world, in the sense of projecting the ground of the process of appearing upon the very limit that which appears. That ground refuses to yield to us. Yet it is already present in the way it resists us. It is not present in philosophical reflection which uncovers only the possibility of its coming but can bring about no transformation of the understanding of being. It is not in art, or not only in art alone, since even though art provides a profound insight into being and offers consolation, it is hardly able to undertake a profound transformation of the original truth.

It is not man who, in modern technology, rules over nature, the earth and the planets; rather, the essential core of technology, the primordial truth as it refuses to yield to us, is what rules over all that is. As refusing to yield: for it remains concealed in its rule. It is as if it “did not want” to be with us. With it there came to us a certain disfavor which we cannot deflect with any measure, through any effort at arranging ourselves in the domain of what is “on order.”

Can we, however, understand this great upheaval which, historically, manifests itself in the readiness of ever so many to sacrifice themselves for the sake of a different, better world simply in terms of a will to arrange oneself within in what is manageable, within our power and calculation? Is it not a misunderstanding to explain this upheaval with the help of the conceptual apparatus of the technical, as an anticipatory grasp of what is to be managed? Such a self-explanation surely comes easily: there is, after all, nothing beside the inner-worldly contents. And yet perhaps precisely here a transformation of our relation to what is primordial may be being prepared, because a sacrifice means precisely drawing back from the realm of what can be managed and ordered, and an explicit relation to that which, not being anything actual itself, serves as the ground of the appearing of all that is active and in that sense rules over all. Here Being already “presents” itself to us, not in a refusal but explicitly. To be sure, only a man capable of experiencing, in something so apparently negative, the coming of Being, only as he begins to sense that this lack opens access to what is richest, to that which bestows everything and presents all as gift to all, only then can he begin to experience this favor. And he who takes this path gives to the others not simply something that can be placed “on order,” though he might attempt so to treat it, but rather, first of all, this glimpse of a reversal, a new primordial truth. Just perhaps, this reversal might also prove a ground for a link with an earlier manifestation of that which saves, though, to be sure, this time that which saves is free of anything otherworldly and so of any metaphysical leftovers as well, and so remains also indebted to the technological world in this sense.

We shall seek to clarify this suggestion further in a special section to follow. Now, though, we need to ask just wherein consists on the one hand a certain agreement, and on the other the difference, between the two thinkers who called themselves and considered themselves phenomenologists (in Heidegger’s case, at least for a time).

The focus of the agreements, it seems, is that technology represents deep and evident dangers that must be carefully differentiated, and that only such a differentiation will allow us to penetrate the problem itself. For while speaking of technology, our two thinkers pay no attention to its cultural consequences which are usually the topic of discussion, not permitting, in their ambiguity a clear assessment of the overall situation. Quite the contrary, both focus on a central point in which the essential core of technology touches upon the essential core of man, and for both this point is *the relation of the human being to truth*, a relation of which man alone among all the beings we know is capable. In this respect both thinkers see the essential core of technology not as actually a disaster but still as a danger. Not technology as such but technology in its relation to that in man which is capable of truth represents a danger that needs to be blocked—technology itself need not be opposed, limited, or eliminated. We need also to note that, in Husserl, given the way he conceives of the topic of his work—as the crisis of the sciences—technology does not come to the fore in its full extent; however, since for this thinker the crisis of science implies a crisis of humanity, it is clear that technology plays an important role, actually taking the initiative, in this

crisis. Thus the difference between the two thinkers must lie in the realm of the conception of truth and of its relation to the essential core of man.

Still, before we turn to explicating the differences, we need to note one more agreement which will come in handy in presenting them. Both thinkers seek to reach a more original relation to the truth than the one at our disposal when we speak of the truth as of the rightness of a judgment.

Husserl seeks to base this more fundamental sense of truth, on which our worldly strivings are grounded, systematically on a specially purified transcendental consciousness which sees through all the “prejudices” of ordinary reality without sharing in them and which can see through them precisely because it does not. However, according to Husserl, our most basic prejudices have to do precisely with the being of objects and of our own objectified subjectivity. This subjectivity needs to be worked clear of this entanglement with the help of an abstention from judgment whose possibilities we had not suspected before. Thus the old thesis of the primacy of spiritual being (or better, of its precedence) is to be demonstrated in a new way.

For all the radical nature of Husserl’s conception of consciousness, marked, in contrast with the traditional, by its breadth, attributing to consciousness not only the activity, but also the passivity, of a wide range of intentional achievements, we must nonetheless ask whether this conception of the fundamental role does not already contain a certain decision concerning the being of consciousness which grounds consciousness in a certain contemplative conception of faith, conceiving of the “faith in the world” as a “thesis” which, like any thesis, might not be a thematic judgment but is still a theoretical act. Along these lines we also need to ask whether the finitude of being human has its basis only in the theoretical sphere of belief (still inadequately analyzed) or, far more deeply, in the very being of this being, and whether we might not set out from a far more radical analysis of being human as an unlocking of a relation to the world. Is a relation to the world really something like a universal presupposition which can be suspended under certain circumstances, setting out of action even the trait of finitude, without affecting the essential core of the functioning of consciousness? Is it really possible to shift this way from a psychological to a transcendental consciousness so that, in spite of the change of the presupposition, perception would remain what it is and so would all other acts? Or does finitude penetrate the very content of our being so deeply that it constitutes the fundamental content of our being in all its moments and expressions? So conceived, Heidegger’s phenomenology of finitude would represent a fundamental (negative) response to Husserl’s idealistic conception of the phenomenological reduction. Henceforth we would need to make not a consciousness, characterized by the subject’s relation to the object, but rather an understanding human existence, finite throughout, the starting point for phenomenological analyses.

From the fundamental difference we have described it is evident that the two thinkers, even though they both began with technology, inevitably present not only a different diagnosis of the crisis of humanity but a different therapy as well. For Husserl, the dominance of the technological which he traces and analyzes as typical in science, means that dator perception, perceptual experience as the source of truth, is being pushed back into the background, something he then seeks to prevent by appropriate theoretical measures. For Heidegger, by contrast, the crisis is one of the very essential core of man which understands being and makes truth possible. Just like every theoretical inversion, this one, too, is rooted primarily in a certain transformation of

being. For that reason the crisis is far more deeply rooted and can only be approached with far greater difficulty than by a radicalized reflection. In conceiving of the crisis as a crisis of being, there is a certain parallel between Heidegger and Marxism, even though Heidegger does not trace being human in its social objectification and does not tend to believe that it could be grasped and exhausted with the help of historical dialectics. Heidegger's conception of history, insofar as it exists at all, appears to us to revolve around the "rare and clear" decisive turns of history. Even though it often seems that in his thought history, and European history in particular, takes place in the realm of thought in which the event of "being's destiny" is being fulfilled, his starting point—human existence, understanding being—is in no way tied to this realm since understanding being takes place as much as in the sphere of nonunderstanding as in that of explicit conceptual understanding, in the sphere of needs as well as in the sphere of spiritual creativity. In every such realm a certain more primordial relation to being and so a more primordial truth is possible: history however, follows no "logic of being," either empirically observable or conceptually construable. However, because being itself is primordially finite but, equally primordially, has and must have a certain dimension of the hidden, history, following "the destiny of being," cannot be a gradual development. It can only be an ever-repeated rising out of fallenness, though that fallenness, characterized by a loss of primordial relation to the truth, might hide beneath the mask of progress, of enlightenment and power (which, however, does not mean that these phenomena are identical with it). It appears that it is such a rising, such a turn of history which is not dependent on arbitrary human will but also is not independent of grasping and accepting our won finitude, is what is at stake where our present technological world becomes genuinely a philosophical question.

II

Perhaps we could append the following comment to the foregoing:

How can that saving dimension become effectively a saving one, that is, how can it stand out of forgetting and manifest its power in history? It would seem that in a technically dominated world there exists no possibility for the essential core of technology to be understood in its inmost sense and become manifest. And yet there are certain phenomena of the technically dominated world which seem to pose the question of whether a basic transformation of man's relation to truth is not being prepared in them, a transformation which might lead from truth as correctness, which is all that the rule of technology requires, to a more primordial form of truth.

Because the technical age is one of calculable resources and their use which can be "on order," and because that age seeks to isolate and squeeze out of everything and everyone the utmost possible performance, it is also an age of an unaccustomed unfolding of power. The most powerful means of its escalation, however, proved to be contradiction, dissension and conflict. In conflict it becomes especially clear that man as such is not understood as dominant but is included as something that is "on order." Yet it is a fact nonetheless that countless people have willingly entered into such conflicts, offering themselves as instruments of the accumulation, escalation, and discharge of power, fully aware that thereby they either sacrifice themselves or are sacrificed in it. What does the sacrifice mean here, and why are we speaking of sacrifice at all and not simply of resources, of their utilization and consumption?

The idea of sacrifice is mythico-religious in origin. Even there, where it has already been obscured and covered over by later motivations, there speaks in it the will to commit oneself, by self-abnegation and self-castration, to something higher and, as a result of a reciprocity so provoked, to bind that something higher to oneself and be assured of its power and favor. The paradoxical conception here is that man gains by a voluntary loss. We speak of parents sacrificing for a child and so for further continuation of their life-line, of combatants sacrificing themselves for the preservation of the society and the state, and so forth. Within the meaning of the technological view of the world, however, there really are no distinctions in the order of being; rather, all hierarchy is arbitrarily subjective, and practically there are only quantitative differences of power. From this viewpoint, to continue speaking of sacrifices is an inconsistency and a prejudice.

In a sacrifice, however, the idea of a difference of order is contained in the true sense of the word. A religious sacrifice presupposes a difference of order between divine and nondivine being. A sacrifice for something or for someone presupposes the idea of a difference of order between human being and the being of things, and within the sphere of the human in turn possibilities of intensification or of failing of being. A person does not sacrifice something that is indifferent to him, something that does not concern him: a genuine sacrifice is always a sacrifice either in an absolute sense or in the sense of sacrificing that which intensifies our being, rendering it rich, content-full, fulfilled.

We are wont to speak of sacrifices of human lives exacted by a natural catastrophe, with an undertone of a distinction between human and inanimate being; likewise when economic losses are described as “sacrifices” exacted by a tornado, a feeling of this distinction lingers in the background. Conversely, we speak of someone having been sacrificed in cold blood when some member of the order of human beings is dealt with as something that a man possesses as an object and “sacrifices” in the interest of self-preservation or development. In short, speaking of sacrifice points to an entirely different understanding of being than the one exclusively attested by the technological age. If people have the feeling that in their mind’s eye they or others sacrifice themselves or are sacrificed, they submit quite naturally to such a self-understanding—or, better, an understanding of the human mode of being.

The experience of a sacrifice, however, is now one of the most powerful experiences of our epoch, so powerful and definitive that humankind for the most part has not managed to come to terms with it and flees from it precisely into a technical understanding of being which promises to exclude this experience and for which there exists nothing like a sacrifice, only utilization of resources. Revolutionary and war-like conflicts of our century were born of and borne by the spirit of a technical domination of the world; but those who had to bear the cost were in no case a mere store of disposable resources, but something quite irreducible to that. That precisely comes to the fore when we speak of sacrifices.

Thus sacrifices represent a persistent presence of something that does not appear in the calculations of the technological world. In order to escape their reproach, the postwar period turned to technology, and that in a way which not only guarantees this forgetting but can actually intensify technologicization through conflicts, for while one part of the world has concentrated on increasing the possibilities of supply and so committed itself to the process of consumption, the other seeks to continue in conflict and so understands and utilizes technology differently but yields to it no less essentially;

and since in this respect the two stand in a disharmonic and conflicting unity, the process of technological domination of the planet shows a constant increase.

This is not in any sense to deprecate the economic miracle of the postwar period or to overlook the social benefits which are a part of it and not comparable with anything that preceded it. However, we believe that we also must not overlook the fact that therein the “human” assumes a form which may be capable of increasing productivity and its consequences but is not capable of understanding it, and that sacrificial victims, wherever they appear, relate to us as beings who essentially care about the mode of their being.

Under these circumstances it may be important that there are people who have undertaken the repetition of the experience of the sacrificial victim, thereby prying it out of forgetting. Here it also seems most important that such repetition comes about remarkably frequently from those who are known as the protagonists of the technical world. On the one hand this makes it evident that in their case no metaphysico-mythological remnants are responsible for it, on the other hand that in their human experience of the world they have come up against a real limit of the technical.

The repetition of the experience of the sacrificial victim bears with it certain distinctive traits which are capable of making it continuous with a certain transformation of the relation to the truth.

The sacrificial victims of the wars that either were world revolutions or were linked with them, as well as the sacrificial victims of the technological age and of its stupendous possibilities, lived in the same naive experience of the sacrifice which does presuppose a certain understanding of the specifically human mode of being yet functions exclusively in the mode of a “preliminary” understanding. Human being in its distinctiveness does not therewith become in any way explicit. That functioning produces the sacrificial victim in a concrete, almost, so to speak, an objectified sense—a certain exchange of one entity for another. What stands out explicitly here are things which stand in a hierarchical ordering that appears not at all arbitrary to those who sacrifice themselves for them, but which do not allow the basis of their hierarchical ordering to become manifest.

The repetition of sacrifice presupposes a voluntary self-sacrifice, just as in the case of the naive sacrifice, but not only that. For if in this repetition the central point is the overcoming of the technical understanding of being which is the basis for the nonacknowledgement and vanity of sacrifice, then the naive stance with respect to sacrifice will no longer do at all. For that reason, in the case of the repeated sacrifice that for which the sacrifice is made does not stand out concretely in the foreground. The entire mode of acting needs to be understood as a protest, not against individual concrete experiences but, in principle, against the understanding by which they are borne. From this perspective, the repeated sacrifice is something no longer concerned with any positive content. As in every radical sacrifice, the agent’s own finitude is naturally in view here. Not, to be sure, as a topic of meditation or reflection, since that is not the point here, as much as the opening up of a certain stultified situation. Those who thus sacrifice themselves do not avoid finitude, nor do they seek admiration on that account. Without ignoring or making light of certain concrete historical social goals, they have another focus. In giving themselves for something, they dedicate themselves to that of which it cannot be said that it “is” something, or something objective. The sacrifice becomes meaningful as the making explicit of the authentic relation between the essential core of man and the ground of understanding which makes him human and which is radically finite, that is, which is no reason for being, no cause, no force. Out of just this situation

stems the need for man to take the part of this ground and to commit himself for it, thereby, however, first winning his humanity in the true sense of the word. For, considered in itself, the ground of understanding is no force; it is, quite the contrary, something like a light or a clearing which makes manifestation possible. However, in man, whose being is essentially elevated by this ground, it does become a force and, as the essential core of technology shows, an immense and terrifying force, which, though, might be transformed into a saving one through sacrifice.

In this way, sacrifice acquires a remarkably radical and paradoxical form. It is not a sacrifice for something or for someone, even though in a certain sense it is a sacrifice for everything and for all. In a certain essential sense, it is a sacrifice for nothing, if thereby we mean that which is no existing particular.

Such an understanding of sacrifice might basically be considered that in which Christianity differs from those religions which conceived of the divine always as a power and a force, and of a sacrifice as the activity which places this power under an obligation. Christianity, as we might perhaps think, placed at the center a radical sacrifice in the sense of the interpretation suggested above and rested its cause on the maturity of the human being. The divine in the sense of the suprahuman, the suprahuman in the sense of turning away from ordinary everydayness, rests precisely in the radicalness of the sacrifice. Perhaps it is in this sense that we need to seek the fully ripened form of demythologized Christianity.

Whatever, though, might be the case in this respect, it seems to us that radical sacrifice is the experience of our time and of the time just passed, an experience which might lead to a transformation in the way we understand both life and the world—a transformation capable of bringing our outwardly rich yet essentially impoverished age to face itself, free of romantic underestimation, and thereby to surpass it.

Translator's Note

Patočka takes advantage of the fact that in both Czech and German the same word (*obět*, *Opfer*) is used to speak of a victim (as of an earthquake) and of a sacrifice (as a religious sacrifice). This enables him to claim that technologicization claims many victims/sacrifices. I have tried to suggest this by resorting to the term sacrificial victim. However, Patočka's point does not depend on the pun but rather on the fact that even in the technological age so many people experience their own victimization as a sacrifice and the victimization of others as their "being sacrificed on the altar of Progress." As long as that is so, nihilism has not prevailed.

Notes

- 1 Editors' Note: © 1989 by The University of Chicago. The translation reproduced here was introduced by the following Translator's Note: "Die Gefahren der Technisierung in der Wissenschaft bei E. Husserl und das Wesen der Technik als Gefahr bei M. Heidegger," prepared in German for presentation at the World Philosophical Congress in Varna, Bulgaria, in September 1973, and in part presented there, but omitted from the *Acta* of the congress. A Czech version, 'Nebezpečí technizace ve vědě u E. Husserla a bytostné jádro techniky jako nebezpečí u M. Heideggera,' appeared in *Svědectví* (Paris) 16, no. 62 (1980): 262–72. The present translation is based on a comparison of the typescript of the German original on file in the Patočka Archive of the Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen with the Czech version."

3 Jan Patočka and the Sacrificial Experience

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This paper asks why Patočka opts for the term sacrifice when accounting for an experience in which man, the operator of phenomenality, comes to seize the meaning of his historic situation. Drawing on the anthropological definition of sacrifice, aligned with Patočka's endorsement of Heidegger's diagnosis of our time as dominated by the technical understanding of being, we try to understand what the mythical partitioning of the world could mean in our epoch.

Keywords: sacrifice; *Gestell*; movement; actualization

I

The notion of sacrifice does not emerge in Patočka until his writings from the 1970s, which are concerned mostly with the *present*, that is, with offering a diagnosis of his own times. In 1973 Patočka gave a lecture in Varna in which he seems to endorse Heidegger's views concerning the essence of our epoch—an epoch characterized as *Gestell*. It is in this context that Patočka introduces the idea of sacrifice, of which he says:

The experience of a sacrifice, however, is now one of the most powerful experiences of our epoch, so powerful and definitive that humankind for the most part has not managed to come to terms with it and flees from it precisely into a technical understanding of being which promises to exclude this experience and for which there exists nothing like a sacrifice, only utilization of resources.¹

Ultimately, sacrifice is the most powerful experience of our time, not simply insofar as it is an experience that can happen *during* this epoch, but it is an experiencing *of* our epoch itself, of our epoch in its essence. While Heidegger would characterize it as an experience of the modality of disclosure, Patočka might describe it as an experience of the unifying movement proper to the epoch. And yet, at the same time, this experiencing of our "time" is made impossible, precluded in principle by the very nature of the technical understanding proper to our age.

In the first section of this paper, we will endeavor to provide a more general overview of Patočka's thought in order for us to better understand how such an experience (i.e., of sacrifice) functions in his account of phenomenality. In section two, we will provide a synopsis of the role it plays in his writings and how it links various aspects of his thought together.

II

For Patočka, human existence partakes in and actually contributes to (by completing it) a general movement of determination. Indeed, Patočka's phenomenological starting point is characterized as a radicalization of Aristotle's ontology of movement.² For Aristotle, movement is what happens to a potentiality when it is actualized, the actualization of potentiality *as* potentiality. In this sense it indicates both *a deficit in being and the act of overcoming it*. For Patočka, there is always movement, movement toward greater determination, toward further manifestation. Cosmic movement, the movement of the world, is not exactly a movement from a given point to another, but rather operates as an actualization of what is potentially already there; it is the simultaneous presence of the end, of the goal, or *telos*, and of the path that leads to it.³ Hence, the endpoint or the point of arrival is at the same time that of departure; it aims at itself, as itself, though now manifest. However, if being can reach itself, can access itself as manifested, then being is in itself already separated, that is, originally separated from itself. Therefore, as fundamentally separated from itself and at the same time essentially moving toward a greater determination of itself, and so toward itself (as separated or separation), being is a movement that can never be completed, that can never cease.

Insofar as this theory conceives of a more fundamental degree of manifestation that is, nevertheless, not manifestation *for* the subject but a manifestation that somehow is *prior* to the subject, a manifestation that individuates, that moves from indeterminacy into further determination. We call this an a-subjective theory and we understand movement, then, as leading to a genetic ontology. In this physical movement—the movement of *phusis*—things are individuated but yet remain indifferent to each other; one could say it is a mute visibility. This first moment of movement grows further into determination when things, once individuated, also acquire differentiation, that is, when they are not just singularized but also appear *as what they are*. This completion of the ontological movement through phenomenological determination finds its ground in a special kind of individuated being, namely the subject. The subject is therefore an essential part of a broader movement in which things appear as what they are; they are oriented in the world. The movement of existence determines beings more. It does so in the sense of bringing beings not only to being but also to being what they are by means of delimitation, de-finition.

For Patočka, movement is the synthesis or unifying principle that holds things together. The proto-movement of individuation is needed for things to appear as the assemblage of their multiple determinations, i.e., as what they are. As Patočka writes, “my subjective synthesis of identification is simply the capturing and the recognition of a singular identity, of this link within the things themselves.”⁴ This link, or better, this glue that holds things together is that which leads to more being, more determination. In other words, movement or *energeia* (actualization) is no longer something that happens *to* a thing, to a substrate, but it is what *makes* this substrate. The substrate does not underlie the process or operation of determination it is the process itself. There is no more rest, no more *hupokeimenon* (material substratum) that underlies the process of determination. This radicalization of Aristotle abolishes all rest: there is *nothing* left from the process of manifestation. As Renaud Barbaras concludes, “Patočka confers movement the status of being the very event of essence.”⁵ Hence, beings are somehow their own access to themselves or, if you will, their own

accomplishment; beings are their own process of manifestation. Accordingly, the subject is a peculiar type of movement; a phenomenological movement that extends and completes the ontological proto-movement. It differs from other beings as it is *in* the subject, or rather in its openness, that things or beings appear as *what they are*, advance their individuation into further determination, and, in so doing, enter phenomenality. This second movement extends the ontological movement into a phenomenological one. Nevertheless, we are dealing with a single movement—the cosmic movement or movement of the world and, in the same way that we say that one is *of* the world and *in* the world at the same time, we might say that we are both *of this* movement and *in this* movement. The subject is the process or the movement that takes charge of its own process, of its own movement; it is the manifestation that is not indifferent to its own manifestation. However, this does not happen “in” the subject or for the subject, rather this is what the subject is charged with effecting in or for beings themselves.

If the first movement, the proto-movement, is a movement of individuation, the second movement is one of unconcealment, of disclosure. The ontological movement brings beings to being (i.e., individuation, singularity), and the phenomenological movement allows beings to be *what they are*. In *Plato and Europe*, Patočka writes, “the soul is the *place* of beings, not in a material sense, but in the sense that with it they are manifest as what they are.”⁶ According to Patočka, the soul is therefore the place where beings access their own being and become fully determined. In this manner, existence is the process whereby beings manifest themselves and is, therefore, nothing other than these things accessing themselves. Existence is not, however, the things themselves; it does not coincide fully or completely with them in such a manner that it would be reduced to them. It overflows beings. It is in this sense *more* than beings. But it is also, and in a radical way, in proximity with and in the closest intimacy to, beings: “The soul does not have any other content than the things themselves, but it is not itself a content: it is an operator, a *making* through which things are disclosed as what they are.”⁷

In fact, one instance where the core of this operation is revealed is in what Patočka calls *sacrifice*. There are two aspects to this sacrifice. On the one hand, it is an *experience*, “the most powerful experience of our times” (as such it as significant as *Angst* proves to be in Heidegger’s *Being and Time*).⁸ Sacrifice happens *to* the subject as an authentic experience of being. On the other hand, since it is an experience automatically ruled out as possible in our times, it also becomes revelatory of the essence of these times as entirely functioning along the lines of a “utilization of resources.” In this latter sense, sacrifice functions in the same way as *Gelassenheit* in the later writings of Heidegger.

III

Why then does Patočka name it “sacrifice,” and how does it work? Rather than simply chronicling definitions of the word, we shall consider briefly the work of anthropologists who treat sacrifice as a kind of practice for various peoples down through the ages. Drawing on studies such as those conducted by the anthropologist Marcel Mauss,⁹ we can distinguish two essential elements of sacrifice, the criteria needed, if you would like, in order for some ritual to actually constitute a sacrifice: there has to be a separation and a destruction.

First of all, there must be a *separation* between the domain of the sacred and the domain of the profane. Sacrifice consists in transformation, the metamorphosis of something profane into something sacred. Conversely, profanation consists in an act that will destroy the sacredness of a thing (for instance drinking soda from a holy chalice). According to Mauss, for something to be rendered sacred, certain rituals must be performed that will first increase its degree of religiosity.¹⁰ The priest or some other religious agent will accompany the victim to be sacrificed and facilitate their transition into the sacred sphere. Furthermore, this transition, this crossing over of the divide, is achieved by means of *destruction*. Indeed, whether it is an animal, a human, or even a pile of seeds or fruits, in order for it to pass over into the sacred sphere, it must relinquish all possibility of usage or value for man. In fact it does not necessarily have to be a destruction in terms of killing or burning, but the result should be that men are from then on incapable of using the thing (animal, place, etc.) for their own ends: the sacred objects are now the property of the gods; they are completely beyond our reach, out of the order of our world. So, if the first essential element of sacrifice is that there must be a fundamental (although invisible) *separation*, a profound difference between objects or people (or places or animals) that are kept for usage, for mundane tasks, and these other transformed objects, people or animals that have been invested with a religious dimension, the second main aspect of sacrifice lies in it being a process whereby its usability is destroyed.¹¹

We now have a partial answer to our earlier question as to why Patočka believes that sacrifice is the requisite response needed to counteract the all-consuming influence of *Gestell* and the concomitant dominion of machination. The property of the thing that is destroyed through the process of sacrifice is its usability—the very property that is crucial to the holding sway of *Gestell*. Sacrifice is needed to bring back a *separation*, a *difference* that has been entirely concealed by the modality of beings in the reign of the *Gestell*, namely the ontological difference.

The hierarchy, the difference in general is the difference between two modes of being: it can only manifest if our mode of being does not remain in the simple functioning that levels it down to the other. No other way to understand being shows its predominance as well as the technical understanding, but technology has to be reduced to its essence. In this case, when technology is reduced to its essence, appears the predominance of being on all the rest. This is the very function of the technical understanding.¹²

In the Christian tradition, the ultimate sacrifice—the sacrifice of Christ – consists in a radical, absolute negation. Interpreting the words of St. Matthew’s gospel, when on the cross Christ asks, “Father, why have you forsaken me?” Patočka argues that:

He is abandoned precisely so that there is nothing he can hold on to. The one who sacrifices has to cross out everything, it is the highest danger, and yet, he has nothing to lose. For sacrifice to happen, something drastically, radically, incommensurable with beings has to emerge.¹³

Sacrifice is the process of radical *absolute negation* that corresponds to a radicalization or demythologization of the *destruction* that Mauss saw as common to all traditional sacrifices. Patočka insists on two things: on the one hand, sacrifice happens

in a situation of extreme, total danger; on the other, once put in this situation, man has to renounce everything, he has to renounce all beings. However, as man consists precisely in a movement of manifestation, the phenomenological movement that serves as an extension of the ontological movement, he is captured by and in this movement and cannot decide for himself to activate or deactivate it. This very powerlessness of man in front of what is, this lack of choice and power over it, is precisely what frees him, and thus what constitutes his very freedom.¹⁴ The sacrifice takes place precisely in the emergence of something like an incommensurable difference comes to the surface.

Patočka also discusses the example of Sakharov, a man who is at the cutting edge of technology itself, a “hypermodern man,” a “representative of the modern age.”¹⁵ And yet, at his trial this man will not step back:

The more he is threatened, the more he says it is for him an incentive. Those who threaten him are led not to understand him—at least in a given situation that does not necessarily last long—and they are led to intensify this effect. To intensify the stunning impression that there is here something that dominates all we take for a force, a power, etc. And what dominates? Not a single thing.¹⁶

So it is through the renunciation of everything, the absolute negation of everything (and so a complete *destruction*) that a *separation* such as the ontological difference can emerge. The sacrifice was always something that at the same time activated and regulated separation. Somehow, what was given in mythical times, namely the separation, has vanished in the realm of *Gestell*, which is precisely why sacrifice, for Patočka, is not made for the sake of someone, something, or for a greater good but consists in the destruction of all “meaning,” in the sense of the usage and of the instrumental functionality to which everything was reduced; however, it is not performed with the guarantee of faith, of being able to follow the rules of each ritual and by doing so being assured (for confidence is requisite for the success of a mythical sacrifice) of its result. Sacrifice, in Patočka, does not consist in moving things from the profane to the sacred sphere, nor does it consist in moving things from the sacred sphere to the profane; in the technological age things can no longer be either consecrated nor profaned, all has been disseminated, captured by the all reaching all grasping tentacles of *Gestell*—things, people, places, animals, activities.¹⁷ What emerges in the mythical sacrifice is the relation between sacred and profane. The sacrifice is, therefore, a “coming to the limit,” an approaching the limit. And it is only at the very moment of the destruction, when all participants have reached their maximal degree of religiosity through pre-sacrificial rituals that the transfer of forces occurs, that the separation appears *precisely*, simultaneously as it is being crossed over.

What dominates beings is the *force* that itself pushes toward actualization. Yet in our times, where the old efficiency criterion of Francis Bacon has prevailed, the most direct way for this force (for this standing reserve) to actualize, to express itself, Patočka insists, is through war. Behind the facade of serving the cause of peace or the welfare of future generations, there is, Patočka claims, a much darker force at work: “[. . .] war, acute confrontation, is the most intensive means for the rapid release of accumulated forces.”¹⁸

Although sacrifice, in its demythologized form, is and has continuously been available for man, it is finally in the globalized, technological age, precisely when man

has become a mere force, dissolved into a chain of pure transitivity, sent in his millions to the front line—it is only on the peak of this wave that, offered in sacrifice, the *force* can finally be apprehended in its full amplitude. It is only at this very moment that he is capable of seizing in a single view or with a single hand, the specificity of his own situatedness and, in so doing, achieves precisely what the sacrifice consists in. Patočka finds evidence for this most concrete and transformative experience in the writings of Teilhard de Chardin and Jünger, who narrate their experience on the front line. As Patočka relates, for Teilhard de Chardin “the man who went on the front line is a different man.”¹⁹ Only *Gestell*, in so far as its massively accumulated energy requires massive and imminent release (and what better place for it than war?), can push man—whether willingly as for Sakharov or in a different manner for the soldiers on the front line—up to his own conclusion, to the ultimate limit, to a limit that one cannot but recognize as such and in contact with which something that he calls a sacrifice takes place.²⁰

Sacrifice can, according to Patočka, “save” man from the danger of complete concealment endemic to the epoch of technology; sacrifice saves in so far as man is ready not only to struggle *for* his life, but is in fact ready to accept his own condition, one of such radical powerlessness that it constitutes a power. Patočka writes, “this is the only way we can see Freedom as something negative: that man is not just about demanding, always asking for more, but in fact, is about refusing, overcoming ourselves.”²¹

VI

The Czech word for sacrifice, *obět*, has the same double meaning as the German *das Opfer*, which names both the victim of sacrifice and the sacrifice itself. In most traditional, mythical sacrifices, the victim is neither the one asking for the sacrifice nor the one performing the sacrifice (i.e., neither the sacrificer nor the sacrificing, the priest that knows what rituals are required). The victim is a third element that takes the place of or represents the one who wishes for the sacrifice to be performed (the sacrificer who hopes for such things as a more fertile crop or marriage). But in our demythologized phenomenological approach to sacrifice, the double meaning of *obět* or *Opfer* as the identity between sacrificing and *what* is sacrificed finds its expression in the coincidence of both beings and their very manifestation, namely as man, the second motion of individuation, the phenomenological movement, manifestation. Sacrifice has the advantage of cumulating the experiential character of *Angst* and the a-subjective character of *Gelassenheit*.²² The function of sacrifice is to give back to things *what they are*, not to limit them to their function for man but to allow them to coincide more fully with what they are. If *in the place of* man beings come to be *what they are*, and if man “commits” this sacrifice, this *phenomenological* sacrifice, it does not mean that beings disappear with the interruption of the process of manifestation. Rather, it is their very manifestation that undergoes the process of manifestation, becomes manifest, becomes *what it is*.²³ Patočka explicitly disagrees with Heidegger in thinking that emancipation from the all-concealing essence of our times will come as a *Gunst des Seins* (a favor of Being), “as a favor from above, or by waiting for the emergence of such a favor in art,”²⁴ and believes that:

The possibility of a *metanoesis* of historic proportions depends essentially on this: is that part of humanity which is capable of understanding what has and is the

point of history, which is at the same time ever more driven by the entire positioning of the present day humanity at the peak of technoscience to accept responsibility for meaninglessness, also capable of the discipline and self-denial demanded by a stance of uprootedness in which alone meaningfulness, both absolute and accessible to humans, because it is problematic, might be realized?²⁵

Hence, it is in an active engagement with *Gestell* (i.e., with the concealing force of being) that Patočka thinks that this very force can be neutralized. However, if it is *active* it is because such is being and such is man: a movement that can never end, that can never be completed.

The twentieth century at war or “as war” (as Patočka entitles his sixth Heretical Essay²⁶) is not only the ideal platform where the danger becomes so great that massive numbers of people are exposed to the experience of sacrifice. There is a deeper truth to the globalization of such a phenomenon as war, it speaks to a more fundamental character of existence: namely the struggle in which it consists—not the daily struggle to find food or to win an argument—but the unresolvable movement it consists in, the incompleteness, the separation it emerges from, that is, the unfulfilled and unfulfillable openness of a movement that shares the structure of insatiable desire. The truth of existence, for Patočka, is polemical, it derives from the Heraclitean word “War [*Polemos*] is the father of all and king of all.”²⁷

Notes

- 1 Jan Patočka, “The Dangers of Technicization according to E. Husserl and the Essence of Technology as Danger according to M. Heidegger,” reprinted in this volume, 13–22, here: 20. Most of the following translations of Patočka into English are from French editions, and are the author’s own, unless otherwise noted.
- 2 See Patočka, “Méditation sur ‘Le Monde naturel comme problème philosophique,’” trans. Erika Abrams, in *Le Monde naturel et le mouvement de l’existence humaine*, ed. Erika Abrams (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2003), 103. [In Czech: “Přirozený svět’ v meditaci svého autora po třiatřiceti letech” (1969), *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 7: *Fenomenologické spisy II* (Prague: Oikumene, 2008), 265–334.] “Leçons sur la corporéité,” in *Papiers phénoménologiques*, trans. Erika Abrams (Grenoble: Jérôme Millon, 1995), 107. [Czech: “Koncept přednášky o tělesnosti,” *Přirozený svět a pohyb lidské existence*, vol. 2, ed. Ivan Chvatík (Prague: Archivní soubor, 1980).]
- 3 See Patočka, *Le monde naturel*, 131–2.
- 4 Patočka, “Phénoménologie et métaphysique du mouvement,” in *Papiers phénoménologiques*, 32. [This is a French translation of an unpublished text originally composed in the 1960s by Patočka in German under the title “Phänomenologie und Metaphysik der Bewegung.”—Eds.]
- 5 Renaud Barbaras, *L’Ouverture du monde: Lecture de Jan Patočka* (Chatou: Editions de la Transparence, 2011), 246.
- 6 Patočka, *Platon et l’Europe: Séminaire privé du semestre d’été 1973*, trans. Erika Abrams (Lagrasse: Verdier, 1983), 206. [Czech: *Platón a Evropa. Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 2: *Péče o duši II*, ed. Ivan Chvatík and Pavel Kouba (Praha: Oikumene, 2002).]
- 7 Barbaras, *L’Ouverture*, 265.
- 8 See Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1993), § 40.
- 9 See Marcel Mauss, *Les Fonctions sociales du sacré*, *Œuvres*, vol. 1 (Paris: Minuit, 1968); see also René Girard, *Le Sacrifice* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 2003).
- 10 These rituals are performed by a religious person, i.e., someone who also shares a degree of religiosity, because the sacred is a highly dangerous dimension; one must be prepared to enter into its proximity.

- 11 In *The Accursed Share*, Bataille explains that “sacrifice restores to the sacred world that which servile use has degraded, rendered profane. Servile use has made a *thing* (an object) of that which, in a deep sense, is of the same nature as a *subject*, is in relation of intimate participation with the subject. [. . .] What the ritual has the virtue of rediscovering is the intimate participation of the sacrificer and the victim, to which a servile use had put an end.” George Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy*, vol. 1: *Consumption*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 55–6. [In French: *La Part maudite* (Paris: Minuit, 1967).]
- 12 Patočka, “Séminaire sur l’ère technique,” *Liberté et sacrifice*, 311. [Czech: “Čtyři semináře k problému Evropy,” in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 3: *Péče o duši III*, ed. Ivan Chvatík and Pavel Kouba (Prague: Oikumene, 2002), 374–423.]
- 13 Patočka, “Séminaire,” 310.
- 14 For a discussion of the practical dimension of this, and the way it can be used in a political context, see Václav Havel’s book written shortly after Patočka’s death, and which was dedicated to him. Václav Havel, *The Power of the Powerless* (New York: Routledge, 2009). [Czech: *Moc bezmocných* (1978) (Prague: LN, 1990).]
- 15 Patočka, “Séminaire,” 321.
- 16 Patočka, “Séminaire,” 321.
- 17 See Agamben’s definitions of an apparatus (*Gestell*) as “anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings.” Giorgio Agamben, *What Is an Apparatus? And Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 14. [Italian: *Che cos’è un dispositivo?* (Rome: Nottetempo, 2006).] Also: “The profanation of the unprofanable is the political task of the coming generation.” Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 92. [Italian: *Profanazioni* (Rome: Nottetempo, 2005).]
- 18 Patočka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, trans. Erazim Kohák and ed. James Dodd (Chicago: Open Court, 1996), 124. [Czech: *Kacířské eseje o filosofii dějin*, in *Péče o duši III*.]
- 19 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 125.
- 20 “It first seems as an absolute objectification, however, as this act implies the striking-out of oneself, he crosses the limit where the non-objective necessarily emerges. [. . .] There, in this clearing, which usually remains unseen, enters vision, emerges not only in the eyes of the one who is sacrificing, but also for the others. [. . .] The one who shows capable of such a sacrifice gives himself and the others—to the others maybe more than to himself—a new way to understand being.” Patočka, “Séminaire,” 310.
- 21 Patočka, “Séminaire,” 310.
- 22 For a discussion on the notion of sacrifice in Heidegger, see Joseph Cohen, “Le sacrifice de l’être. Note sur le sacrifice dans la pensée de Heidegger,” in *Bulletin Heideggérien* 2 (2012).
- 23 In a talk entitled “Sketch of a Phenomenological Concept of Sacrifice,” Jean-Luc Marion draws on his phenomenology of the gift or of givenness, arguing that “sacrifice presupposes a gift already given. [. . .] Sacrifice gives the gift back to the givenness from which it proceeds, by returning it to the very return that originally constitutes it.” What Marion has in mind here is the givenness of the *es gibt* and, according to him, Sacrifice has the function of, not only revealing the givenness that is concealed, hidden behind what is given, that is, behind the gift itself, but to actually *give back*, to reverse the process so to speak. See Jean-Luc Marion, *The Reason of the Gift*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (University of Virginia Press, 2011), 83.
- 24 Patočka, “Séminaire,” 284.
- 25 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 75.
- 26 Patočka, “Wars of the Twentieth Century and the Twentieth Century as War,” in *Heretical Essays*, 119–138.
- 27 Heraclitus, Fragment 10.82 (53), *Philosophy before Socrates*, trans. and ed. Richard D. McKirahan (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), 124.

4 “Christianity Unthought”— A Reconsideration of Myth, Faith, and Historicity

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Contrary to myth, which adheres to a petrified and irrevocable past, faith is oriented towards the future. It believes in the “salvation” of man. But how is this idea of salvation to be understood? Faith is the opposite of the will to come to an end (nihilism); it is an interest in one’s own destiny and the conviction that it can always be changed. According to Patočka, the philosophical (Post-Christian) meaning of Christianity is precisely this idea of faith as a *belief in life*. It is constituted by the dramatic striving and an inner historicity that is not only a *being subjected to history* but a *realization of history*.

Keywords: faith; myth; historicity; Patočka; Löwith; post-Christian

There’s a crack in everything. That’s how the light gets in.

—Leonard Cohen

In one of his letters to a theologian and friend of his, Jan Patočka comes to a conclusion that might be seen as the kernel of his philosophizing view of theology and religion. His friend, the protestant theologian, Josef Bohumil Souček, a well-known biblical scholar and university professor of his time, had written to Patočka and asked for his critical advice concerning the publication of an article dealing with *Christianity* and the *question of myth*.¹ Patočka’s answer is given in a long and elaborate letter, written in a friendly and amicable tone, yet also taking his friend’s request seriously to the extent of formulating a firm critique of his paper. Souček had presented his own basic assumption that human beings will always have a desire, a demand, for gods. This desire, however, says Souček, can be satisfied solely by the one and only God, and if this God is not there, people will always tend to create other gods, false gods and deities, to rely on.

One might call it a good Christian’s assumption—for surely it is a theologian’s assumption in the literal sense of the word: it speaks about God and about the one and only God as the axis of (Christian) religion. Yet, does this reference to the one and only God define Christianity? Is God indeed the core of what Christianity is about? Patočka’s answer to his friend opens up a different trajectory. It centers around the core shift of understanding religion in more of a philosophical than a theological sense: “I am convinced,” he writes, “that every God—independently of whether it is a single god or a plurality of gods—is an idol and a false god, as long as it is understood in a *mythological* way as pure origin, but not through faith as the condition of the possibility of human freedom, which is secured by the *act of faith*.”²

Patočka's answer shifts away from theology by replacing speaking about God, about the one *who* is addressed in the religious attitude, with a sole focus on the *how*, in other words on the human attitude of faith as such. Faith here seems to be the true realm and the transcendental guarantee of human freedom. Such a statement is remarkable against the backdrop of a long philosophical tradition of Enlightenment that saw faith merely as an obstacle on the road to human self-determination and freedom. But furthermore, it should then be asked what concept of faith is advocated here. What does "faith" stand for, if fully detached from the question of *who or what* is addressed in the attitude of faith? Can "faith" be a synonym for the enabling of human freedom? And to give this question a firmer perspective: what does the concept of faith stand for in regard to the "Christianity unthought" that gives this paper its title? The claim that there is a potential in Christianity that might still be *unthought-through* is made in Patočka's *Heretical Essays*. It reads almost apodictically: "By virtue of this foundation in the abysmal deepening of the soul, Christianity remains thus far the greatest, unsurpassed but also unthought-through human outreach that enabled humans to struggle against decadence."³

However, before the full meaning of faith and its "unthought" potential may be unfolded, it is important to clarify an earlier differentiation. As Patočka's description has it, the concept of "faith" also entails a negative component in the sense of *what faith is not*, and the supposition is that faith is not *myth*; it has left behind the mythological approach. If taken together with the attempt to redefine the concept of faith within and against a certain tradition of enlightenment, one could hold that Patočka addresses the question of faith "beyond myth and enlightenment." The problem is then to exactly outline faith's potential for this double transcendence.

The question of myth is already touched upon in Patočka's letter to his theologian friend, where he holds: "The overcoming of myth by faith is a problem of great conceptual complexity. I don't know how it is possible to think this overcoming—as a complete pushing aside of myth, as its modification, as a metamorphosis of its inner meaning, or how?" The reflection, however, does not end with this open question. "I confess," Patočka continues, "that the way I would like to think this 'overcoming' is in terms of a mutual and necessary relation. Faith is an answer to myth, and therefore it is not possible otherwise as if taking place on the ground set up by myth."⁴

This statement, made in 1944, already sets the tone for Patočka's later, extensive philosophical reflections on the concepts of myth and faith. The main ideas in regards to *myth* and *faith* will be highlighted in the following two sections. I will then turn to the problem of historicity and Christianity's close intertwining with the philosophy of history, before I will finally articulate the alleged *unthought* potential of Christianity in a Post-Christian time.

Myth—Fate and Passivity

In an article that was published eight years after the above quoted letter, Patočka has both of the main concepts already in the title: *Time, Myth, Faith*. (The article is published in this volume for the first time in English translation.⁵) This piece is quite significant for Patočka, the philosopher of history who somehow relates all of his thought to the idea of human historicity. Consequently, the article commences with the striking remark that a "life in truth is [. . .] a life in time, a life of inner tension of human, historical time."⁶ This historical time is obviously different from the time

of mere succession; it is not just “*sequabiliter*,” rather it relates to something that is outside the time sequence. Patočka calls it “*heteron*” (meaning “different” or “other”).

Against this background, then, *myth and faith* are characterized as the two fundamentally diverging modes of relating to this ultimate otherness. Myth exemplifies finding the *heteron* at the very beginning—it speaks about an event, a decision or a fate at the origin, which shapes everything that comes afterwards. With this orientation towards the past, myth deprives human beings of their capacity to act and change their human lot. The past is frozen, petrified, irrevocable; the past is not at our disposal and most of it entirely eludes our powers.

Myth is the assumption of a primordial time that was completely different and holds the key to everything that follows later. Whatever happens, happens under a certain spell and the process of a fatal decision: it is determined by deities, pre-arranged. The human lot is derived from an extra-human sphere. Myth, therefore, is intrinsically related to the temporal dimension of the *past*. It is a fantastic projection of human imagination into the past—primordial human wishes and desires gain the shape of something super-human. This marks the greatness of myth, but also its fatal passivity. The (only) wisdom of myth is that of human subjection and, ultimately, suffering.

Myth relates to the *heteron*. It addresses the ultimate questions of human existence and time, but in a way that, as Patočka famously holds in the *Heretical Essays*, gives the answer before the question is even raised: that is, before the question’s dangerous potential to shake the firm ground of human convictions may unfold.⁷

In *Plato and Europe*, a lecture series from the 1970’s, written two years before the *Heretical Essays*, Patočka also tackles the topic of myth and faith, or what is here called “*the transformation of myth into religion*.”⁸ Myth is set against and contrasted with religion: “Myth is a grand passive fantasy—a fantasy that is not aware that it is fantasy and that answers to certain deep affective needs of man. Myth is wholly practical. Religion, on the other hand, is something which requires a personal act of faith; it is something actively carried out by us.”⁹ What is here called “religion” has exactly the same connotations as the earlier reference to “faith”: it is a human relation to something outside of the sphere of the concrete and objective; a relation to the whole and the wholly other (*heteron*). As such, it brings about, as Patočka says, a “crack” in the world.

The crack becomes visible as “a fissure [. . .] in the human experience of time,” it is “based on a relation to what is beyond objectivity.”¹⁰ Faith (like “religion,” when defined as requiring the *personal act of faith* in order to be “a religion” and not just a mythological worldview) is thereby an opening to the future, an active projection of human life into the future. This attitude is one that at the same time originates in freedom and generates the space for further acting in freedom: faith is synonymous with human freedom. This understanding clearly shows a tendency that is quite divergent, if not contrary to what seems to be the widespread perception of faith. Faith, for Patočka, is specifically *not* defined by the holding on to *something* that will give stability and hope amidst human confusion. This kind of delegation of meaning to something extra-human or super-human would precisely indicate a mythological worldview. Faith in a certain sense holds on to *nothing* or to *no-thing*. It is a confrontation with an abysmal problematicity where firm ground is left behind, but the quest as such provides new meaning.

This understanding of myth and faith can also be related to Patočka’s analyses in the *Heretical Essays*. In one of its best-known passages, he outlines the simultaneous

origin of politics, philosophy and history (history proper) in the Greek polis.¹¹ The dividing line is the overcoming of myth: the change from a concern with the past to the future, the change from giving answers to enduring questions, the change from cosmogony to care for the soul. The outlined concept of “faith” (or “religion”) could easily fit into the same picture and join the triad of politics, philosophy and history. Religion, defined by the personal act of faith, would then also have to be seen as one of the “fundamental possibilities of free life” that Patočka speaks about in reference to Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* and Hannah Arendt’s *The Human Condition*.¹²

Yet there is something else that becomes important with this notion of “faith.” On the one hand it smoothly fits into the picture of a general overcoming of myth; an overcoming that manifests itself in the different areas of philosophy, politics and religion (religion certainly in the *non-mythological meaning*), thereby constituting history proper. But this would maybe transmit an incomplete picture of the whole problematic, because it is precisely the inclusion of faith/religion that points to a problem. Derrida is the one who has come closest to an understanding of what, in his words, might be called the “double mystery” in Patočka’s thought—namely that not only do his *Heretical Essays* thematize the incorporation of mystery into responsibility (i.e., the overcoming of myth in religion or philosophy), but that this incorporation also poses a challenge:

Taken to its extreme, the text [the *Heretical Essays*] seems to suggest on the one hand that Europe will not be what it must be until it becomes fully Christian, until the *mysterium tremendum* is adequately thematized. On the other hand it also suggests that the Europe to come will no longer be Greek, Greco-Roman or even Roman. The most radical insistence of the *mysterium tremendum* would be upon a Europe so new (or so old) that it would be freed from the Greek or Roman memory that is so commonly invoked in speaking of it [. . .] What would be the secret of a Europe emancipated from both Athens and Rome?¹³

This question is like a call to fully reflect on a notion of faith that on the one hand is meant to incorporate myth, yet on the other hand is characterized by a certain potential to exceed the enlightened idea of philosophy as reason. Only then might it become clear why this thought sets out towards an understanding of “faith” beyond the dichotomy of myth and enlightenment.

Faith—The Belief in Life

Faith can be characterized as an awareness of the fact that the *dramatis personae* in life include the human being as well as the super-human. The “super-human” is here certainly not to be understood in the Nietzschean sense of a drive towards the further or higher development of human beings. It is rather that which lies beyond the realm of human action, outside of human accessibility and manipulation. It is that wholly other that is like an uncontrolled framework that cannot be transcended by man, because “this framework is itself what makes all his movements of transcendence possible”.¹⁴

Contrary to myth, which adheres to a petrified and irrevocable past, faith is oriented towards the future. It believes in the “salvation” of man. But how to understand this idea of salvation? As already indicated in Patočka’s letter to his theologian friend, the

concept of faith is not characterized by holding on to an “object” such as God. Therefore, the aforementioned “salvation” is certainly not to be passively received from some super-human power through its beneficent deed. The redemption of man must be the redemption of man by man. This however does not mean to advocate the enlightened and positivistic idea of human self-liberation through gain of power, knowledge, technology, and so on. Faith is not the dream of Utopia. Faith is the redemption of man, but in some sense also the deliverance of man from himself. This is depicted in the following quote, where the mention of “God” indicates exactly this inclusion of the super-human, or the realm of what is outside of the human:

Thus the content of human faith is the “redemption” of man. God and man act together in the redemption of man—a redemption that can only happen with the sacrificing of everything in man that cleaves to the relative meaning of beings and, above all, to *his own* relative being.¹⁵

Faith means to not cling to an object or a relative meaning. It is therefore characterized by freedom. In a certain sense, it is empty, or opens up the path towards some kind of emptiness. Faith leaves behind belief in any relative meaning. It is oriented towards the future and, on a more concrete level, is the basic conviction that no decision is the last one. Faith is an openness towards the future as well as the belief in openness as future; it is the belief in an everlasting change, not as a metaphysical or cosmological principle but as the idea that everything, at any point, can still be changed. This is what makes faith the opposite of nihilism. Nihilism is the will to come to an end, whereas faith is the *belief in life*, as Patočka says in a remarkable formulation. And this belief in life then entails even more:

The conception in which the future takes priority can be realized only as *faith*. Faith however is the belief that no decision is ultimate and irrevocable. Faith is essentially the belief in life. And to believe in life is essentially to believe in eternal life.¹⁶

It is important to note that this “eternal life” is neither the Christian resurrection of the dead, nor the mere continuation of life in the sense of extending its duration *ad infinitum*. The second might be the dream of positivistic science, but it is above all a dream of immortality. It could be characterized as eternal duration, and this idea presupposes, as Patočka says, “the continual repetition of that which was or is already.”¹⁷ Eternal duration believes in particular values, it believes in what has already been and it believes in its right to repeat itself. Faith in the outlined sense of being oriented to the future, however, is the exact opposite of that eternal repetition. It believes:

[. . .] in the importance and the necessity to abolish that which “is,” in the possibility of its being shaken by what “is not.” Thus faith is simultaneously the belief in (eternal) life and the belief in that which (in the present sense of the term) “is not.”¹⁸

This “eternal life” does not only include and accept death, it is to some extent the propagation of death or, put less provokingly, the awareness of the “gift of death” (to recall Derrida’s above-quoted title). In this sense, it is once again close to the Christian

belief of gaining (eternal) life through death, as expressed in the Gospel of John: “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”¹⁹ In the Christian context, this sentence indicates Jesus’ willingness to accept passion and death, thereby taking upon himself the sin of the world and redeeming mankind from eternal perdition. Yet it is possible to read this saying independent of its theological interpretation. Human life is “unfree” as long as it clings fast to something *in* the world, as long as it is preoccupied with beings, and that may be its own being—the preservation of one’s own life as a possession. True life is a life in freedom that should not be chained by death. For Western philosophy, this idea has been essential since the very beginnings—in other words, since Socrates described the philosopher’s life as “to practice for dying and death.”²⁰

According to Plato (and the Platonic Socrates), the philosopher should not be shattered by the prospect of his dying. This is why Socrates willingly accepts the cup of hemlock instead of clinging to life, at the cost of giving up his life in conduct of the good, a life of insight and morality. Striving for the realization of the good therefore entails more than stoic immovability in facing death. It is not like an immunization that works against the possibility of being overwhelmed by emotions such as happiness or fear of death. For Socrates, moral life is a conduct of the good that is essentially influenced by insight and wisdom. Precisely because the good is unknown (there is no predefinition of the good), (self-) examination plays a crucial role in order to determine the concrete character of the good. It is the realization of the Delphic order, “know thyself,” which Socrates understands first of all as a call to examine oneself and to find out what one really knows; or, in most cases, does *not* know. It is only this conjunction of an examination of oneself and its implementation for morality that constitutes the core of the Socratic-Platonic ideal of the good life. The famous formula describing this position is “care for the soul” (in Greek, *epimeleia tēs psyches*).

This motif of the care for the soul became the crucial axis of Patočka’s philosophy of history. Care for the soul is what differentiates a life in upswing—a life that examines itself and is willing to endure the state of problematization—from a life in mere acceptance and decadence. In the *Heretical Essays* Patočka depicts it in clear reference to the Socratic tradition as follows: “Care for the soul means that truth is something not given at once and for all, nor merely a matter of observing and acknowledging the observed, but rather a lifelong inquiry, a self-controlling, self-unifying intellectual and vital practice.”²¹ Care for the soul is the leading principle *in* history, or rather it is the principle that breaks ground *for the possibility of history as such*. It is the breakthrough to a new understanding of life at civilizational scale: “The care for the soul is what gave rise to Europe—this thesis we can hold without exaggeration.”²²

The noteworthy component for our discussion here is, however, the fact that the principle of the “care for the soul” is the demarcation line for the separation of faith from myth. A life that exposes itself to the problematization of its foundations, a life of self-examination and inquiry, is for Patočka—despite appearances to the contrary—precisely a *life of faith*. And it is here that the discussion of the care for the soul departs from its Greek origins and focuses on Christianity as the “the greatest and unsurpassed [but also] unthought-through human outreach.” The following sections will highlight this *historical* achievement of Christianity, but will also explicate its proclaimed “unthought-through” potential for an era that is no longer Christian in the devotional sense.

Christianity as Historicity

Our modern concept of history is closely tied to the Judeo-Christian idea of salvation. This historical conjunction has been pointed out by a number of scholars, most prominently so by Karl Löwith in his epochal *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History*.²³ Modern philosophy of history is, according to Löwith, “entirely dependent on theology of history, in particular on the theological concept of history as a history of fulfillment and salvation.”²⁴ Only against the backdrop of an “ultimate meaning” of the whole of history does it become possible that actual history may seem to be meaningful or, conversely, can be regarded as meaningless. The Greeks, by contrast, were more moderate in their speculations. They felt no need for such a fundamental quest, since they were “impressed by the visible order and beauty of the cosmos, and the cosmic law of growth and decay was also the pattern for their understanding of history.” Only “Hebrew and Christian thinking,” holds Löwith, “brought this colossal question [the question of a meaning of the world and of history] into existence.”²⁵ The modern concept of history, with its idea of progress and an ultimate goal of historical development, is especially spell-bound by this idea.

That the teleological concept of history and its historical origins are closely tied to the religious idea of salvation and fulfillment seems to be evident. Yet Löwith does not content himself with this merely historical analysis. The pre-eminent peril, the dangerous flipside of the all-too-presumptuous quest for an ultimate meaning of history, is, according to him, a devaluation of the actual world and actual history. All actual happenings are seen and understood only in relation to the final goal or an eschatological future. The claim that history must have an ultimate meaning thereby tacitly includes nihilist tendencies. These tacit inclinations, however, may easily turn into an active and destructive form of nihilism, when, by its detachment from a firm religious background, the overall goal of history becomes questionable. Historically, this process is what characterizes modernity, with its more and more secularized versions of the ultimate meaning of history: once the *telos* itself becomes doubtful, because it is no longer safeguarded by belief, the whole movement of history and the process leading up to the final goal become meaningless. Nihilism is the consequence—the problems arising from this historical change were already addressed by Nietzsche.

Patočka’s philosophy of history is to be situated right here. Most of his work was written after the Second World War; in other words, at a time when all enlightened dreams of a harmonious progress of mankind had been finally and irrevocably shattered. That Patočka nevertheless reflects on the *meaning of history* is not indicative of neglect for this fundamental shaking of all explanatory models and grand narratives of history. Quite the opposite: he insists that it is exactly a situation like this that calls for a renewed reflection on the meaning of history. His philosophy certainly does not lead to the dogmatic assertion of a new *telos* or metaphysical purpose of the world. He nevertheless seems to suggest that it is impossible for us to live our lives without some relation to an all-encompassing horizon of ultimate meaning. It is *impossible to not reflect on the meaning of life and history*. As distinct from Löwith, Patočka therefore seems to exclude the possibility that the Greek cosmological worldview, with its mute admiration for regularity and cyclical order, still offers a viable alternative or, at least, a profound orientation for the modern world and its understanding of history.²⁶ Human life is, necessarily, affected by *the quest for meaning*. Accordingly, philosophy

as post-metaphysical thought will be characterized exactly by this quest and search for meaning—also for *ultimate* meaning—but it will not stand still with either the metaphysical affirmation of a given meaning, or the nihilistic denial of all meaning, both of which are prone to the same dogmatic tendencies.

Patočka agrees with Löwith that the Christian idea of salvation and fulfillment had a tremendous impact on the conception of history as teleological. One could also say that the historical role of Christianity was that it created a certain kind of history and historicity. Yet this diagnosis, for each philosopher, brings about reverse consequences. For Löwith, the Judeo-Christian impact enabled a completely new idea of history (a teleological view oriented towards the future); yet ultimately this understanding is harmful because it implies an eschatological perspective that devalues most of the world and, in the end, inevitably opens the door to nihilism. For Patočka, the very same impact had, and may still have, the opposite character: it facilitates a life in freedom, where humans can distance themselves from beings in the world and relate to themselves and their own destinies. This is what has been characterized above as *faith*. Faith is the opposite of the will to come to an end (nihilism); it is interestedness in one's own destiny and the conviction that destiny can always still be changed. It is—to use Patočka's formulation cited above—the *belief in life*.

Taking these diverging evaluations as the starting point, two main lines of argument can be outlined to show how Patočka counters Löwith's critique of teleological history.²⁷

- 1) Any reflection on history, any periodization of history in terms of upswing and decadence, of favorable and unfavorable developments, entails the idea of changing history towards the better or more favorable; thereby any theory of history itself proclaims a *telos* or goal in the weaker, non-metaphysical sense. This precisely reflects the difference between human history (which can be changed) and natural history (which can be observed or admired but which is not "made"). Consequently, one has to concede that a critique such as Löwith's is also led by the same will to "change" (namely, to warn against and to overcome the maldevelopment of eschatological worldviews) and thereby falls victim to its own critique. This rejection of Löwith's sweeping critique of all philosophy of history also lays the ground for Patočka's own historic-philosophical undertaking in the characterized post-metaphysical manner. Conceding the inherent dangers of an eschatological worldview, he nevertheless adheres to the necessity—or better, the unavoidability—of a reflection on the meaning of history. Even in a secularized world, deprived of the religiously conceived goal of history, the mere "being historical" of humans (i.e., human historicity) necessarily sets up a relation to the "whence and whither" of history. This becomes clearer with the second line of argument;
- 2) Patočka's interpretation of the process of "historicization" is first and foremost guided by his viewing it as an existential happening in relation to the individual person. History—or more accurately, historicity—is rooted in the individual human soul; and it is precisely here that the Christian doctrine is of crucial significance. Different from Löwith, who sees the *eschaton* merely in relation to world history,²⁸ the *eschaton* for Patočka means, first and foremost, the individual person's relation to her own destiny, her interestedness in her own salvation and the responsibility for her own soul. It is the existential and moral dimension that

matters. Once again—and in order to not construct untenable oppositions—it should be said that Löwith is certainly not unaware of this individual happening;²⁹ yet the question remains regarding the focal points of the two analyses. Whereas Löwith reads Christianity merely as a reversal of Greek cosmology, Patočka recognizes its most important impact in the existential and moral transformation of the individual human being. This existential and moral impact is something that is at the same time in keeping with, and a continuation of, the Socratic-Platonic care for the soul, as well as containing the sources for its drastic intensification and radicalization.

The best reference for this interpretation of Christianity as a silent transformation of the world, as a happening taking place within the individual human soul, can be found in the *Heretical Essays*. In one passage of his essays, Patočka clearly marks the fundamental difference between the Greek and the Christian (i.e., Paulinian) concept of the soul. It is not only that the Christian doctrine, in its essence, is a rejection of the Greek *sophia tou kosmou* (Paul names it the “wisdom of the world”; in philosophical terms it might also be regarded as metaphysics). Christianity not only shifts from the wisdom of the world towards the care for the soul: it also seems that only now is the innermost content of the soul revealed. Its struggling is not for the truth of intuition. What it really cares for is the “truth of its own destiny”—in other words the life of the soul is not derived from “seeing,” but is constituted in the soul’s dramatic striving for grace and salvation, i.e. by its inner historicity, which is not only a *being subjected to history* but a *realization of history*. In Christianity, therefore;

[. . .] the overcoming of everydayness assumes the form of the care for the salvation of the soul which won itself in a moral transformation, in the turn in the face of death and death eternal; which lives in anxiety and hope inextricably intertwined, which trembles in the knowledge of its sin and with its whole being offers itself in the sacrifice of penance.³⁰

Care for the soul entails a moment of individuation; it is interiority or “concentration on the inherent pulse of life,” as Patočka had already put it in one of his extensive yet fragmentary manuscripts from the time of the Second World War.³¹ It is the individual happening, the existential and moral transformation that is here understood as the crucial historical impact of Christianity. Human historicity brings about human history. Care for the soul, in this sense, is the opening of the dimension of history as such. This breakthrough to history in the emphatic sense (a history that is more than mere chronology; history as the “project” of realizing human freedom) is a discovery of Greek philosophy and of the Greek *polis* (as outlined in reference to the Socratic-Platonic *epimeleia tēs psyches* as lifelong inquiry and a self-controlling, self-unifying vital practice). Yet, historically, this approach is fully grasped and realized only with the advent of the Christian doctrine. Christianity radicalizes, “dramatizes” the care for the soul, by the idea:

[. . .] that the soul is by nature wholly incommensurate with all eternal being, that this nature has to do with its care for its own being in which, unlike all other existents, it is infinitely interested; and that an essential part of its composition is responsibility, that is, the possibility of choice and, in this choosing, of arriving at

its own self—the idea that the soul is nothing present *before, only afterwards*, that it is historical in all its being and only as such escapes decadence. By virtue of this foundation in the abysmal deepening of the soul, Christianity remains thus far *the greatest, unsurpassed but also un-thought-through human outreach* that enabled humans to struggle against decadence.³²

Due to its “abysmal” deepening, its “dramatic” intensification of care for the soul, Christianity can thus be seen as the greatest and unsurpassed factor for human outreach *in* history and for the opening up *of* history as such. Care for the soul is tantamount to historicity, and Christianity—not exclusively, but more than any other tradition and in a more radicalized way than any other thought—is what made people care for their souls. Historically, Christianity is therefore synonymous with the rise of historicity—this again reflects the thesis of Löwith. Yet historicity is not gained for once as a kind of possession. Historicity is an ongoing process, it is a dimension of temporality which always has to be gained anew by and as care for the soul; it is a relation towards one’s own temporal being and a being directed towards the future. This finding might explain why Derrida, in his reading of Patočka, speaks about the vision of a Europe to come, a Europe that would be “emancipated from both Athens and Rome,” and a Europe that can be what it has to be only by becoming “fully Christian.”³³ This is not at all meant as a critique or as pointing at a short-sightedness in Patočka’s claim; quite the opposite: following Derrida, this claim not only encompasses the consistent unfolding of the implications entailed in the concept of the “care for the soul,” it also shows that such a “philosophy of history” in fact is not primarily concerned with the past but always with the *history to come*; and this also means with a Christianity to come: a “Christianity unthought-through”; an idea of Christianity that transcends its historical realization and its religious shape. In the same way that the speaking of “a Europe to come” transcends any concretion of Europe as a geographical, historical or spiritual entity, the projected future Christianity will be a Christianity fully dispossessed of itself; in other words, a Christianity after the end of Christianity.

The Historicity of Christianity

The formulation “historicity of Christianity” has a double meaning. As shown in the previous section, it may refer to the dimension of temporality and historicity opened up by Christian doctrine; its capacity to enable and maintain our “being historical”—meaning the self-conception of historical beings in their being towards history. Yet, it is precisely the outlined emphasis of individuality in Christianity, the appreciation of the self and its uniqueness, which also lays the ground for another trajectory. One could hold that this trait reinforces the privatization of religion and its withdrawal from the public sphere—something that is symptomatic of the modern process of secularization. Marcel Gauchet described this with his famous characterization of Christianity as “the religion of the egress from religion,” thereby depicting this inbuilt tendency towards secularization.³⁴ The “historicity of Christianity” in this sense also signals its historicity: the fact that it has come to an end and that its role as a vital structural principle of society is over. This, however, is more than a factual and descriptive analysis: secularization is not something that happened *to* Christianity, but is, according to this view, a consequence *of* Christianity and its individualization of

belief. In the same way that Hegel speaks about the “pastness” of art,³⁵ one would then also have to attribute a “pastness” to Christian doctrine—it would be something that once had a historical role, yet one that out of an inner necessity must be overcome and outbid. It should however be added that, for Gauchet, his verdict on religion refers only and explicitly to its social and political role. Obviously this does not mean that the subjective experience of the Christian religion can no longer persist; in fact it would not be a logical contradiction to his thesis if individual belief and confessionality were even to increase in times of secularization.

Interestingly, Patočka outlines an almost identical finding already in his early philosophy of history. In his ambitious and fragmentary project of the 1940’s, he declares that the central aim of his planned undertaking will be to grasp the intellectual happenings that marked the shift from the Christian era to the post-Christian epoch.³⁶ Whereas for Gauchet the year 1700 marks the crucial turning point, Patočka examines the time between the fifteenth and the late eighteenth/early nineteenth centuries as the period of this transitional process. This periodization might be surprising. While the loss of the societal influence of religion in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is all-too-evident in most European countries, Patočka’s is indeed a surprisingly early dating of the “post-Christian” period. Yet, what he has in mind are first and foremost the underlying philosophical concepts. This approach, then, is very much in keeping with his oft-repeated reference to German idealism as the last, futile attempt to once again bridge the gap between modern sciences and the Christian tradition. After the collapse of idealism, the history of Christianity as the dominant shaper of European thought is over. Consequently, Nietzsche could be seen not so much as the prophet of future developments (as he considers himself), but more as a chronicler of the past and the witness to an intellectual landscape that has changed irreversibly. As for Gauchet, Patočka’s predicate “post-Christian” certainly does not mean that there can no longer be individual belief and dedication; but for him, Christianity has ceased to be the shaping factor for decisive intellectual novelties.

In his *Deconstruction of Christianity*, Jean-Luc Nancy has recently addressed similar problems.³⁷ His reflections on Christianity bear witness to the very same doubling of the question of historicity. On the one hand, he elaborates the dimension of historicity won in and by Christianity as a relation of the soul to itself (exactly as outlined above in regard to Patočka’s topos of *care for the soul*). Nancy in the same sense attests an “essential historicity” to the Christian faith, holding that this dimension is won precisely by the individuation of the soul and its responsibility for itself—except that he uses the term “subject” instead:

History understood as distortion, as opening [. . .], history as the opening of the subject as such—who is only a subject by being a historical subject, in distension with itself—is the matricial element that Christianity brings progressively to light as its truth.³⁸

This idea of the opening up of the subject as such, the distension of the historical subject with itself, also provides a good explanation of the title *Dis-Enclosure*, which serves like a guiding principle for Nancy’s interpretation. Dis-Enclosure as “an opening of self, and of self as opening [. . .] is the essence of Christianity.”³⁹ By opening the self, Christian faith brings about the dimension of historicity. On the other hand, this individualized approach also lays the ground for its own weakening as organizational

principle of politics and society. Secularization is therefore an unfolding of the Christian doctrine itself. As a consequence, Nancy unmistakably diagnoses Christianity as something that is “surpassed,” because it “has ceased giving life—at least as the organizing structure of an experience that would be something other than a fragmented individual experience [. . .] It has ceased giving life in the order of *sense* [. . .], if sense is the order of the common.”⁴⁰ This finding also has immediate consequences for the philosophical task of today: once Christianity is surpassed, it obviously cannot be the philosophical challenge of today to once more attack or denounce it. But the same is true for the opposing strategy: the wish to defend or rehabilitate the Christian doctrine would somehow go against the unfolding of its own sources and implications. Attempts at denunciation and rehabilitation both ignore the inner historicity of Christianity.

If it was Nietzsche’s undertaking to fight even the shadow of religion,⁴¹ if it was his concern to overcome even the remnants of Christianity in the secularized world, then it might seem that contemporary thinking—as here characterized by Nancy and, almost identically, by Patočka’s earlier reflections—has finally and irrevocably stepped out of that shadow. The de-Christianization of the West is seemingly a self-evident matter of fact, stated indifferently, passionlessly by both philosophers. Yet, this is not the last word for either of them.

Nancy, in a kind of abrupt counter-move to the death of Christianity, states a provenance in Christianity that is deeper than Christianity itself. In an unmatched conflation of all-encompassing predicates and an almost paroxysmal syntax he emphatically states: “*We are in that shadow* [the frightful shadow of God, as depicted by Nietzsche]. . . . We are in the nervation of Christianity . . . *all* our thought is Christian through and through. Through and through and entirely, which is to say, all of us, all of us completely.”⁴²

Why this intensified elocution? Simply in order to make clear how pointless the attempt of some kind of expulsion of Christianity would be: Nancy’s move is at the same time a referencing of Nietzsche’s metaphor of the shadow as well as the most outspoken distancing from the kind of exorcism (to use this utterly religious term) that it advocates. Philosophically, it is impossible to ever completely refute or confirm a dominant spiritual tradition as Christianity. What such a move would presuppose would be the capability of being fully outside of that tradition: to be able to oversee, grasp, understand it in its entirety.⁴³ The substitute for the presumptuous project of either a refusal or a confirmation of the tradition in its entirety may be called de-construction—at least in the context of Nancy. De-construction is an attempt to stay within the tradition, but to loosen its structural ties; to make them move and to dare to play the game of establishing new references and interrelations.

De-construction is a move for the contemporary reassessment of a tradition that cannot simply be refuted or declared as invalid, because every attempt to do so already starts off from its very ground. De-construction may also be applied retrospectively to history. It would then show that there is no “Christianity as such” which suddenly came about as an absolute happening.⁴⁴ Historical Christianity is a projection that carries within itself a manifold and conflictual history of its own development, so that at the very least we would be forced to speak about a Jewish, a Greek, or a Roman Christianity, and so on. This, once again, strongly resembles the historical reflections in Patočka’s *Heretical Essays*, where he examines the historical development of the idea of the care for the soul. Care for the soul was not gained once and for all, but

went through a number of transformations that he characterizes as necessary modifications of the same attitude.⁴⁵

Obviously, Patočka never uses the word “de-construction.” Nevertheless, his approach to the history of ideas evidences a similar move. This is all too clear when following his analyses regarding the development of European thought and the oft-repeated attempts to grasp its subtle influences and secret genealogies.⁴⁶ Much of this “de-construction” is an effort to always re-read and re-evaluate the history of ideas, to go against its grains and come up with surprising continuities. No detailed account of this can be given here. It might suffice to mention only one punchy example, which is significant especially in the context of our discussion on the historical meaning of Christianity. One manuscript of Patočka’s projected philosophy of history is entitled “Enlightenment”; yet, interestingly, it says little about the Enlightenment as a radical break with traditional worldviews. The praised individualism of the Enlightenment is, rather, determined in relation to its older sources and interpreted as a perseverance of the care for the individual soul in the Christian tradition. Enlightened individualism, in this understanding, is the result of the Christian care for the salvation of the soul. Care for the soul means the attempt to fight decadence, the Christian counterpart of which is the striving for transcendence, almost casually characterized in the following fragmentary remark: “The movement of transcendence is accomplished in individuation, since it is an expression of freedom. [. . .] Therefore the Christian individualism, which is rooted in the idea of freedom.”⁴⁷ In fact, much of the whole manuscript is basically a reflection on faith—faith as moral transformation and individual struggle against decadence—which brings the discussion back to the earlier characterization of faith as the enabling of freedom and openness towards the future.

Yet this kind of “de-construction” clearly indicates that the basic interest determining the research is never a mere historical one. Patočka’s attempts to rethink Christianity, to unfold its “unthought” potentials, are first and foremost led by the endeavor to philosophically exhaust and adjust our heritage for the contemporary world, or, more pertinently, for the future. This Christianity is (and always will be) a Christianity to come. Its real shape is still in the process of emerging or is to be discovered: some kind of “Christianity” after the end of Christianity as organizing principle for political and societal order. Taking into account its inbuilt secularization or self-sublation, it also becomes clearer that the repeated talk about the “post-Christian” epoch entails a double meaning: it (still) articulates a strong inclination to Christian ideas, yet in a setting that transcends or exceeds the limits of its religious connotation. “Christianity unthought” would then indicate the maintenance of some core of Christianity even after its suspension, and through its suspension; yet saying so, one hesitates: it might sound too dialectical, too affirmative, too hopeful or just too Christian—in the sense of metaphorically reclaiming some resurrection after the Cross. Nevertheless, it is precisely this potential upswing of the individual soul that indicates the philosophical legacy of the Christian doctrine, even for the secular world. It is the signal for an investigation into what is left of the Christian spirit without being confessional or credulous. Care for the soul was and is the principle for this Christianity to come; faith is the name for the liberating move that it entails.

It seems that this insight is already the leading hypothesis of Patočka’s correspondence with his theological friend in 1944. After highlighting the existential meaning of faith, he declares that it is here where we face “life in its entirety”; a life which “by the decision of faith has obtained an overall meaning (positive or negative)

so that the faithful human being [. . .] can always anew turn back to her explicit and absolute act.”⁴⁸

Notes

- 1 Josef Bohumil Souček (1902–72) was an outstanding theologian of his time. He was a clergyman in the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren and worked as a professor at the faculty of theology. His theology is influenced by Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann, both of whom also had an impact on the thinking of Jan Patočka. The correspondence between Souček and Patočka began in 1944, amidst the Second World War, and was to continue until 1967. A German translation of this correspondence is planned to be published on the website of the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna (<http://www.iwm.at/research/patocka/>).
- 2 Jan Patočka, Letter to J.B. Souček from April 8th, 1944, italics added by LH. The correspondence is still unpublished. It is kept in the Patočka Archives, Prague, signature 5052; translated from the manuscript by the author.
- 3 Patočka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, trans. Erazim Kohák, ed. James Dodd (Chicago: Open Court, 1996), 108. [Czech: *Kacířské eseje o filosofii dějin*, in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 3: *Péče o duši III*, ed. Ivan Chvatík and Pavel Kouba (Prague: Oikumene, 2002).]
- 4 Patočka, Letter to J.B. Souček.
- 5 “Time, Myth, Faith” (English translation published in this volume, cf. 3–12 above).
- 6 Patočka, “Time, Myth, Faith,” 7.
- 7 The natural world is therefore, according to Patočka, a “pre-problematic world,” a “world of a pre-given meaning,” where people “understand before questions are even posed.” Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 12f.
- 8 Patočka, *Plato and Europe*, trans. Petr Lom (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 122 (emphasis in the original). [Czech: *Platón a Evropa*, in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 2: *Péče o duši II*, ed. Ivan Chvatík and Pavel Kouba (Prague: Oikumene, 2002).]
- 9 Patočka, *Plato and Europe*, 122.
- 10 Patočka, “Time, Myth, Faith,” 10.
- 11 The German term for this simultaneous origin is *Gleichursprünglichkeit* (cf. the German edition of the *Heretical Essays*: Patočka, *Ketzerische Essays zur Philosophie der Geschichte, Ausgewählte Schriften II*, ed. Klaus Nellen and Jiri Němec (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1984), 65f.). Patočka hereby wants to indicate that politics, philosophy and history proper are not subordinate to each other (in whatever direction), nor “fettered” by any causal relation, but that they all originate in the “shaking of life as simply accepted.” Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 41. The remarks on *Gleichursprünglichkeit* were only added to the German version of his *Heretical Essays*. In the process of translating his own essays from the Czech, Patočka reformulated several passages and made new insertions. These are not included in the English translation of the Czech original.
- 12 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 40; cf. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1958), 12–17.
- 13 Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 29. [French: *Donner la mort* (Paris: Galilée, 1999).]
- 14 Patočka, “Time, Myth, Faith,” 11.
- 15 Patočka, “Time, Myth, Faith,” 10, emphasis in original.
- 16 Patočka, “Time, Myth, Faith,” 9.
- 17 Patočka, “Time, Myth, Faith,” 9.
- 18 Patočka, “Time, Myth, Faith,” 9.
- 19 John 12, 24. Translation from *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books*, ed. Bruce Metzger and Roland Murphy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).
- 20 Plato, *Phaedo*, trans. G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1977), 64a.
- 21 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 82.
- 22 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 83.

- 23 Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1957); first published in German in 1949. See Löwith, *Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschehen. Die theologische Voraussetzungen der Geschichtsphilosophie* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2004).
- 24 Löwith, *Meaning in History*, 1.
- 25 Both quotes: Löwith, *Meaning in History*, 4.
- 26 Certainly, Löwith is no propagator of any kind of simple return to the Greek worldview. In the concluding remarks of his *Preface* he says: “We are neither ancients nor ancient Christians, but moderns—that is, a more or less inconsistent compound of both traditions.” Löwith, *Meaning in History*, 19. But still, the Greek model of history is to him like a safeguard against the exaltations of Hebrew and Christian eschatology that, by its orientation towards the future, has “perverted the classic meaning of *historein*.” Löwith, *Meaning in History*, 17.
- 27 This is a kind of a general strategy in defense of the philosophy of history and its indebtedness to Christian ideas. Patočka’s undertaking is not explicitly formulated in answer to Löwith, whose name is mentioned only once in the *Heretical Essays*. Yet the following summary nicely shows the processing of Löwith’s arguments and the crucial relevance of his critique for Patočka’s own approach: “European humanity has become so accustomed to this Christian conception of the meaning of history and of the universe that it cannot let go of some of its substantive traits even where fundamental Christian concepts such as God the creator, savior, and judge have ceased to be significant for it, and that it continues to seek meaning in a secularized Christian conception in which humans or humanity step into God’s place. Karl Löwith, who forcefully called to our attention that, in the Christian era, the ancient cosmos was replaced as the source of meaning by the reconciliation between God and man, sees this clinging dependence of all meaning on history, even in the modern age, as one of the sources of the modern despair over meaning: for if history is the locus of meaning, then to rely on it is like trying to hold on to the waves in a shipwreck.” Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 69.
- 28 The “*eschaton* delimits the process of history by an end,” as he puts it. Löwith, *Meaning in History*, 18.
- 29 In one of the few remarks on the matter of the individual soul, he describes the historical rise of Christianity in relation to the “history of salvation for the souls of individual men” which then “indirectly [. . .] also transforms society.” Löwith, *Meaning in History*, 13.
- 30 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 108.
- 31 These manuscripts constitute part of a large-scale project on the history of ideas. Essential parts of them have been published in German. The following remarks nicely resonate with the *Heretical Essays*, written more than thirty years later: “Im Gegensatz dazu betonte das Christentum stark das Individuum, das als etwas Ewiges, Absolutes gilt. [. . .] Gegenüber der griechischen Exteriorität, die sich in dem Bewusstsein kundtut, dass *mundus est Deus*, dass das Innere das Äußere (und das Äußere das Innere) ist, kommt es zu einer Umkehr: Gott ist in der Seele, Interiorität, Konzentration auf den eigenen Puls des Lebens. [. . .] Der Weltprozess ist für das Christentum ein Ringen um das Heil der individuellen Seele, die herabgesunken ist und einen Vermittler braucht. Das Christentum als Aufrührerbewegung. . .” Patočka, *Andere Wege in die Moderne* [Other paths to modernity]. *Forschungsbeiträge zur Patočkas Genealogie der Neuzeit* ed. Ludger Hagedorn and Hans Rainer Sepp (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2006), 366. The final remark on the political-revolutionary implications of the Christian doctrine (“a movement of upheaval”) strongly reminds of Alain Badiou’s more recent interpretation of the same context (see his *Saint Paul. The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003) [French: *St. Paul. Le fondation de l’universalisme* (Paris: PUF, 1997).]). It would be too much of a diversion to explicate this parallel here, but Patočka clearly detects a similar potential in Christianity. Tellingly, the first sentence of the quoted chapter starts off by holding that “the Enlightenment is a child of Christianity” (“Hinsichtlich des Individualismus ist die Aufklärung ein Kind des Christentums,” Patočka, *Andere Wege*, 366).
- 32 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 108.
- 33 Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 29.

- 34 Marcel Gauchet, *Le Désenchantement du Monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), 292: “la religion de la sortie de la religion.” [English: *The Disenchantment of the World*, trans. Oscar Burge (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).]
- 35 G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 13: Art “is [. . .] and remains for us a thing of the past.” [German: *Ästhetik*, Band I, ed. Friedrich Bassenge (Frankfurt am Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1966), 22.]
- 36 Cf. Patočka, *Andere Wege*, 77.
- 37 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure. The Deconstruction of Christianity*, trans. Bettina Bergo, Gabriel Malenfant, and Michael B. Smith (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008). See especially the eponymous chapter “The Deconstruction of Christianity,” 139ff. [French: *La décloison. (Déconstruction du christianisme I)* (Paris: Galilée, 2005).]
- 38 Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, 146.
- 39 Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, 145. The motif of “openness” bears close resemblance to Patočka’s concept of the “open soul.” The subject of modern philosophy, reaching out for absoluteness and totality, for Patočka is paradoxically a “closed soul,” because it knows nothing outside of itself. Taking up the earlier definition of faith, one could also say that the closed soul has no *heteron*, no wholly other that it relates to. The Christian concept, on the contrary, has a soul that is always confronted with God as something that remains unfathomable and that it cannot take possession of. Cf. especially Patočka, “Comenius und die offene Seele,” in *Kunst und Zeit, Ausgewählte Schriften I*, ed. Klaus Nellen and Ilja Srubar (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1987), 175ff.
- 40 Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, 141f.
- 41 Cf. § 108 from his *Gay Science*: “After Buddha was dead, his shadow was still shown for centuries in a cave—a tremendous, gruesome shadow. God is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown.—And we—we still have to vanquish his shadow, too.” Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Vintage, 1974), 167. [German: *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, in *Nietzsche Kritische Studienausgabe 3*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999), 467.]
- 42 Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, 142.
- 43 “That is the move that we philosophers make too often and too soon . . .”—Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, 149.
- 44 The pretension of such an absolute happening would be, as Nancy says, “the Christmas projection.” Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, 145.
- 45 Cf. Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 83: “[. . .] the care for the soul is transformed in the two great historical catastrophes, that of the *polis* and that of the Roman Empire. We could then also say that this heritage helped transform these two catastrophes from purely negative phenomena into attempts at overcoming that which had grown sclerotic and incapable of life under the historical conditions of the time [. . .]”
- 46 This is one of the main goals of his fragmentary project on the philosophy of history, parts of which have been published in a German edition. In particular, Patočka here articulates his conviction that intellectual novelty and originality are never gained by way of a superficial turn against tradition, but by the reworking and innovative rearranging of its inner spiritual principles. His example for this kind of “de-construction” is Cardinal Nicolas of Cusa; according to Patočka the real genius and innovator of the Renaissance, as distinct from Petrarch, whose seeming novelty is considered to be a mere unreflecting escape from the weight of tradition—in fact “a Christian who cannot reach the core of the Christian experience.” Patočka, *Andere Wege*, 97.
- 47 Patočka, *Andere Wege*, 368.
- 48 Patočka, Letter to J.B. Souček.

5 The Gift of Life

Jan Patočka and the Christian Heritage

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This article presents Patočka's philosophy as a way of thinking that is thoroughly affected by the Christian tradition, though in a secularized form. Several Christian themes—mainly gift, love and sacrifice—are essential and decisive for the development of his existential phenomenology. Moreover, the idea of the care of the soul needs to be interpreted as a religious way of life beyond religion, i.e. beyond Christianity, but still characterized by many Christian notions.

Keywords: Patočka; Christianity; sacrifice; secularization; a-subjective phenomenology; love

*My mama said that your life is a gift [. . .]
And my mama said that love's all that matters
But I'm always on the run*

—Lenny Kravitz

[. . .] only in Europe was philosophy born in this way, in the awakening of man out of tradition into the presence of the universe, only in Europe, or better said, in what was the embryo of Europe—Greece. [. . .] Usually it is said that European civilization rests on two pillars: one, the Judeo-Christian tradition, the other, antiquity. On my understanding, as I have tried to depict it, Europe stands on one pillar [. . .]—and that is because Europe is a looking-in [nahlédnutí], Europe is life founded upon seeing what is.¹

This is one of the remarkable statements of Czech phenomenologist Jan Patočka in his noteworthy book *Plato and Europe*. According to Patočka, the heart of European civilization can be found in the Greek notion of the *care of the soul*, which is the main theme of his book. In the quotation above he refers to this notion as one of “insight”: human beings transcend the practical and usual patterns of their existence by looking for insight in the real nature of reality and of their lives. The one pillar on which “Europe as insight” rests is supposed to be antiquity. It is obvious, of course, that the Judeo-Christian tradition has been of major importance for European culture, but, in Patočka's view, this tradition is secondary, in the sense that it had to adapt to Hellenic culture to become so influential in Europe.²

At first sight, this looks like the statement of a twentieth century post-Christian philosopher who tries to emphasize the non-Christian origins of philosophy in ancient Greece. However, in contrast with the quotation above, Christianity plays a crucial role in Patočka's view on the development of the care of the soul and, consequently, of

European civilization. The main thesis of this article is that “the care of the soul” is a Christian concept. Until now this has been mostly neglected in the reception and interpretation of Patočka’s thought. Although Christian elements have been recognized quite early in the reception of Patočka’s work,³ only very recently a start has been made in outlining the central status and importance of Christian ideas in his phenomenology.⁴ In this article I shall present Patočka’s philosophy as a way of thinking that is thoroughly affected by the Christian tradition, be it in a secularized form. Several Christian themes—mainly gift, love and sacrifice—will be shown to be essential and decisive for the development of his existential phenomenology. Moreover, the idea of the care of the soul needs to be interpreted as a religious way of life beyond religion, i.e. beyond Christianity, but still characterized by many Christian notions.

In order to make a case for this thesis, I shall first briefly outline the main features of Patočka’s so-called a-subjective phenomenology and his ideas on the care of the soul (1). Then I shall discuss a number of texts and passages in which Patočka explicitly deals with Christian notions in a way that puts the quotation above in perspective. It will be shown that these notions are both historically (2) and systematically (3) constitutive for Patočka’s views on human existence, but also that Patočka gives his own specific interpretation of them. In addition, these themes—gift, love, sacrifice and the care for the soul—are also decisive for Patočka’s view and estimation of modern civilization (4). Finally conclusions will be drawn with regard to the role of the Christian heritage in Patočka’s work, and also regarding the specific characteristics of his interpretation of this heritage (5). All this will hopefully show that, despite its secular character, Patočka’s philosophy has a profoundly Christian character.⁵

A-subjective Phenomenology and the Care of the Soul

Despite the fact that he is not as well known as other second generation phenomenologists like Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and Levinas, the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka (1907–1977) has contributed a range of important ideas and insights to the phenomenological movement. Like most of the phenomenologists of his time, Patočka is influenced by both Husserl and Heidegger, taking a distance from Husserl’s Cartesian efforts to find in (inter)subjective consciousness an absolute foundation for scientific knowledge. He traces the development of Husserl’s Cartesianism and conceives a non-Cartesian alternative, which he labels as “a-subjective phenomenology.” In short, this means that the phenomenological reduction does not uncover subjective consciousness as the “field of appearances,” but a field that includes more than consciousness and has a legitimacy of its own. This phenomenological field also involves the entire existence of the subject (i.e. not only its consciousness but also its body, its character, etc.), other subjects, the world in which the phenomena appear and, last but not least, the phenomena themselves. Together they all contribute to the network in which the phenomena, as well as the subject, are constituted. In other words, the phenomenological reduction leads to the “appearing as such,” to the movements by which the phenomena emerge. “A-subjective,” therefore, does not mean that the subject does not play any role in the manifestation of phenomena; it means that the subject cannot take an unprejudiced transcendental position to describe how the phenomena appear, and that it is itself shaped by the field of appearing.⁶

Nevertheless, Patočka often specifically focuses on the role of the human subject in this field of appearing. For this position is crucial for a good understanding of human existence. In his 1969 lectures Patočka elaborates on the bodily and social existence of the human subject, often referring to the work of Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The subject is always actively involved in the world; it is a “powerful centrifugal stream,” intentionally directed to its environment. Human life is a dynamic source of activities that can never be fully grasped by its own reflection. This intentional stream of energy never ceases but returns to itself, when it is mirrored in the Other. The manner in which the subject finds itself in the world, has the “structure of Thou-I.”⁷ From the start, the world is a shared world. The mutual mirroring with the other has a central function in my orientation in the world. The relation to the other, therefore, is a primordial structure that is presupposed in the constitution of phenomena. The phenomena receive their meaning in an intersubjective world. This relation is also constitutive for our self-understanding.⁸ For several reasons, we never grasp ourselves completely. The reflecting I can never be the same as the original centrifugal stream of intentionality. It is also constituted by the relation to the Thou, in a way that leads beyond mutual mirroring:

The original thrust toward things is thus at the same time a thrust toward other beings like myself. This is what makes possible a return from the world to the self. The return to the self is not analogous to a reflection in a mirror; rather, it is a process in which we seek and constitute ourselves, lose ourselves, and find ourselves again. It is a process of self-retrieval from the world, one of the fundamental episodes of our life’s drama.⁹

This dialectical relation of mutual recognition can already be found in Hegel.¹⁰ But the formulation above also has a religious connotation: we have to lose ourselves before we can really find ourselves. This idea can be found, e.g., in Buddhism, to which Patočka refers several times.¹¹ But, as we shall see, he mainly thinks of the Christian motifs of gaining life through death, of conversion (*metanoia*) and of renunciation (*kenosis*).¹²

Later on in his lectures Patočka deepens this structure of mutual recognition and leads it beyond dialectics in his notion of the three movements of human existence.¹³ Here we find also one of the ideas by which his thought differs from the phenomenology of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. The three movements are three aspects of human development that can only be understood as interconnected and presupposing one another. The first movement is the movement of sinking roots, of anchoring: every intentional relation starts from out of a natural and cultural belonging, a passive, instinctive and affective feeling at home in the world—a feeling of safety that, however, may also be in danger. He describes this movement as one of mutual surrender: the small child passively surrenders to its environment; adults devote their life to raising the child. This basic movement is more than a passing psychological phase: it always remains constitutive to human behavior.

The second movement is one of self-sustenance or self-projection: an active and practical coming to terms with our environment; in this movement work plays an important role—but it may also lead to estrangement and even to decadence. Even this movement is understood by Patočka as a form of surrender, be it a surrender to overcome instinctual, immediate desire, as a means to gain self-control.

These first two movements are bound to the structures and arrangements of the world in which they are performed. The movements of anchoring and self-projection are always subordinate to “the rule of the Earth.”¹⁴ The third movement breaks through this earthliness, it is the movement of breakthrough, truth or transcendence.¹⁵ In this movement the subject questions the traditional opinions and worldviews. The usual structures lose their supposed self-evidence and are shaken. However, one cannot find a new absolute certainty. Neither the world, as a whole, nor human existence can be surveyed, and the subject has to accept its finitude. But after this effort to find real truth, beyond the current habits and opinions, there is no way back. The world has become mysterious, our existence uncertain, and our ideas and points of view remain questionable. From now on, we have to give an account of ourselves. In short, in the third movement of human life, the subject first loses itself and all its certainties, and then finds itself back as a finite, responsible and free individual person. Not being able anymore to fall back on conventions and authorities, the subject can achieve its full self-understanding as a free individual that needs to take up its own authentic attitude and position.

The third movement, therefore, is “the authentically human movement,”¹⁶ for only in this movement human existence in the true sense can be found. It reveals the special task of human beings in their relation to the world and to the field of appearing. Human existence has to shape and reshape itself in an oscillating movement: by fundamentally questioning itself, letting go all certainties and then trying to find firm ground under its feet again. This task of bearing and remodeling its own existence is what Patočka calls “the care of the soul,” which is a translation of Plato’s *epimeleia tès psychès*.¹⁷ “Soul” does not refer here to a sort of non-material substance, but stands for that which makes us human, in Patočka’s words, “that which is capable of truth.”¹⁸ He also calls this “living in truth” and the position of “insight.”¹⁹ “Living in truth” refers both to truthfulness and to Heidegger’s concept of truth as “*aletheia*,” the opening of a world in which phenomena appear and in which human existence participates. The openness and indeterminacy of this position, or better: of this oscillating movement, is in itself an essential element of being human.

The third movement is also the moment of surrender *par excellence*. The subject gives up its own interests and dedicates itself to a higher goal, by relating to the manifesting of phenomena, to letting things appear in the right way. This includes both a rational search for truth, as surrender to the uncertainty beyond the current points of view, and a rise above self-interest towards a devotion of one’s life to others. Can this surrender and devotion be understood within the Greek care of the soul, or is it Christian or perhaps even post-Christian? To answer this question we will have to take a closer look to several other texts of Patočka, in which he describes the historical development and new characteristics of the care for the soul.

A History of the Care of the Soul. 1. Christianity

Heretical Essays

“History” is the central topic of Patočka’s *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*.²⁰ History starts in Ancient Greek culture, in the *polis* and in philosophy. Here the decisive step to the third movement of human life has been made. The freedom of

the Greek citizens to constitute their way of living together, as well as the wonder in which philosophy finds its beginning, are aspects of the breakthrough of the third movement. As we will see, this is not only the start of history, but also the start of politics, philosophy, responsibility and religion.

In prehistoric, mythical culture natural and cultural structures are experienced as eternal, as a divine ordering. The first two movements of life are dominant. The routine of everyday life and labor is regularly interrupted by what Patočka calls the exceptional or the holiday, the sacred, the demonic, the orgiastic. They are an alternative for everyday work and can turn everything upside down, but in the end they leave the common structures intact and even affirm them. The third movement realizes a step forward to responsibility, by rationally questioning the structures of this cycle of everydayness and holiday, i.e. by approaching the realm of the sacred in a rational manner—this is why Patočka locates here also the beginning of religion. And since the permanent cyclic structures of time are opened up to the possibility of something really new, unexpected and uncertain, a new temporal sequence has started: the beginning of history.²¹

But what is history about? History is about freedom, about the search for a new orientation in life:

We can speak of history where life becomes free and whole, where it consciously builds room for an equally free life, not exhausted by mere acceptance, 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.²²

History is first of all determined by the way people try to understand their possibilities and to discover their authentic and unique self, in other words "[...] history is foremost a history of the soul."²³ The care of the soul is the core of history, but it also has its own history, and this is crucial to an understanding of history as such. In the fifth Heretical Essay Patočka makes an outline of the history of the care of the soul, with three turning points: from prehistoric myth to Platonism, from Platonism to Christianity, from Christianity to modernity. The first turning point is, as we have seen, the beginning of history. Patočka has discussed the Platonic idea of the care of the soul extensively in *Plato and Europe*, and he has sketched this phase as the beginning of history in the second *Heretical Essay*. In the fifth essay he mainly focuses on the way Platonism tries to overcome and tame the demonic and sacred by relating it to responsibility. In Platonism the sacred is interiorized in the soul that is looking for its own unity by inner dialogue. The orgiastic is "disciplined and made subservient" by, among other things, letting the power of Eros be directed to the higher Idea of the Good.²⁴

The second turning point, the transition from Platonism to Christianity, involves three main changes. First, the idea of a transcendent Good is replaced by a personal God. Second, responsibility is no longer seen as something to be achieved by rational reflection; it starts as a gift from a transcendent God beyond all understanding. The good that is given is here "a self-forgetting goodness and a self-denying (not orgiastic) love."²⁵ Third, against the mystery of this personal gift of divine love the subject understands itself as unique and finite.²⁶ Human beings are mortal, the reach of their

reflection is limited, they have no autarchy but are dependent on a higher mysterious divine power; they are part of an endless struggle between light and darkness, and they experience their responsibility as an inevitable guilt.

This short sketch of the Christian care of the soul raises several questions. To start with, it is a rather one-sided picture that Patočka draws here of Christian faith. There seems to be no place for redemption and reconciliation. As far as grace is mentioned, it is seen more as a source of responsibility and guilt than as a forgiveness of guilt: “[. . .] individuality is vested in a relation to an infinite love and humans are individuals because they are guilty, and *always* guilty, with respect to it.”²⁷ Moreover, Patočka also speaks of the intrinsic life of the soul as “an openness to the *abyss* in the divine and the human” and of the “*drama* of salvation and grace.”²⁸ Words like “abyss” and “drama” are in clear contrast with the Christian notion of complete forgiveness of sin by which a cosmic battle between good and evil is in principle already decided. For Patočka, the essential part of the composition of the soul is responsibility, and therefore, the core of the Christian care of the soul seems to be that:

[. . .] the inmost content of the soul is revealed, that the truth for which the soul struggles is not the truth of intuition but rather the truth of its own destiny, bound up with eternal responsibility from which there is no escape *ad secula seculorum*.²⁹

In addition, is the whole idea of a religion with its revelation and faith beyond understanding not contrary to the notion of “living in truth,” since this understanding of human life is characterized by a profound rational questioning of all beliefs, by rational insight? Patočka seeks to solve this problem by showing how human thought and action are not completely ruled out by Christian faith, but reserve their own task. There is a Christian metaphysics for which:

[. . .] within the framework provided by faith and *guaranteed* thereby, it is possible to some extent to come to understand what faith offers. Rational cognition thus reaches transcendent goals without fear of going astray, while on the other hand we can devote ourselves to all speculative daring without being led to the regions of skepticism where meaninglessness lurks. Reason as the natural organ for the understanding of truth loses its place of pride in life, but we might claim that this loss is at the same time a gain: for it gains firm foundation, certainty, and with it daring.³⁰

The same goes for human action that receives its ultimate meaning from a mysterious God, but can also be understood as part of a community in which it participates freely and responsibly. Human individuals are “[. . .] true fellow participants in a meaningfulness which they did not create but which they are called to bring about.”³¹ Thus, within the care of the soul it seems to be possible that a guiding revelation and critical rational questioning go together after all. Even more, the historical development of the care of the soul has reached its summit in Christianity, because it shows the mysterious depth of the soul:

By virtue of this foundation in the abysmal deepening of the soul, Christianity remains thus far the greatest, unsurpassed but also un-thought-through human outreach that enabled humans to struggle against decadence.³²

This same passage, however, also shows the shortcomings of Christian faith and its care of the soul: it needs to be “thought through.” The Christian “life in truth” is in need of philosophical clarification. Philosophy must provide an ontological understanding of the soul and its relation to the world:

Explicit clarity about humans cannot be achieved without an explicit relation to being. Religious and sacred forms of experience do not always include such clarity. [. . .] For that reason, in the question of being human religious conversions [. . .] do not have the fundamental importance of the ontological experience of philosophy. Perhaps for that reason, too, it may turn out that religion is subject to temporary obscurity until its problems have been resolved philosophically.³³

So far, we have seen that the third movement of human life is the movement in which humans transcend the traditional structures of their existence, looking for everlasting truth and devoting themselves to a higher good. Patočka calls this a “living in truth” and a “care for the soul,” in which he discerns the kernel of European culture and of history as such. This way of life is first of all developed in ancient Greece, but reaches its highest peak in Christianity, where the “abysmal deepening of the soul” is recognized. In Patočka’s interpretation the Christian care of the soul not only receives a very specific characterization, but is also in need of ontological clarification. Philosophy has to understand individual existence and the world in terms of being. In two texts of his later work Patočka tries to present such an ontological illumination: an afterword that he wrote for his dissertation after 33 years, and the last philosophical text he wrote, in 1977.

Surrender and Love: a Secularized Christian Ontology

The Afterword after 33 Years

At the end of the afterword to the new Czech publication in 1970 of his dissertation of 1936, Patočka gives an extensive description of the three movements of human life, in which he depicts the third movement again as the essential movement of surrender:

My being is no longer defined as a being for me but rather as a being in self-surrender, a being which opens itself to being, which lives in order for things—as well as myself and others—to be, to show themselves as what they are.³⁴

As a surrender or devotion (the German translation is *Hingabe*) to Being, the human subject finds the real meaning of its existence in an openness to Being, in letting things be, i.e. in its relation to the field of appearing. This self-surrender is, literally, a giving up of its own singular interests, a giving-oneself-away, through which the real meaning of the existents of others and of myself can be revealed. At this point in his text the Christian shape of this elaboration of the life in truth becomes explicit, when Patočka, after the ontological analysis of the core of human existence in the openness for the world, adds that all this is related to a myth: the inexhaustible myth “[. . .] of the divine man, the perfectly true man, his necessary end and his inevitable ‘resurrection.’”³⁵ Using the metaphors of Christian theology, Patočka describes an ontology of

human existence: incarnation, sacrifice, resurrection, Kingdom of Heaven and eternal life all play their part in this speculative ontology.

Truth, the Word, Patočka writes, has become flesh, when the “event of Being,” that has elected the human being as its place of revelation, has found its fulfillment in the thoroughly true human being, a *god-human*, who lives entirely in surrender, in the light of Being. In this surrender a provocation manifests itself to the world of self-interest and domination: the truth of Being stands over against the power of beings.

[. . .] All and sundry are now placed in this crisis, confronted with this distinction, for all and sundry there suddenly opens a future from which a new self is forthcoming, the self given in dedication, the kingdom of God already come, already among us—but in such a way that each must *accomplish* his conversion to it [. . .].³⁶

This “god-human” must be destroyed by the world that only relates to beings, but he also has to rise out of death, because truth is immortal. Therefore, life in devotion and surrender, *das Leben in der Hingabe*, is, in its own way, eternal,³⁷ because it participates in truth and in a community of people that transcend their particular interests and self-centeredness.

Here we see that Patočka’s elaboration of the care for the soul is profoundly Christian, even in its secular and ontological form beyond revelation.

The Question of Meaning in the Epoch of Nihilism

Also in the last philosophical text that Patočka wrote, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” surrender and devotion are described as the main characteristics of man’s position with regard to ontological difference, and as that in which humans can find the meaning of their existence. This meaning can only be understood, Patočka writes in Heideggerian style, if man is related to Being:

Man faces a tremendous challenge, [. . .] to comprehend *himself* as a being existing out of meaning and for meaning, living for what gives rise to a world full of meaning, sacrificing himself so that the meaning whose foundation “is” outside of beingness can take root, make a home, and grow in him.³⁸

After a refusal of Kantian ethical metaphysics, in which the whole universe needs to be considered as directed towards a moral aim,³⁹ Patočka insists that the meaning we can find in relation to ontological difference lies beyond any reciprocity or calculation; it is:

[. . .] something *for the sake of which* we are allowed to live, *for the sake of which* we are claimed and engaged, but not as something that itself would have any obligations to us. *Meaning as such* is itself the principal gift. Meaning is an openness that jolts that sufficiency with which our everyday significance, with its values and purposes begins, and mostly also ends. This is why the conversion, characterized as a *step back* from beings, brings about an openness: It constitutes the fundamental gift of meaning, a gift freely given, beyond quantification, beyond all calculus of merits and penalties.⁴⁰

He develops these ideas by interpreting a story of Fyodor Dostoevsky, “Dream of a Ridiculous Man.” This story is about a man who, after having reached the lowest point of boredom and rejection, dreams of his own suicide and then finally experiences the blessing feeling of a healing light and a life in paradise. Following the lines of Heidegger’s phenomenology of boredom, Patočka interprets these elements of the story as border experiences of estrangement and utter nothingness that in the end lead to an experience of wonder. Through the experience of nothingness, Being appears as “[. . .] that by virtue of which everything opens up: It takes place as the wonder that everything *is*.”⁴¹ Then Patočka gives this line of thought his own twist by introducing the notion of love: “This wonder, due to which we are no longer among tools, instruments, equipment (*Zeug*), but among *being*, is a union, an opening up that one may thus designate with the word “love.”⁴²

In this entire text the connection with Heidegger is clear and explicit, but Patočka adds his own nuances and turns. The question of the meaning of life can only be answered if one pays attention to ontological difference. But, unlike Heidegger, Patočka describes Being as inherently meaningful and even as love. Our existence is a gift of love that can be experienced if we give away ourselves, if we can let go our own interests and personal intentions.⁴³ Being is not meaningless or beyond the question of meaning, it is meaningful; it gives us our life as a gift of love that needs to be answered with a love that forgets itself and gives itself away:

Being is neither thing nor entity but what opens things and entities, binding everything to itself with the invincible power of love. And love does not belong among the things and contents of this world, but by the side of immortal Being. Being is not what we love, but that *through which* we love, what *gives* us to love, and on the basis of which we let things be what they are [. . .]⁴⁴

In short: life is a gift, a gift of love that has to be answered by giving it away again, by giving through the gift of love. And again Patočka continues by referring to a mythical understanding, by which the generous gift of Being was always already thought, although not in a strictly rational way. In this text he refers to “the myth of the Golden Age” that is followed by the fall and by original sin. They are described with a Heideggerian terminology, by which Patočka demonstrates the religious and mythical origins of Heidegger’s notions of fall and authenticity.⁴⁵

These two sketches of Patočka’s own ontology show a remarkable similarity with his description of the Christian phase of the care of the soul in the fifth Heretical Essay. Again, the care of the soul appears to be first of all a Christian notion. Ontological difference takes a central position in these texts; the relation to Being is crucial for human self-understanding. But Patočka also distances himself from Heidegger by choosing his own emphasis and terminology. Human existence is depicted as a gift of life and a gift of love, a gift beyond the economy of reciprocity or calculation, a gift that is only understood if one resigns from one’s own interests and that asks for an incalculable surrender. Life is a gift of love to which we respond by giving ourselves away. Except for the idea of a personal God, this ontology has all the features of a Christian care of the soul: a gift beyond understanding that affirms our finitude and makes us responsible beyond reciprocity.

A History of the Care of the Soul. 2. Modernity

The opposition between gift and love on the one hand, and interest and calculation on the other hand, is related to the peculiar situation of the care of the soul in modern civilization. Modern culture, Patočka writes, tends to leave the care of the soul completely out of sight:

The great turning point in the life of western Europe appears to be the sixteenth century. From that time on another motif comes to the fore, opposing the motif of the care of the soul and coming to dominate one area after another, politics, economics, faith, and science, transforming them in a new style. Not a care *for the soul*, the care to *be*, but rather the care to *have*, care for the external world and its conquest, becomes the dominant concern.⁴⁶

We can see here how Patočka follows the lines of Husserl's philosophy of history in his *Crisis of the European Sciences*: in early modern times the concept of reason takes a fatal turn. Husserl's view, in this regard, was mainly restricted to the development of scientific knowledge.⁴⁷ Patočka broadens it to a general cultural tendency, which comes close to Heidegger's characterization of modernity as a time of the *Gestell*, of the technological framing of everything that appears. In modern civilization things can only appear as objects of knowledge, control and manipulation. Modernity witnesses "[. . .] the rise of an entirely new kind of rationalism, the only one we know today: a rationalism that wants to master things and is mastered by them."⁴⁸

This all-encompassing *Gestell* has led to the demise of Europe in the twentieth century. The combination of a gigantic technological development with a disappearance of the care of the soul has created a culture in which the second movement of human life is dominant again. Freedom is understood here as a negative freedom, using instrumental reason to dominate its environment in relations of work, self-interest and conflict. This domination, however, has switched to a being dominated by anonymous technological powers that can find no meaning in themselves. This leads to experiences of boredom, decadency and meaninglessness—hence the title of the fifth *Heretical Essay*: “Is Technological Civilization Decadent, and Why?”

But the situation of modern culture is even worse. The second movement of human existence had its counterpart, as we have seen, in the experiences of the demonic and the orgiastic. When they are no longer guided or suppressed by a care for the soul, they can unleash powers beyond our control. Together with enormous technological inventions this has initiated orgies of violence in the First and Second World War, where millions of people have been sacrificed and in which Europe has more or less committed suicide. Hence the title of the sixth *Heretical Essay*: “Wars of the Twentieth Century and the Twentieth Century as War.” The twentieth century has become a century of war, according to Patočka, because technological developments have given a free reign to demonic powers. As a result of these wars, the political power of Europe is over, Patočka writes, and the question is whether there can still be hope for the spirit of European culture, the care for the soul, to be revived again.⁴⁹

This is a very dark and pessimistic picture of twentieth century European civilization. This century, Patočka writes, was “[. . .] an epoch of the night, of war and of

death.”⁵⁰ But right at the moment when we are confronted with the ultimate consequences of these dark powers, they also show their limits. In the midst of war, when millions are sacrificed by powers that cannot measure the meaning of a human life but regard humans as mere things among other things, as just objects, calculable and manipulable, right there the real meaning of human life must manifest itself. First of all because all these sacrifices are called, exactly, sacrifices—this means that even in war humans are necessarily seen as more than just tools at the battlefield.

Patočka also discusses the phenomenon of the “front experience,” which was much discussed after the First World War, and of which, among others, Ernst Jünger and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin have written. This “experience of the front” is described as a fundamental transformation of human existence. Although it is horrifying, Patočka writes, “[. . .] yet in the depth of that experience there is something deeply and mysteriously positive [. . .] an overwhelming sense of meaningfulness which would be hard to put into words.”⁵¹ The soldiers who have this front-line experience:

[. . .] are assaulted by *an absolute freedom* [. . .]. That means: the sacrifice of the sacrificed loses its relative significance, it is no longer the cost we pay for a program of development, progress, intensification, and extension of life’s possibilities, rather, it is significant *solely in itself*.⁵²

In the midst of the horror of orgiastic violence, there can be a sudden experience in which every alleged meaning is shaken, but where life itself emerges as meaningful—here the third movement of human life manifests itself. In the middle of war we suddenly can experience the real *polemos*, the conflict in Being itself, of which humans have to testify.⁵³ The relation to ontological difference is essential for being human, but in the *Gestell* of modernity this relation can only appear in extreme situations.

In a lecture of 1973, which was to be held in Varna, Bulgaria, and in the discussions on this lecture⁵⁴ Patočka is looking for a way out of the technological framing. He refers several times to a famous poem line of Hölderlin that was quoted by Heidegger: “Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst das Rettende auch” (“but where there is danger, that which saves is also growing”).⁵⁵ According to Heidegger, art might save us, when it escapes the functionality of technical organizations and may show the world in a new way. But in his posthumously published Spiegel-interview Heidegger says “Nur ein Gott kann uns noch retten” (“only a God can save us now”).⁵⁶

Patočka, however, thinks that what might save us can be found in the notion of sacrifice. The greatest danger of the technical era is that we lose the understanding of man as capable of truth, that the dimension of a life in truth gets out of sight.⁵⁷ How can this dimension be found again in sacrifice? First of all, a sacrifice demonstrates the limits of the technological framing in which in principle everything is convertible, because sacrifice implies a hierarchy of order. Secondly, a sacrifice questions the technical manipulation of things:

[. . .] because a sacrifice means precisely drawing back from the realm of what can be managed and ordered, and an explicit relation to that which, not being anything actual itself, serves as the ground of the appearing of all that is active and in that sense rules over all.⁵⁸

A sacrifice, in other words, is supposed to reach beyond economic calculation. But is that really the case? Are sacrifices not always taken up in an exchange, in the sense that we give up something in order to reach a higher good? Patočka is well aware of this element:

The idea of sacrifice is of mythico-religious origin. Even there, where it has already been obscured and covered over by later motivations, there speaks in it the will to commit oneself [. . .] to something higher and, as a result of a reciprocity so provoked, to bind that something higher to oneself and be assured of its power and favor. The paradoxical conception here is that man gains by a voluntary loss.⁵⁹

A sacrifice, therefore, is a gift that can easily become part of an economic exchange, or perhaps can never escape such a calculation. Patočka seems to claim, however, that the sacrifice he is looking for reaches beyond calculation. He differentiates between several forms and aspects of sacrifice, making use of the several meanings of the Czech word *obět*, which can mean both victim and sacrifice. One can become a passive victim of a natural disaster or an accident; soldiers can be sacrificed at the front, without realizing what happens to them; they can also willingly sacrifice themselves for family or fatherland, i.e. for a specific goal. According to Patočka, this last sort of sacrifice implies a hierarchical ordering, but does not “[. . .] allow the basis of their hierarchical ordering to become manifest.”⁶⁰ Patočka is looking for an understanding of sacrifice that explicitly shows the basis of the hierarchical ordering that is presupposed by it, i.e. an understanding of the soul, of the capability of man to live in truth. He finds it in a repeated sacrifice that can be understood as a protest, not against specific singular events, but against the structural frame in which these events are originated. Those who sacrifice themselves:

[. . .] dedicate themselves to that of which it cannot be said that it “is” something, or something objective. The sacrifice becomes meaningful as the making explicit of the authentic relation between the essential core of man and the ground of understanding which makes him human and which is radically finite, that is, which is no reason for being, no cause, no force.⁶¹

In a way, this is a “sacrifice for nothing.” Here we find the difference between an authentic and an inauthentic sacrifice: The latter is a sacrifice for a specific being or thing; the former is seeking to find back a human relation to Being, to truth. It is a giving oneself away, not for a specific gain, but to reach that which makes us human. In a culture in which everything can only appear as object of force or economic calculation, the only way to escape such a framework is by radically refusing to adapt to it and then by accepting the consequences. This does not mean that sacrifice is a goal in itself, and it is also certainly not a suicide, but it is a consistent dedication to reach beyond the structures of a technological society and to find again a living in truth, a conscious and responsible insight in the field of appearing.⁶² In the last discussion of his lecture Patočka mentions Andrei Sakharov, Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Robert Oppenheimer, “heroes of our time,” as examples of people who were willing to repeatedly offer sacrifices for a responsible life.⁶³

In the discussions of the Varna lecture Patočka refers several times to the Christian tradition in which this notion of sacrifice has been developed. An authentic sacrifice

takes the risk of an absolute abandonment: “Why hast Thou forsaken me?”⁶⁴ At the end of the lecture itself he also makes a link to Christianity:

[. . .] such an understanding of sacrifice might basically be considered that in which Christianity differs from those religions which conceived of the divine always as a power and a force, and of sacrifice as the activity which places power under an obligation. Christianity, as we might perhaps think, placed at the center a radical sacrifice in the sense of the interpretation suggested above and rested its cause on the maturity of the human being. The divine in the sense of the suprahuman, the suprahuman in the sense of turning away from ordinary everydayness, rests precisely in the radicalness of the sacrifice. Perhaps it is in this sense that we need to seek the fully ripened form of demythologized Christianity.⁶⁵

The remedy for the crisis of modern civilization, therefore, needs to be found in a secularized Christian notion of sacrifice and gift. It is the Christian care of the soul, again, which Patočka tries to develop further.

But if Patočka finds in Christianity the real care for the soul, why then does he state that in ancient Greece we can find the one and only pillar of European culture? He can only do so by projecting a Christian notion of sacrifice in Plato’s *Phaedo*. In *Plato and Europe* he refers to Socrates as a precursor of Jesus. In “the myth of Socrates,” his conflict with the polis and finally his death, Patočka sees “the outlines of the Christian myth.”⁶⁶ Here Socrates’ death is clearly interpreted from a Christian perspective. In short, Patočka is only able to see in Greek Antiquity the sole pillar of European civilization by including Christian motifs in his interpretation of the philosophy of Socrates and Plato.⁶⁷

Conclusions

Several aspects of Patočka’s existential phenomenology, especially his ideas of the care for the soul that have been discussed in this article, demonstrate the essential Christian character of this notion. In the Christian approach, as Patočka reads it, human existence is understood as a gift beyond understanding, as a gift of love; it is essentially characterized by the need of surrender and dedication, eventually even the need to sacrifice; this responsibility is constitutive for human existence and it is larger than human finitude. This “abysmal deepening of the soul” was lacking in the Platonic life of insight. Such a rational insight, however, needs to be found again in a rational and philosophical clarification of the Christian care of the soul. In this secularization or demythologization the human relation to Being, to the ontological difference, is the central issue. Dedication is understood as a conscious and conscientious participation in the field of appearing, as a letting be of beings in a truthful way. Here the care for the soul takes the shape of a secularized religiosity beyond religion, rooted in the Christian tradition. Since all these motifs manifest more of a Christian than of a Greek character, Patočka’s thesis that European culture, which in his view finds its core in the care for the soul, has only one pillar, a Greek and not a Christian pillar, is hard to maintain. Even an interpretation of Platonism that is colored by a Christian perspective—of which one can find several traces in Patočka’s work—cannot clarify or justify this one-sided thesis. Even if it is true that the Judaic tradition had to be

“Hellenized” in order to become so influential in Roman and later European civilization, then still it preserved many elements that cannot be reduced to Greek sources. These elements can also be found in Patočka’s analysis of the Christian and secularized-Christian care for the soul. Therefore, Patočka’s efforts to overcome the crisis of modern culture, by reinventing the Greek idea of the care for the soul, can only be understood if one also acknowledges the Christian elements of thought that are at work in this idea and in his entire philosophy.

Notes

- 1 Jan Patočka, *Plato and Europe*, trans. Petr Lom (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 88, 89–90. [Czech: *Platón a Evropa*, in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 2: *Péče o duši II*, ed. Ivan Chvatík and Pavel Kouba (Prague: Oikumene, 2002).]
- 2 “This heritage goes all the way back to the Greeks, especially to Plato, because when mankind in its new form tried to bring the city of justice into reality, a city to be founded [. . .] on absolute truth, so that it would be the kingdom of God upon earth, then the guiding thought of this other kingdom, this other world, which is the world of real truth, is after all Plato’s thought. [. . .] To become what it is for Europe, the Judaic element, which is obviously extraordinarily important in the European Judeo-Christian tradition, had to be Hellenized, it had to pass through Greek thought.” Patočka, *Plato and Europe*, 89, 90; cf. 128.
- 3 First of all in the biography of Erazim Kohák, “Jan Patočka: A Philosophical Biography,” in *Jan Patočka: Philosophy and Selected Writings*, trans. and ed. Erazim Kohák (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 1–135; and later, though in a problematic way, in Jacques Derrida, *Donner la mort* (Paris: Galilée, 1999), translated by David Wills as *The Gift of Death* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). For a critical discussion of Derrida’s reading of Patočka, see Edward F. Findlay, “Secrets of European Responsibility: Jacques Derrida on Responsibility in the Philosophy of Jan Patočka,” in *Philosophy Today* 46/1 (2002), 17, and by the same author: *Caring for the Soul in a Postmodern Age. Politics and Phenomenology in the Thought of Jan Patočka* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 196–203.
- 4 See Ludger Hagedorn, “Beyond Myth and Enlightenment: On Religion in Patočka’s Thought,” in *Jan Patočka and the Heritage of Phenomenology. Centenary Papers*, ed. Ivan Chvatík and Erika Abrams (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 245–261.
- 5 It is not the aim of this article to discuss the question whether European civilization has its sources in both ancient Greece and Christianity or only in ancient Greece. I also leave aside the problem of Eurocentrism, which is clearly at stake in the quotation with which this text has started. I only focus on the role of Christianity in Patočka’s view of European culture. For a discussion of Patočka’s Eurocentrism, see Kwok-Ying Lau, “Patočka’s Concept of Europe: An Intercultural Consideration,” in *Jan Patočka and the Heritage of Phenomenology*, 229–244; and by the same author, “Jan Patočka: Critical Consciousness and Non-Eurocentric Philosopher of the Phenomenological Movement,” in *Studia Phaenomenologica* 7 (2007), 475–492.
- 6 Patočka, “Der Subjektivismus der Husserlschen und die Möglichkeit einer »asubjektiven« Phänomenologie,” and “Der Subjektivismus der Husserlschen und die Forderung einer asubjektiven Phänomenologie,” both in *Die Bewegung der menschlichen Existenz, Ausgewählte Schriften IV: Phänomenologische Schriften II*, ed. Klaus Nellen and Jiří Němec (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1990), 267–285 and 286–309 respectively; and Patočka, *Vom Erscheinen als solchem. Texte aus dem Nachlaß* (Freiburg: Karl Alber, 2000). Also see Patočka, “Husserl’s Transcendental Turn: The Phenomenological Reduction in *The Idea of Phenomenology* and in *Ideas I*” [Czech: Chapter 6 of *Úvod do Husserlovy fenomenologie* [Introduction to Husserl’s Phenomenology], *Filosofický časopis* 14/1 (1966), 11–21] and “Cartesianism and Phenomenology” [Czech: “Karteziánství a fenomenologie,” unpublished text from 1976], both in Kohák, *Jan Patočka*, 207–222 and 285–326 respectively. Cf. Filip Karfík, *Unendlich werden durch die Endlichkeit. Eine Lektüre der Philosophie Jan Patočkas* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2008).

- 7 Patočka, *Body, Community, Language, World*, trans. Erazim Kohák, ed. James Dodd (Chicago: Open Court, 1998), 36. [Czech: *Tělo, společenství, jazyk, svět*, ed. J. Polívka (Prague: Oikoumene, 1995).]
- 8 Patočka, *Body*, 53; cf. Patočka, “The ‘Natural’ World and Phenomenology,” in Kohák, *Jan Patočka*, 239–273, especially 258–263. [Czech: “Přirozený svět a fenomenologie,” in *Přirozený svět a pohyb lidské existence*, vol. 1, ed. Ivan Chvatík (Prague: Archivní soubor, 1980).]
- 9 Patočka, *Body*, 57.
- 10 “It was Hegel who first analyzed this double relation of the I and the Thou in depth and did so with a special metaphysical emphasis,” Patočka writes. But then he distances his own approach from Hegel’s dialectics of master and slave, with its metaphysical elaboration: “The way we understand it, by contrast, is that the I, an existence projecting itself into the world, into objectivity, is only seeking its meaning and content, so that we cannot say a priori what it is. For that reason we can save ourselves this whole metaphysical entanglement from which Hegel derives his entire philosophy of history.” Patočka, *Body*, 52–53.
- 11 See, e.g., Patočka, “Nachwort des Autors zum tschechischen Neuausgabe,” in *Die natürliche Welt als philosophisches Problem. Ausgewählte Schriften III: Phänomenologische Schriften I*, ed. Klaus Nellen and Jiří Němec (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1990), 181–267, here 264. [Czech: “‘Přirozený svět’ v meditaci svého autora po třiatřiceti letech” (1969), in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 7: *Fenomenologické spisy II* (Prague: Oikoumene, 2008), 265–334.] English translation: Patočka, “The ‘Natural World’ Reconsidered Thirty-Three Years Later,” in *The Natural World as a Philosophical Problem*, trans. Erika Abrams, ed. Ivan Chvatík and Lúbia Učnik (Forthcoming from Northwestern University Press).
- 12 Cf. Hagedorn, “Beyond Myth and Enlightenment,” 252–261.
- 13 Patočka, *Body*, 147–161; cf. Patočka, “Nachwort,” 246–267.
- 14 Patočka, *Body*, 149–151, 156–161.
- 15 For the importance of transcendence in Patočka’s philosophy, see Richard Kearney, “La question de l’éthique chez Patočka,” in *Jan Patočka, philosophie, phénoménologie, politique*, ed. Etienne Tassin and Marc Richir (Grenoble: Millon, 1992), 203–219.
- 16 Patočka, *Body*, 158.
- 17 Patočka, *Plato and Europe*, passim; Patočka, “Europa und Nach-Europa. Die nacheuropäische Epoche und ihre geistigen Probleme,” in *Ketzerische Essays zur Philosophie der Geschichte, und ergänzende Schriften, Ausgewählte Schriften II*, ed. Klaus Nellen and Jiří Němec (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1984), 207–287.
- 18 Patočka, *Plato and Europe*, 36 and passim.
- 19 *Nahlédnutí*. In the quotation at the beginning of this article, this is translated as “looking-in.”
- 20 Patočka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, trans. Erazim Kohák, ed. James Dodd (Chicago: Open Court, 1996). [Czech: *Kacířské eseje o filosofii dějin*, in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 3: *Pěče o duši III*, ed. Ivan Chvatík and Pavel Kouba (Prague: Oikoumene, 2002).]
- 21 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 1–51. Patočka’s distinction between prehistory and history is not based on the rise of written sources, but on the development of the breakthrough by the third movement of human life.
- 22 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 40–41.
- 23 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 103.
- 24 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 103–106.
- 25 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 106.
- 26 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 107.
- 27 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 107.
- 28 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 108 (my italics). In another text Patočka refers approvingly to modern theologians who see in the metaphysical interpretation of death and immortality (as a continuation of life after death) a coarse cynicism that derides the tragic sense of human life. See Patočka, “Séminaire sur l’ère technique,” in *Liberté et sacrifice. Écrits politiques*, trans. Erika Abrams (Grenoble: Millon, 1990), 277–324, here 299. [Czech: “Čtyři semináře k problému Evropy,” in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 3: *Pěče o duši III*, ed. Ivan Chvatík and Pavel Kouba (Prague: Oikoumene, 2002), 374–423.]
- 29 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 107–108.

- 30 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 68–69.
- 31 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 67.
- 32 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 108.
- 33 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 101–102.
- 34 Patočka, “The ‘Natural World’ Reconsidered” (Forthcoming).
- 35 Patočka, “The ‘Natural World’ Reconsidered” (Forthcoming).
- 36 Patočka, “The ‘Natural World’ Reconsidered” (Forthcoming).
- 37 Also in his reading of the care of the soul in Democritus and Plato, Patočka speaks of immortality “in its own way.” See Patočka, *Plato and Europe*, 69; also 13, 36, 68, 80–81. Cf. Krzysztof Środa, “Patočka, Platon et l’immortalité de l’âme,” in *Jan Patočka, philosophie, phénoménologie, politique*, 39–44.
- 38 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 130 (in this volume). [Czech: “Kolem Masarykovy filosofie náboženství,” in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 12: *Češi I* (Prague: Oikumene, 2006).]
- 39 “The moral purpose of the universe has no apodictically binding effect even if we dismiss all claims relating to the relativity of morality and of moral norms. Precisely the principle of *redeeming someone*, or of harmony requiring *payment*, is possibly an outright disqualification of any moral purpose for the universe.” Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 102.
- 40 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 131.
- 41 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 108.
- 42 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 108.
- 43 “For the light did not initially reveal itself *in* man, but *above* him. Man is not the creator of Truth, but someone who is abandoned to it or immersed in it. . . there where he is capable of renouncing all he clings to as his own.” Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 108.
- 44 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 109. Patočka mentions the idea of self-surrender as love also in “The ‘Natural’ World and Phenomenology,” 267–268: “An existing being can only surrender itself, dedicate itself, to an other. The strength of the transubstantiation of life is the strength of a new love, a love yielding itself unconditionally to others. Only in this love does individuality become itself without maintaining the other in a self-alienation. Only here is the distraction of atomized life replaced by an inner continuity for which the other is not alien but a living I, not only abstractly but in the power of self-surrender—much as in vital, biological love, though now freely, openly, universally. That is not love as sympathy, as fellow feeling for a destiny of the same suffering, but of the same glory, of the same victory—the victory over the self-destructive self-centeredness. Biological love is merely an incomplete and inconsistent metaphor of this true and final love.”
- 45 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 109–110.
- 46 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 83.
- 47 Edmund Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie*, *Husserliana* VI, ed. Walter Biemel (Hague: Nijhoff, 1962), 18–104; [English translation: *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern, 1970), 21–102].
- 48 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 110.
- 49 Patočka, *Plato and Europe*, 9–10; *Heretical Essays*, 128–129.
- 50 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 120. The metaphors of day and night, light and darkness play an important role in the sixth essay, but I leave that aspect aside here.
- 51 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 126.
- 52 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 129–130.
- 53 For explanations and commentaries on Patočka’s characterization of the twentieth century as war, see Lubica Učnik, “Patočka on Techno-Power and the Sacrificial Victim (*Obět*)” and James Dodd, “The Twentieth Century as War,” both in: *Jan Patočka and the Heritage of Phenomenology*, 187–201 and 203–214 respectively; also Peter Trawny, “Die Moderne als Weltkrieg. Der Krieg bei Heidegger und Patočka,” in *Studia Phaenomenologica* 7 (2007), 377–394; and Findlay, *Caring for the Soul*, 139–141, 149–151.
- 54 Patočka, “The Dangers of Technicization in Science according to E. Husserl and the Essence of Technology as Danger according to M. Heidegger,” this text is reprinted in the present

- volume, 13–22. Patočka had written this lecture for a conference in Varna, Bulgaria, which he was not permitted to attend and where he could speak for only a few minutes before he was silenced. The discussions of this lecture were held later in clandestine meetings in Prague. Transcriptions of these discussions are what appear in French translation as “Séminaire sur l’ère technique,” in *Liberté et sacrifice*, 277–324.
- 55 This is the first phrase of Hölderlin’s poem “Patmos.”
- 56 Martin Heidegger, “Spiegel-Gespräch mit Martin Heidegger,” in *Martin Heidegger Gesamtausgabe* 16, ed. Hermann Heidegger (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2000), 652–683. [English translation: “Only a God Can Save Us,” trans. William Richardson, in *Heidegger: The Man and the Thinker* (1981), ed. Thomas Sheehan (Chicago: Transaction, 2009), 45–67.]
- 57 Therefore, according to Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback, the question of modern technology is central to the understanding of freedom and of phenomenology itself, i.e. to the phenomenological question of appearing. See Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback, “Sacrifice and Salvation: Jan Patočka’s Reading of Heidegger on the Question of Technology,” in *Jan Patočka and the Heritage of Phenomenology*, 23–37.
- 58 Patočka, “The Dangers of Technicization,” 17.
- 59 Patočka, “The Dangers of Technicization,” 20.
- 60 Patočka, “The Dangers of Technicization,” 21.
- 61 Patočka, “The Dangers of Technicization,” 21.
- 62 Cf. Philippe S. Merlier, *Patočka. Le soin de l’âme et l’Europe* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2009), 119–126; Émilie Tardivel, *La Liberté au principe. Essai sur la philosophie de Patočka* (Paris: Vrin, 2011), 251–265.
- 63 Patočka, “Séminaire,” 314–316, 321–323. Cf. Patočka, “Les héros de notre temps,” in *Liberté et sacrifice*, 325–330, especially 328–329. [Czech: “Hrdinové naší doby,” in *Péče o duši III*, 186–190.]
- 64 Patočka, “Séminaire,” 298, 310–311.
- 65 Patočka, “The Dangers of Technicization,” 339.
- 66 Patočka, *Plato and Europe*, 128.
- 67 This interpretation of Socrates’ death seems to be rather doubtful, but I leave a discussion of it aside now, because the point here is only that Patočka includes Christian elements in his interpretation of Socrates.

6 Philosophy in Dark Times

An Essay on Jan Patočka's Philosophy of History

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This paper explores Patočka's philosophy of history, with particular emphasis on the analysis of the First World War and related matters that one finds in the *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*. The aim of this exercise is to illuminate the philosophical/phenomenological anthropology that Patočka deploys in his analysis of the human condition in the twentieth century.

Keywords: First World War; ontology; phenomenology; nihilism; Europe; philosophy of war

The idea that war itself might be something that can explain, that has itself the power of bestowing meaning, is an idea foreign to all philosophies of history and so also to all the explanations of the world war we know.

—Jan Patočka¹

Introduction: Europe is Dead

The legacy of the twentieth century is to a great extent a legacy of its wars, and accordingly the question of the meaning of these wars—the First World War perhaps above all, but only if understood as the first of many wars hot and cold and their aftershocks that we are still feeling today—has a central place in Jan Patočka's philosophy of history. The sixth of the *Heretical Essays*, from which the above quote is taken, is devoted explicitly to this question, but arguably the reflection already constitutes a basic concern of the work as a whole. Likewise the wars of the twentieth century are present in various other texts of Patočka that are devoted to the history of philosophy and the philosophy of history, such as *Plato and Europe*, *Éternité et historicité*, and *Europa und Nacheuropa*; for the question of the meaning of the wars of the twentieth century in Patočka's thinking proves to be inextricable from the question of the meaning of philosophy itself, or what philosophy is to mean *for us*.²

Yet for Patočka what philosophy is to be, to be for us, is in turn tied, bound, and determined by a more fateful question, namely the question of the meaning of *Europe*. This means that to understand what is being suggested in the statement above, we first need to understand what Patočka means by "Europe," for it is only within the horizon of the problem of Europe that Patočka's thesis that war "has itself the power of bestowing meaning" can be understood.

That the question of Europe is so tightly interwoven with the question of philosophy in Patočka's thought should come as no surprise. For Patočka, perhaps more than any other philosopher of the twentieth century, with the possible exceptions of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, understood the question of Europe to be a specifically *philosophical* question. The development of what we might call the philosophical problem of Europe spans Patočka's entire philosophical career, but it arguably begins with a deep engagement with Husserl's phenomenology, an engagement that coincided with the genesis of Husserl's last great work, *The Crisis of the European Sciences*.³ Two ideas are decisive here: the first is the problem, historically rooted in the positivism of Richard Avenarius, of the "natural" world, and the project of breaking it free from scientific and empiricist assumptions about the being of the world in order to reveal its existential structure. This is the subject of Patočka's first major work, appearing in 1936, *Přirozený svět jako filosofický problém* [The Natural World as Philosophical Problem], and inaugurates a reflection that, through an increasingly profound engagement with both the history of the problem of movement and Heidegger's existential philosophy, results in a unique philosophical anthropology oriented around the concept of movement.⁴ The second idea is Husserl's identification of philosophy, specifically Greek philosophy, as the essence of European civilization, the source of its ultimate *telos* and guiding form as a rational culture. The confluence of these two convictions forms the core of Patočka's thinking of the problem of Europe, and provides a basic framework that is progressively developed and enriched over the course of his life by a deep and complex reading of the history of Western philosophy and religion.

This philosophy of history is in turn mediated in Patočka's work through a series of important writings on Czech national history and identity, much of which were written in the context of the collapse of the Czech democratic project that had begun with Masaryk's presidency after the First World War and which, after 1938, seemed to be hopelessly suppressed.⁵ The role of these writings in Patočka's reflections should not be underestimated, nor passed over as irrelevant to his other works that one might take to be more clearly devoted to "universal" philosophical themes. In the end, Patočka's Europe represents the concrete life of a philosophical ideal, one that is ultimately only meaningful when articulated from specific perspectives, including that (or perhaps those) of the Czechs. The result is that one finds in Patočka's writings a nuanced, philosophically and historically sophisticated reflection on the meaning of Europe, one deeply haunted by the complex and often tragic history of Bohemia, stretching from catastrophic defeat in the seventeenth century that marked the close of the first phase of the Thirty Years War, to the German and then Soviet subjugation of the nascent independent Czecho-slovak state during Patočka's own lifetime. Patočka was very much, to echo Arendt, a thinker in and of dark times, and he gave unique expression to the troubled character of the interwar period that often contrasts starkly with the confidence and optimism of his fellow countryman Masaryk. The sixth of the *Heretical Essays* is a case in point: it represents, on a number of levels, the culmination of a lifelong struggle of Patočka's to understand the meaning and purpose of the philosophical vocation in the shadow of the immense suffering and devastation of the twentieth century.

The pathos that emerges from bearing witness to dark times is so palpable in Patočka's work that one could almost sum everything up with one simple observation: *Europe is dead*—and its death represents precisely the legacy of the wars

of the twentieth century, wars which have brought to an end the promises of an authentic European universality. In *Plato and Europe*, Patočka expresses this in no uncertain terms:

Europe, that two thousand year old construction which managed to lift up mankind to an altogether new degree of self-reflection and consciousness, and strength and power as well, this historical reality, which for a long time supposed that it encompassed all of mankind, that it is mankind and all else is worthy of neglect, is definitely at an end.⁶

To understand the “Europe” that died, and why the wars of the twentieth century resulted in its death, requires a closer look at some of the basic gestures of Patočka’s philosophy of history. This will be the principal task of the bulk of this essay. The most important of such gestures for our purposes are, first, Patočka’s account of the beginning of history, or the birth of historical existence from a pre-historical, mythical world; second, Patočka’s account of the concept of the “care for the soul,” which he understands to be basic to the history of European civilization; and, third, Patočka’s understanding, heavily influenced by Heidegger, but also by his extensive reading of the history of science, of the modern age as a decadent techno-civilization. Together, our account of these three gestures in Patočka’s writings will provide the basis for a reading of Patočka’s thesis cited above from sixth of the *Heretical Essays*, namely the idea that war in the twentieth century is the basis for its own sense or meaning.

The Beginning of History

One of the many striking aspects of Patočka’s account of pre-history and the beginning of history in the first two essays of the *Heretical Essays* is his argument that historical reality is incomprehensible without understanding how it is grounded in myth, and how, once history begins, it subsequently carries with it a fundamental mythical dimension. Patočka situates his descriptions of this mythical dimension in texts such as *Plato and Europe* and the *Heretical Essays* within a philosophical anthropology that has at its core the idea that human existence is oriented ontologically as an *openness* (*otevřenost/Offenheit*)⁷ to what exists. Accordingly, in Patočka’s thinking, as in Heidegger’s, the *world* serves as the organizing theme of a fundamental ontology: it is not simply that humans have some idea of the world or other; rather, the point is that they *exist as worldly*. This means in turn that “myth” is not understood as a repository of representations or images capable of bearing interpretive weight or value (so in the sense of a “picture of things”). Instead, Patočka understands myth to delimit the form of a primordial opening of human existence with respect to the manifestation of things. The “myth” in question, in other words, is really a *mythical world*.

This openness, its structure, plasticity, and fragility, is of central importance for all of Patočka’s thinking; its thematization represents for him the key fulcrum for a philosophical reflection on human life, made possible by phenomenology. “Humans,” Patočka writes, “are in their inmost being nothing other than this ‘openness.’”⁸ Patočka understands this “inmost being” in terms comparable to Heidegger’s conception of a *Seinsverständnis*, or of an understanding of being that constitutes the existential

infrastructure of all human comportment. Accordingly the “achievement” of this understanding, which structures the manner in which beings are manifest, is twofold, following the contours of the ontological difference between what manifests itself and the retreating ground of concealment that allows for such manifestation: “Every phenomena must be understood as a lighting, a coming forth from concealment, and never otherwise. Concealment penetrates the phenomenon and more: it is what first releases from itself the being which manifests itself.”⁹

This means that humans do not merely occupy a given space or horizon of existence, but as openness experience the emergence of space and horizon, and in turn comport themselves in ways that cultivate this openness to emergence. Taking our cue from the later Heidegger, we might turn to the question of the being of language as of particular relevance to openness; but Patočka is at pains to argue that the cultivation of openness is not limited to language, but includes “modes of development and transmission of openness in religion, myth, art, and sacrifice.”¹⁰ Yet this does not mean that all human comportment is explicitly oriented towards openness and its transmission; life cultivates, gives shape and form, by extending itself throughout a multiplicity of movements across time, including movements of rooting and preservation that represent comportment *in* the open without being a comportment *towards* the open. Thus even if openness is not the theme or the explicit end of all of these movements, nevertheless its history and fate is bound to them all.¹¹

The “mythical world” is thus a particular mode of human existence, one in which openness is cultivated in a particular configuration of movements both towards and away from the explicit thematization of openness as such. Patočka emphasizes three basic aspects characteristic of the particular configuration of the mythical, pre-historical world as a primordial order of manifestation. The first is a marked orientation towards the *past*.¹² The mythical resides in what has already been, which in turn functions as an organizing structure of the possible future. Accordingly, in the mythical world possibilities carry the sense of something already given, as if answers naturally precede questions; possibilities bear the mark of being closed, as if life has already been settled even before it has been lived. Patočka describes this orientation to the past and the dominance of the past over the possible as basic to a fundamental human movement of *acceptation*, in which the world embraces human life in the form of a welcoming rootedness in the plenum of being, a gift that comes with no need for explanation or insight.¹³

Another way to describe this is the experience of the world as *non-problematic*, in which the mystery of concealment out of which manifestation emerges, the very mystery of truth as an event of the world itself, remains only implicit. This does not, however, mean that the mythical world is without its secrets, its mysteries; nor does it imply a lack of a sense or experience of depth:

The non-problematic world is one in which concealment is not experienced as such. That does not mean that such a world would not have or know secret things, the sacred, or the mysterious; on the contrary, it can be full of such things, they might even play a decisive role—but it lacks the experience of a transition, of the emergence of what-is as a phenomenon out of obscurity into the openness in the course of which even that which allows what-is to become manifest shows itself and thereby and only thereby sets questions about what-is on a firm foundation.¹⁴

The problematicity at the root of manifestation in openness is un-experienced but present, itself concealed in the form of the happening of a non-event; but it is nevertheless felt as a peculiar subterranean presence that finds indirect expression in the second basic feature of the mythical world for Patočka, namely the fact that the world is a world of *conflict*, and with that of burden. For as soon as life is embraced in the movement of acceptance it is revealed to be fragile. This is a primordial expression of finitude: the human being is ontologically a threatened being, one that can continue to exist only if it labors to maintain itself, to shelter itself from exposure to forces that would destroy it. The existential character of the mythical world is thus one of sheltered vulnerability; its movement unfolds within the tension between an unconditioned promise embedded in the embrace of the world, and the risk of danger, of being exposed to death and the threat of destruction. And it is this sense of being-exposed, and with that the necessity for labor to maintain one's existence, that takes the form of an *imposition*—thereby providing mythical humans with an illicit sense of their freedom:

Paradoxically, work lets us feel our freedom; its character of burden is derived from burden as a more basic trait that has to do with human life as such, the fact that we cannot simply take life in indifference but must always “bear” it, “lead” it—guarantee and stand for it.¹⁵

The third characteristic of the mythical world is that, throughout this struggle and the labor to survive and find shelter, there runs a sense of *order*, of a presence of the divine that vaguely illuminates the how of things, of what it means to be manifest, and with that to inhabit the open realm of the manifest. Yet this relation to what one might call the truth of things, thus the relation between the truth of their manifestation and the openness of human existence as the being for this truth, is again for Patočka only implicit in the mythical world. At most it remains a tacit, though concrete and “natural” dimension of human existence, embedded in a sense of how the burden of our lives is intertwined with an obscure but present order of things. The result is that history, to the extent to which history is a mode of relating to the truth of the self, is not yet established as a patent mode of life. This is one of the “heretical” theses of the *Heretical Essays*: humans are historical, to the extent that openness, the very core of human existence, represents a relation to the truth of things; but nevertheless history originally takes the form of only a pre-history, a deep history submerged in the rhythms of a natural, mythical existence that obscures its essence and with that its specifically human promise. Likewise, in the mythical world any questioning or reflection that might represent a step towards historical self-consciousness remains at best a muted rehearsal and repetition of the world as an established, given order of meaning. It is important to emphasize that Patočka is not committed to the argument that the mythical or pre-historical represents a total *absence* of questioning, of reflection or even knowledge; the point is only that in deep history questioning and reflection remain firmly embedded in, and with that hindered by, a given natural order of life.

It is as if mythical humans, to evoke a striking phrase of Patočka's, lived according to an essentially *metaphorical* self-understanding of being, one marked by a distinct *naïveté* with regard to its own metaphorical character. In the mythical world it is as if everything necessary for the beginning of explicitly problematic (and therefore historical) existence were already expressed metaphorically in an experience, a life that

humans nevertheless never fail to take literally, and thus fail to differentiate between ground and existence:

[. . .] it is characteristic of humans before history that they understand their entire life in terms of something like an ontological metaphor, that they do not differentiate between the night which is a fact of experience and night as the darkness out of which the lightening of being strikes; between the earth that bears fruit and nourishes and the earth that is the backdrop of all that is, of the world which is not identical with any single factual existent which, in turn, shows itself only against the backdrop of the world.¹⁶

In a life understood and lived as an ontological metaphor, the *city* takes on particular significance. The city is a primordial expression of the uncanny position of the human between non-human nature and the gods, those who enjoy a divine life unburdened by labor and the imposition of life. The city likewise orchestrates the patterns of acceptance and defense thanks to which human life is given to itself, maintained, and reproduced. As a concentration of the movements of human existence, the city provides the unique space within which the ontological metaphor of existence unfolds as a unity of meaning. Thus in ancient Sumerian mythology Gilgamesh is a builder of cities; the walls of Uruk stand as his most enduring and significant accomplishment.¹⁷ Deep history itself, whether of proto-European or non-European civilizations, is arguably the history of the city; here one can think of a long list of examples from the ancient Shang city of Yinxu in China to the Mycenaean temple city of Knossos in Greece. The point is not that everyone in the ancient world lived in the city (which is obviously false), but instead that the city, as a concentration of humanity and a privileged site of its manifestation and expression, bears within its fold a uniquely mythological and metaphorical resonance.

All civilization for Patočka is rooted in this mythical world of the city; it is the site in which human life is accepted into a world in which it must defend itself, all within the horizon of an implicit sense of the divine, illuminating the contours of the openness of human existence in a muted lived metaphor. Europe, which for Patočka as for Husserl first emerges with philosophy, is no exception; yet in Patočka the argument that Europe proper begins with philosophy takes the form of tracking the emergence of the transformation of the mythical world of the city.

This transformation is deeply ambiguous. On the one hand, Patočka understands philosophy as something that transforms the relation between humans and the truth of their existence, thus revealing explicitly a relation that in the mythical world had only been latently present. Revealing, articulating explicitly the relation to truth amounts to a rejection, one might say, of the very status of the ontological metaphor as an authentic figure of understanding; but this only establishes the importance of pre-history as such, as something *against* which philosophy reacts and first defines itself.¹⁸ Philosophy is nothing less than a recasting of the mythical figure of the true, or of the movement of human existence within which openness is taken up and cultivated. This does nothing less than change the meaning of the world. Yet on the other hand, this transformation of meaning does not simply replace myth, as if awakening from a dream; myth continues to grip humanity through the fundamental movements of acceptance and defense, though it is now incorporated within a new constellation thanks to a transformed, more explicit relation to openness.

An important consequence of this idea, which we might call the thesis of the irreducibility of the mythical, is that the contrast between myth and philosophy, and with that between deep history and history, is not the same as the contrast between falsity and truth. Patočka instead thinks of the contrast in terms of two fundamental ways in which humans relate to truth, in the sense of a relation to openness. On the properly mythical register, the truth of things, of the whole, is a horizon in which we blindly wander, like Oedipus; it is a path onto which we are always already thrown and from the facticity of which we are never released.¹⁹ Accordingly philosophy represents a countermovement to this blindness, one launched within the mythical domain of the human city; it seeks to bring the truth of things into view, awakening humans to the clarification of what is, insisting on the possibility of modifying the manner in which we encounter our facticity in the movement of our existence. Yet we remain ultimately blind in our factual existence; any awakening of philosophy will not be a clean exit, but will always remain in tension with a facticity that resists articulation, resists the demand for clarity and insight. Thus the revolution of philosophy is more like the movement from the night of myth to a kind of *daytime mythos*.²⁰ We awaken, as it were, within the dream of a life that we are nevertheless compelled to continue to dream.

Polemos

The irreducibility of myth means that philosophy, as a temporal and existential reorientation to the very meaning of truth, of openness, can be thought in terms of an ancient city rediscovered, or perhaps better *refounded*, in light of the potential for a different mode or type of factual existence. This reorientation is at the same time the re-birth of the primordial mythical city as the *polis*. Drawing on Arendt, Patočka characterizes the *polis* by way of a contrast between the city as a means of preservation and lasting endurance (or the form of life that Arendt describes under the designation of *homo faber*²¹) and political life as *initiative*—which means “a life in active tension, one of extreme risk and unceasing upward striving in which every pause is necessarily a weakness for which the initiative of others lies in wait.”²²

The contrast is thus between two very different modes in which human possibility is taken up, pursued, lived; it is not so much a shift from one set of goals to another, as a shift in human understanding of the manner in which life posits itself as an end as such. With the *polis*, acceptance and defense no longer determine the rhythm in which human beings live their possibilities; “here life is not received as complete as it is, but rather transforms itself from the start—it is a reaching forth (*vzmachu*).”²³

What is distinctive about such a life—at once political and philosophical, or rather the common root of both—is that it is a reaching forth, pursuit, but *without foundation*; it is a life that “does not stand on the firm ground of generative continuity, it is not backed by the dark earth, but only by darkness, that is, it is even confronted by its finitude and its permanent precariousness of life.”²⁴ The ontological metaphor, in other words, begins to unravel; darkness itself, always saturating human existence as that receding ground that at the same time gives or allows the manifestation of what-is, of beings, ceases to be the given darkness of the earth, and instead begins to become the rootlessness, the groundlessness of existential possibility. Darkness shifts from metaphor to the (still mythical) figure of *problematic insight*. Instead of an implicit, metaphorical sensibility of finite existence, whether expressed by the burdensomeness

of labor or the inevitability of death, there is now in play a free relation to problematic meaningfulness, one that takes the explicit form of a *confrontation*.

The figure of confrontation, of strife, is essential to Patočka's account of the beginning of history. It is important to stress what it is not: the point is not to argue that somehow in pre-history mythical humans are unaware of their finitude, of death, or even that they give it a different, false meaning that is then contrasted to a "true" account of death that emerges with philosophy, or with the *polis*—one that would give death, say, a moral significance or some other interpretation it would not otherwise have had. The point is instead that the understanding of human life as that which emerges from nothing, a nothing that continues to attend to its disappearance, here takes the shape of an insight into the meaning of the being of all that is, of all that can be said to be; human being begins to re-orient itself as an understanding that sees across a landscape of being as emergence, a landscape carved by the tension between what shows itself for what it is, and what refuses and recedes into a nothingness that is implicit in all striving, all fixing and determining, all of existence. In other words, it is the shift from an understanding that takes the form of an ontological metaphor, to one that now takes the form of an ontological *seeing*—a seeing that, Patočka argues, is nothing less than the *polemos* of Heraclitus.

Polemos, which is at once a power that binds all to all, the strife (*eris*) that lies within the inwardly stretched, tension ridden harmony of beings, but also at the same time the manner in which all that exists is understood and grasped in insight, in *logos*:

[. . .] the power generated by strife is no blind force. The power that arises from strife is a power that knows and sees: only in this invigorating strife is there life that truly sees into the nature of things—to *phronein*. Thus *phronesis*, understanding, by the very nature of things, cannot but be at once common and conflicted. To see the world and life as a whole means to see *polemos*, *eris*, as that which is common; *xunon esti pasi to phroneein*: "insight is common to all."²⁵

Polemos so conceived is thus the manner in which openness, both to what appears and becomes manifest and to the appearance of what refuses to appear in it,²⁶ becomes both an explicit theme of human comportment and its particular shape or form. Conflict, the groundless initiative to grasp and pursue the possible as it is illuminated by the insight, the seeing of *polemos*, is not disinterested contemplation, but life, understanding, lived and experienced on an explicitly ontological plane.

If this is the case, then it is clear that this also means that *polemos* in Heraclitus can only be translated as "war" with serious reservations; for what cannot be meant here, as Heidegger has also emphasized, is war "in the human sense,"²⁷ that is, war in the sense of this or that human conflict or historical event such as the Persian Wars. The *polis*, and with that philosophy, did not emerge as a mere effect of the fighting of men, as if political life arose from a clash of hoplite shield and spear. Nevertheless, the emergence of *polemos* does change the *meaning* of war, transforming it from the work of violence necessary for preservation to an essential dimension of the pursuit of the possible in a new and open horizon of the significance of what it *means* to fight. Again Patočka:

[. . .] warriors prior to the emergence of political life find their support in a meaning woven into the immediacy of life, fighting for their home, family, for the

continuum of life to which they belong [. . .] in contrast to that stands the goal of a free life as such, one's own or that of others; it is, essentially, an unsheltered life.²⁸

Thus it is not an accident, as Patočka goes on to remark, echoing a body of historical literature on the origins of the Greek *polis* that emphasizes the importance of hoplite warfare, that the meaning of political life, and by extension philosophy, is shaped “*inter arma*.”²⁹ It is an understanding that shatters the given meaning of the pre-historical in favor of an embrace of risk, of the groundlessness of pure initiative. Such initiative is creative, binding humans together in what Patočka calls the “solidarity of the undaunted” (a phrase that recalls the “solidarity of the shaken” in the sixth *Essay*), a solidarity that includes even adversaries (for in politics everyone is an adversary in this sense) in a unity that is “perhaps the only mode [of being human] that offers hope amid the storm of the world.”³⁰

This discussion of *polemos* at the end of the second of the *Heretical Essays* provides, within the economy of the work as a whole, a key foundation for the argument about the wars of the twentieth century, as is signaled by Patočka himself in the following passage:

This beginning [of history] then reaches out to future historical outreach, especially by teaching what humankind does not wish to comprehend, in spite of all the immense hardness of history, does not want to understand, something that perhaps only latter days will learn after reaching the nadir of destruction and devastation—that life need be understood not from the viewpoint of the *day*, of life merely accepted, but also from the view of strife, of the night, of *polemos*. The point of history is not what can be uprooted or shaken, but rather the openness to the shaking.³¹

The Care for the Soul

Openness, in all of its forms, always occurs for Patočka in a relation of care—of human care for existence, for life. In Heideggerean terms, it is the care of a being that is always an issue for itself, a question that unfolds in the horizon of an understanding. Prehistory is the cultivation of a modality of care that posits its understanding of itself as an answered question, thereby founding a given lot in life the possibilities of which are orchestrated in the movements of acceptance and preservation that pass consistently, monotonously, over the potential for unlocking the question as a question. The emerging of understanding as *polemos* thus sets into motion a very different modality of care, one that no longer has itself in question from out of the positing of a given answer, thus out of an openness as a manifestation of the given, but now out of the explicit cultivation and care for an openness to shaking. This new orientation, new ontological posture of human existence, is described by Patočka through a reflection on the ancient theme of the “care for the soul.”

The care for the soul becomes an explicit theme first in Plato, but Patočka believes that the idea can be discerned earlier, in Democritus.³² Patočka traces in both Plato and Democritus the idea of a unique relation to manifestation as such, one determined by the possibility of a free relation to the truth, one that would no longer blindly rely

on the figure of a given world to determine how truth is to play a role in human existence. The pursuit of a free relation is not simply a question of cultivating an understanding of things, of knowing more of what there is to know; it instead has to do with the possibility of giving one's life a new shape, a new form in accordance with its inner potential for a free relation to openness.

This relation is nothing less than a renewed, creative relation to the divine, but now to the divine understood explicitly as *eternity*, as that which transcends finite human time. Of course the divine is present in the mythical world as well; there it not only expresses a latent sense of the presence of an origin of order, but it also takes the explicit form of the *sacred*, as that which stands in evident opposition to the profane. Again influenced by Arendt, Patočka describes the profane as that which encompasses the tedium of life, the bad infinity of ever-repeated tomorrows bound to the necessity of consumption in order to sustain existence. As such the profane roots itself in our bondage to life, to the cycles of nature, while the sacred represents a primordial, violent and devastating exception to this burdensome monotony of the profane. The sacred is the disruption of the dominion and burden of life for the sake of the release of a radical, inexplicable otherness in the midst of things. Here the night emerges as pure destructive force; all bonds are apparently broken, and something like a raw, unconscious freedom emerges as the possibility of alleviating humans from the impositions of existence. But this release of the orgiastic sacred is not for humans; it does not release them for their sake. In the mythical realm, humans amount to little more than the helpless playthings of the divine; they are in the end nothing but pathetic objects scattered across the landscape of the mundane to which sacred, orgiastic powers periodically lay waste, wholly indifferent to whatever is consumed in the process. As sacred violence, the divine thus accentuates the ultimate character of human finitude, suffering, and vulnerability; but for all that, sacred violence, however dangerous, is nevertheless the natural symbol of a latent, potential freedom, in that it shows that it is possible to be released from the tedium of the maintenance of life and the burden of labor. The sacred is proof, already established in pre-historical consciousness, that life's bondage to itself is not unassailable.

Patočka argues that, in early Greek philosophers such as Democritus, another possibility of a relation to the divine is pursued, one that does not take the form of an ultimately anonymous natural existence punctuated by divine disruption. Instead the human soul emerges as not only a relation to things, but as a *project*, one in which a self gathers together its potential as life, disciplines itself, and dedicates itself to a relation to the divine through its capacity to comprehend, its ability to reflect and to *see*. Rather than existing as dispersed in the world, absorbed in its activities as a mundane existence interrupted only by periodic exposure to sacred violence, the soul becomes something more—it itself, as soul, which now emerges as a new mode of understanding and thus as a care for openness, becomes an explicit *purpose*. Human care for itself is no longer limited to the mere care for bare life and the defense of given existence; it now becomes the care for being in the light of higher things, possibilities of human existence that can be brought to a new and powerful, even “sacred” visibility through what has now become an explicitly *philosophical* life.

In Plato this ideal of a self-gathered soul, one that has submitted itself to truth in the form of a discipline of life, is explicitly articulated in terms of the transformation of the mythical city, the ancient locus of the opposition between the sacred and the profane. However, this emergence of the soul as a self-cultivated relation to the divine stands in

direct tension with the mythical world; the mythical city cannot anticipate it, and its emergence in its midst can only occur in the wake of a fundamental shaking of its foundations, and with that a profound sense of a loss of meaning. As we have seen in conjunction with the discussion of *polemos* above, the philosopher can only be anticipated, as it were, polemically, which is to say politically, in a world that has already been broken free of its moorings and, accordingly to Patočka, has thereby become *historical* in character.

This philosophical soul of tempered self-discipline, what Patočka at one point describes as an “untarnished steel crystal in the view of eternity,”³³ is clearly not a figure recognizable on the level of the mythical profane, for it participates in a transcendence strangely, even dangerously related to the sacred. Yet for all that philosophical transcendence does not take the violent form of the mythical sacred, for it does not seek the destruction of the mundane, but rather its mastery for the sake of cultivating an explicit and free relation to the divine. The sacred itself is accordingly transformed in the care for the soul from pure violence, pure disruption and exception, to the ideal of an eroticized noetic relation to the Good, which in Plato takes the form of a pure fixed point of eternity that provides a direction for the self-gathering and self-possession of the philosopher. The philosopher here thus emerges as one who lives *towards the truth*, for the sake of the truth as an organizing pole of self-possession and, with that, *responsiveness*.

Thus, on the one hand, Patočka describes the emergence of philosophy as accompanied by a shaking of accepted meaning, the rise of a problematized existence for which questions suddenly become primary and answers elusive; but on the other hand, philosophy becomes understood as the rise of a specific form of *responsibility*, of a mode of life organized around an ethic of disciplined responsiveness to truth, however opaque and elusive. However, this is not a responsibility that is wholly unique to philosophy. Patočka argues that something like this—namely, the transformation of sacred violence into an erotics incorporated into a practice of life, thereby transforming the radical opacity of human finitude into a free relation to the divine—is probably something that belongs to all religions:

This bringing [the orgiastic realm] into relation to responsibility, that is, to the domain of human authenticity and truth, is probably the kernel of the history of all religions. Religion is not the sacred, nor does it arise directly from the experience of sacred orgies and rites; rather, it is where the sacred qua demonic is being explicitly overcome.³⁴

To the extent to which it grafts the sacred to responsibility, in Plato in a way that eroticizes the latter, philosophy is likewise not equivalent to the sacred. More, we need to be sensitive here to the distinction between two distinctions: namely the sacred and the profane on the one hand, and authenticity (responsibility) and inauthenticity on the other.³⁵ Here drawing on Heidegger, for Patočka, authenticity is the accomplishment of that explicit relation to truth at the heart of the care for the soul as a life in truth, as the basic aim of its discipline and focus; its opposite, inauthenticity, is accordingly a dispersion of the self, the giving way of the project of the soul for a forgetfulness and self-immersion in the concerns of the everyday—or, alternatively, the abandon of the orgiastic which, in its violence, represents the opportunity for an equally radical dissolution of the self. Thus in a way the sacred and the authentic stand together in an

uncanny alliance against the suffocating domination of the profane; both are expressions of an understanding that human being always carries within itself more than what can be realized in the rhythms of profane life. Likewise, there are modes of inauthenticity that consort equally with the profane and the sacred, through cultivating styles of indifference and insensitivity that shape the everydayness of the one and the violence of the other.

More, there have been unsuccessful, incomplete or aborted attempts at realizing a genuine configuration of a life in truth that mark the history of the care for the soul. Religion itself, though it might begin with a disciplining of the orgiastic, does not by that alone necessarily achieve ontological clarity into the being of responsibility; it may “turn out that religion is subject to temporary obscurity until its problems have been resolved philosophically.”³⁶ But also philosophy, in its attempt to articulate a *decisive* determination of truth in the wake of the historical experience of the shaking of meaning, threatens to ossify into a sclerotic dogmatism that fails to genuinely engage the form of insight basic to the ontological experience of philosophy—for Patočka, this occurs when philosophy takes the form of *metaphysics*.

The importance of Christianity for Patočka can be seen as a response to both the emptiness of metaphysics and a deeper need to articulate the historical essence of religious life. The failure of hubristic human understanding, the pettiness and absurdity revealed in the failed attempts to provide a firm and unassailable *episteme*, provides both context and motivation for faith.³⁷ This faith is not a mere acceptance of a given, but a cultivated skepticism that grasps again the ultimate relation to the night, to human finitude, that lies at the core of *polemos*; Christianity is, in other words, ultimately historical. Yet at the same time it represents a historicity that, for Patočka, is left unthought; the care for the soul in its Christian form, as a care of the self through and as faith, at once implies and passes over the possibility of a radical ontological understanding and seeing:

Implied [in Christianity], though never explicitly thematized and never grasped philosophically as a central question, is the idea that the soul is by nature wholly incommensurate with all eternal being, that this nature has to do with its care for its own being in which, unlike all other existants, is infinitely interested; and that an essential part of its composition is responsibility, that is, the possibility of choice and, in this choosing, of arriving at its own self—the idea that the soul is nothing present before, only afterwards, that it is historical in all its being and only as such escapes decadence.³⁸

Decadence

These two failures—one of a philosophy become metaphysics and the other of a Christianity that remains the unthought response to the first, failures that both carry at their core a continuing promise of authentic life—are symptomatic of a history of the care for the soul as a history of a struggle against *decadence*. Other factors in Patočka’s account of this history, and which tie the legacy of the care for the soul explicitly to the idea of Europe, are the twin disasters of the collapse of the Greek *polis* and that of the Roman *civitas*. The legacy of philosophy Patočka describes is accordingly borne from a sense of a world that can no longer remain secure, that is dissolving around us, and to which we must somehow respond from within.

Philosophy as a response to a decadent world is of course a theme that is at least as old as Heraclitus, and likewise Plato can be read as a meditation on the meaning of the collapse of a decadent Greek world in the wake of the Peloponnesian War. More important for Patočka's thinking, however, is the more recent permutation of decadent Europe, namely the nineteenth century and its culmination in the birth of modern industrial civilization. In the rather dense fourth essay of the *Heretical Essays*, where Patočka explores the legacy of the nineteenth century, the analysis is to a great extent political, and follows a familiar narrative: the nineteenth century begins with the rise of Revolutionary France as a genuine continental power under Napoleon; it also witnesses the subsequent final demise of the Holy Roman Empire and the restructuring of the order of nations, as well as the emergence of Russia as a more forceful broker in European affairs. Yet at the same time, Patočka is clearly looking back to the nineteenth century through the experience of the twentieth, and in terms of what he considers to be the meaning of the two world wars and the rise of Soviet Russia and the United States as world powers: namely, what is being traced here is the beginning of what Patočka considers to be the effective *retreat of Europe from history*. This retreat is not limited to Europe relinquishing its place in the world as a dominant center of power, but involves a final break with a spiritual tradition embodied in the ideal of the care for the soul.

But what does it mean, to *retreat from history*? What is it about the nineteenth century that puts, so to speak, history itself at risk, at least in its European form, and with that brings to an end the particular legacy of the care for the soul? Patočka's analysis in the fourth and fifth of the *Heretical Essays* emphasizes two related, interwoven factors. Both can be characterized as retreats of a certain kind, or perhaps better as constrictions and limitations of the spirit; both have complicated origins in the dissolution of the medieval world and the legacy of the Renaissance; and both contribute to a specifically European form of decadence.

The first factor is a spiritual constriction that Patočka sees exemplified by the rise of mathematical natural science. Here the relation of the knower to the known, and the very meaning of what it is to know, retreats from the promise of an insight into the essence of things to the safer harbor of a successful manipulation of things, the projection of structure and form into the future behavior of beings. In the place of the Platonic soul that cultivates the steadfastness and permanence of a vision of the true, of the Good, there enters a calculating subject that limits its efforts to see to the surfaces of things, thus establishing itself to being a mere observer of patterns and an agent of organization. This is to a great extent the result of the history of a metaphysics that succeeds in the articulation of existence only to the extent to which it also drains existence of its inner sense, its inner meaning. The result is that to "know" is no longer philosophical, no longer that inward cultivation of a free relation to openness, to the separate and the exceptional, the invisible and the secret, but instead becomes a purely external affair of mapping forms and functions—and with that inaugurates a strangely resilient form of impenetrable immanence.

The second factor has to do with what we might call a newfound orientation to brute externality. Patočka characterizes this as a shift from the "care to be" to the "care to have"—to what he calls "care for the external world and its conquest."³⁹ Like mathematical natural science, this drive to expansion and power in the form of *having* has its origin in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but it is only in the nineteenth that these two factors together mature and coalesce into a spiritual posture that

decisively brings to a close the legacy of the care for the soul. The soul, as knower, no longer means the subject of any other kind of truth than what can be calculated and manipulated; we have become, as Nietzsche says, completely “objective”; and care, as the primordial structure of human comportment, no longer means anything other than to have, to accumulate endlessly, to expand power and dominion without end.

The rise of these two spiritual tendencies and their interweaving, which in turn draws from a dizzying complex of other ideas and experiences (the rise of individualism, the rapid social and political transformations in the wake of industrialization, the astonishingly swift expansion of European colonial power), has the ontological significance of decidedly displacing *polemos* as a mode of human existence, that politico-philosophical insightful relation to the emergence of being, with the figure of pure *force*:

Humans have ceased to be a relation to Being and have become a force, a mighty one, one of the mightiest. [. . .] It seems as if humans have become a grand energy accumulator in a world of sheer forces, on the one hand making use of those forces to exist and multiply, yet on the other hand themselves integrated into the same process, accumulated, calculated, utilized and manipulated like any other state of energy.⁴⁰

Or perhaps better put, force itself takes on a new meaning, one that has its origin in a reconfiguration of human openness to Being, or of the manner in which human existence is open to the emergence of beings from their ground. *Polemos* is not so much displaced as perhaps transmogrified, or retranslated from strife/conflict to *mobilization*, to evoke a theme of Ernst Jünger’s. And in fact Jünger plays a key role in Patočka’s understanding of the wars of the twentieth century, just as it had for Heidegger;⁴¹ and also like Heidegger, the rise of the new metaphysical *Gestalt* of human existence in the modern age represents a distinctive manner in which Being rules its domain:

hidden within Force there is being which has not ceased to be that light which lights up the world, though now only as a malevolent light. If we understand being merely from the perspective of the existents among which it belongs, and we do so understand it because being for us is what is forever, radically and agelessly ruling over all, what is thus contingent on the primordial beginnings which to master means to master all, then in present day understanding Force is the Highest Being which creates and destroys all, to which all and everyone serve.⁴²

To be, to emerge into manifestation, is to be an expression of force; the care of life, of the relation to openness to manifestation, now takes on the *Gestalt* of mobilization, of the organization of beings, including human beings, as so many forces to be orchestrated into the event of the world—whether this event take the form of increasing production, unbridled consumption, or war as limitless mass destruction. Yet the more such a metaphysics takes hold, the more what it means to be is to be force, the more suspended the specifically problematic (and “polemic”) character of the human to openness becomes; the more decadent, in other words, with respect to the ancient promise of the care for the soul. “Decadent” here in a very specific sense:

A life can be said to be decadent when it loses its grasp on the innermost nerve of its functioning, where it is disrupted at its inmost core so that while it is thinking itself full it is actually draining and laming itself with every step and act.⁴³

Nevertheless, the nineteenth century does not simply bring to full maturation those spiritual tendencies that render ineffective the promise of authentic historical existence. With the nineteenth century also comes a specific kind of self-awareness, one that recognizes itself, even *feels* itself to be in a state of decline, specifically *moral* decline. One can even go so far as to say this becomes an experience characteristic of the age. Thus it is not that the particular spiritual type Patočka describes with the concept of the care for the soul simply fades away in favor of a new, bold human being of force and domination; its coming to an end also gives rise to a specific form of spiritual anxiety and unease that accompanies the rapid expansion of European power. This is where Nietzsche becomes important, and Patočka in fact ends the fourth of the *Heretical Essays* with a brief discussion of Nietzsche. It was Nietzsche, Patočka tells us, who, along with others such as Dostoevsky, expressed in the most profound fashion the consciousness that Europe was in a moral crisis, one of decadence and decline.⁴⁴

It might be helpful at this point to reflect briefly on Nietzsche's concept of nihilism. Nihilism is often described as a symptom of decay, of a failure of faith, perhaps in the face of extreme hardship or social and political turmoil; it is the conviction that existence has no meaning, even to the point where meaning and being seem to be an antinomy, as if to experience being directly is precisely to experience its utter meaninglessness.⁴⁵ This is to some extent true in Nietzsche, but in his notebooks from the 1880's we also find the thought of nihilism as the result of an exercise of a peculiar kind of health, of strength—even, notably, of insight and understanding.

Nihilism in Nietzsche is identified as the collapse of morality, specifically Christian morality, and thus in that sense it is a symptom of decay, of the failure of Christian civilization. Yet Christianity collapses thanks to the radicalization of an element that is essential to its morality, namely an unrelenting demand for truth. The Christian demand for truth, which for Nietzsche as for Patočka ultimately has a Greek origin, does not simply insist that one not be lied to, nor does it simply warn us of practical dangers that may be lurking in falsehoods. It represents above all a demand of *oneself* never to have recourse to untruth, that one should forgo the advantages of the power of dissimulation, resisting the temptation to shape the appearances of things in accordance with one's needs and desires. Instead, it asserts the ideal of living wholly in and for the "truth," as an inwardly established moral solidity of aim and purpose.

It is the *success* of its own drive to truth, Nietzsche tells us, that ultimately killed Christianity. And it killed it precisely in its highest metaphysical form: that is, as an affirmation of the meaning of the *whole*, thus as a totalizing valuation that would posit truth as the undisputed master of what is. Thus the collapse of Christianity did not occur until after Christianity had first been successful in articulating its world, and with that establishing itself as a form of life. This is essential to understanding Nietzsche: it is not enough to see that Christianity was a mistake, or an error; one way or another, everything is a mistake or an error for Nietzsche, so why should Christianity be any different? The key is to understand what the mistake of Christianity nevertheless established, what it achieved, in order to understand the manner in which its collapse still reverberates with us spiritually, or what happens

when, in our disciplined drive for revelation and insight, we discover our inevitable partiality or mendacity.

The collapse is not sudden, but occurs in stages, each of which is, paradoxically, in some way also experienced as progress: Christian religion is overcome by Christian morality, which jettisons the “superstitions” of the former in favor of a perspective on what it is to live in accordance with true, authentic being; morality is in turn overcome by an even more radical asceticism of scientific reason, of a philosophy that ceases to hide behind masks of tradition and cultural habit in favor of a more individual, more disciplined seriousness of an existence in truth.

This progressive purification, this overcoming through a reaction to everything false, everything partial and unjustified, everything hidden and presupposed, is at first for Nietzsche the greatest *antidote* to nihilism. For the rigor, the earnestness of the ascetic ideal embodied in Christianity and its post-religious forms, gives the human world meaning—the world is here experienced as meaningful to the extent to which it can be judged as conforming more or less to the ideal of truth or perfect insight. Yet on the other hand its mature form, the total accomplishment of purified insight, gives rise to another form of nihilistic collapse: but now the collapse is not due to partiality, one that follows the revelation of yet another failed attempt at achieving the ideal, but rather represents the experience of the collapse of ideals *as such*—right down to the very hold that *any* ideal can have on us: “the impracticality of one interpretation of the world [namely, the Christian—JD]—one to which tremendous energies have been dedicated—arouses the suspicion that *all* interpretations might be false.”⁴⁶ This statement could be taken as a summary of Nietzsche’s understanding of the meaning of the nineteenth century.

And it is not all that far from Patočka’s perspective.⁴⁷ What Nietzsche is describing, one might say, is a particular kind of null-point of meaninglessness, one that represents a form of the experience of the shaking of meaning that is, if not distinctive to, then certainly definitive of modern Europe. Nihilism is the experience of the ultimate vacuity of truth, exacerbated by a waning sense of the promise of the care for the soul; nihilism as a condition in turn allows the two tendencies of the technologization of science and the will to have to ossify into a lasting spiritual *Gestalt*. And at the same time it is a condition marked by a distinct dissatisfaction, one that undermines faith not only in past attempts to freely relate to the true, but now stands as a reserve of skeptical resistance to *any* attempt to pursue the care for the soul: for if *this* attempt has failed, if modern science as the perfection of Greek metaphysics and the Christian drive to moral authenticity fails, then the growing sense of moral crisis seems to coalesce around the conclusion that *nothing* can succeed.

It is a short step from the insight that nothing can succeed, to the embrace of a nothing that can succeed, or the nothingness of force; and this, precisely, is what Patočka identifies as the key background assumption of the First World War:

The shared idea in the background of the first world war was the slowly germinating conviction that there is nothing such as a factual, objective meaning of the world and of things, and that it is up to strength and power to create such meaning within the realm accessible to humans.⁴⁸

In the wake of nihilism the key issue becomes, for both Nietzsche and Patočka, the question of *response*. One sort is familiar: one responds in rage, a peculiarly rational

form of rage, to the extent that nihilism crystallizes around an insight, an awareness, of what we might call the collapse of the meaning of meaning. One is ashamed, nauseated at oneself and at humanity, for having been lied to for all these millennia about truth, about morality, about the Good; so one lashes out, and thereby moves from the extreme of absolute morality to the opposite extreme of absolute immorality. This is the response of destruction, of embracing a loss of self and world through a merciless pursuit of the truth of the untruthfulness of everything—it is that orgiastic impulse behind the cry “everything is permitted!” the psychology of which Dostoevsky explores with such depth and pathos in novels like *The Demons*. In the fifth and the sixth of his *Heretical Essays*, Patočka himself explores this through the theme of the renewed force and violence of the orgiastic in modern European existence. No longer subordinated to responsibility, which has become undone through a loss of a relation to its vital basis in an authentic life in truth, the orgiastic unleashes itself by gorging on the concentrated accumulations of energy made possible by modern technology and the limitless will to have. Nihilism, as the legacy of the nineteenth century, thus opens the way for that peculiar spiritual emptiness characteristic of the twentieth that accompanies the unleashing of limitless destruction, limitless force. It allows, in other words, for that bizarre combination of utmost superficiality, of the emptiest of perspectives and understanding, with a deep addiction to the *extreme*. Europe dies, in other words, not by succumbing to the rot of spiritual and moral decadence, but through a violent and sudden nihilistic suicide, which for Patočka represents the ultimate legacy of the wars of the twentieth century.

On the other hand, weakness, in the form of an unwillingness to be exposed to the problematicity of history, can also be the basis for a response that is different from simple reactive destruction, and it is one that is also, I would argue, present in Patočka’s analysis of the wars of the past century. We can reflect on this possibility in the figure of the “last man” from Zarathustra’s *Prologue*:⁴⁹ the world of the last man is still governed by ideals, but ideals that have become rubrics for management, thus leveled down to the manageable and the practical, in order to pave the way for a spiritual retreat of lowered expectations and muted drives. The last man has solved all the problems, but only by decreasing systematically and deliberately his capacity to suffer problems, or to feel the burden of existence revealed in problems. In the world of the last man, nihilism is not an intermediary state between disappointment and suicide, but a permanent justification for the retreat of life into the rhythm of a leveled existence, one that mimics human flourishing through the cultivation of unconsciousness, comfort, and, ultimately, peace. Here Europe does not die in a suicidal outburst of destruction, but instead drifts into the voluntary coma of a union of endless boredom with a stubborn spiritual inconsequence.

Writing from the 1970’s, during the period of so-called “normalization” in the wake of the suppression of the Prague Spring by Soviet tanks in 1968, it is perhaps more this latter form that Patočka has in mind, namely decadent retreat as a spiritual and moral collapse, rather than physical devastation. It represents a more lasting and decisive retreat from history, one that mobilizes the trappings of peace (itself a form of waging war) and the distractions of empty consumerism to forestall the risk essential to historical existence.

This also points to an important aspect of the difficult sixth essay: despite the apparent exclusive focus on the First World War, in fact the Second World War, the Holocaust, and the aftermath of the Cold War—including the strange politics of

normalization in 1970's Czechoslovakia—are always implicitly woven into the main outlines of what is, at the end of the day, an existential diagnosis of the human condition in the twentieth century. The argument is that the human condition has become one of permanent war, and that the most decisive phase of this war, of the twentieth century as war, is precisely the moment when peace itself has been mobilized as a means, or when demobilization takes a form that opens a new horizon in which Force finds an even more complete modus of manipulation than what had been apparent in cases of “extreme means of mobilization” directed at terror:

The question, though, is whether this abolition [of terror—JD] represents a true demobilization or, on the contrary, a war that establishes itself as permanent by “peaceful” means. War is here showing its “peaceful” face, the face of cynical demoralization, appealing to the will to live and to have. Humanity is becoming a victim of the war already launched, that is, of peace and the day; peace, the day rely on death as the means of maximal human unfreedom, as shackles humans refuse to see but which is present as a *vis a tergo*, as the terror that drives humans even into fire—death, chaining humans to life and rendering them most manipulable.⁵⁰

If the being of modern war is, as Jünger saw it, total mobilization, the shaping of human matter into concentrations of force; and if, in addition, the flight from death is the fulcrum with which mobilization levers humans into its service, then war has become not a matter of the *night*, but of the *day*. The forces of the day—the forces that bond humans to life, to the preservation and continuance of existence—press those of the night into its service; even death itself has become one of many means available to the day for rendering human life more and more reducible to the mere matter of economic existence.

Ultimately what Patočka is trying to grasp in these pages is the complicated relation between the wars of the twentieth century, the question of their meaning, and the spiritual situation post-1945, or the dawn of an age of response to but also suppression of what had begun in 1914 and culminated in 1945. Patočka understood this “post-war” age to be the continuation of war by other means, that paradoxical condition of a normalized Apocalypse.

The Sacrifice of the Front

Nevertheless the sixth of the *Heretical Essays* does not simply posit the culmination of European nihilism in the wars of the twentieth century, it also presents an argument about the meaning of these wars—a meaning that in fact represents for Patočka a potential counterpoint, even point of resistance, to the spiritual situation post-1945. We are perhaps now better positioned to listen to the argument alluded to at the beginning of our reflections, to the effect that war has its own source of meaning other than the day.

At the heart of Patočka's argument is an interpretation of the figure of the *front line*, and with that the First World War does indeed take on primary significance in the essay, at least rhetorically. Jünger is again of course a vital source, but perhaps more poignantly is a short essay by Teilhard de Chardin, “La nostalgie du front,” that Patočka cites along with Jünger's writings.⁵¹

Written in September 1917 when Teilhard de Chardin was serving as a stretcher-bearer with the Eighth Tunisian Tirailleurs, “La nostalgie du front” contains a number of themes that Patočka weaves into his own reflection on the meaning of the war. One is the peculiar liberation from everyday life experienced by soldiers at the front, what Teilhard de Chardin describes as the “defeat of quotidian slavery” thanks to which the “burden of social conventions” has been shed. This liberation from the everyday, coupled with intense experiences of danger, generates a powerful sense of freedom, one so unfamiliar and overwhelming that it seems to inaugurate a new humanity. Teilhard de Chardin:

And for he who gets up, dusty yet unscathed after a near-miss from the explosion of a cooking-pot [La marmite, or the cooking-pot, slang expression for a German 105mm and 150mm howitzer. NdW], why this joyous dilation of the heart, this lightness of the will, and this new perfume of life that one experiences as greater than the close call of being missed by a speeding train or grazed by a bullet from a revolver misfired by an idiot? [...] For my part, I think that the unprecedented savor of living that follows a narrow escape retains above all this profound intuition that the existence one discovers, as consecrated in danger, is a novel experience. In such moments, the physical well-being that spreads through out the soul signifies a superior Life to which one has become baptized. Among men, he who has passed through the fire becomes another species of man. . .⁵²

Yet perhaps the most important theme in Teilhard de Chardin’s essay for Patočka is that of *sacrifice*, here understood as a freedom that is at once a higher freedom than that of the everyday and higher than one’s very self. Again Teilhard de Chardin:

This man possesses concrete evidence that he no longer exists for himself—that he has been delivered from himself—and that some other Thing lives within him and dominates him. I am not afraid to say that this special de-individualization that allows each combatant to attain a human essence greater than himself is the ultimate secret of the incomparable impression of freedom that he experiences, and which he shall never forget.⁵³

Sacrifice represents the key for Patočka as to how the war can be the source of its own explanation, its own meaning; but only sacrifice experienced in the quasi-mystical form of the front line as described by Teilhard de Chardin and Jünger. It is thus not sacrifice in the sense of “the cost we pay for a program of development, progress, intensification, and extension of life’s possibilities,” not sacrifice as something that belongs to the economy of the day, of mobilization in which sacrifice simply amounts to the deployment of the expendable, just reckoned in terms of personal cost. It is, instead, sacrifice in the sense of something that has the capacity to be “significant *solely in itself*.”⁵⁴

Yet for Teilhard de Chardin, sacrifice has a distinctively religious meaning; the experience of freedom at the front was ultimately a mystical union with Heaven, and the “Thing” greater than oneself is for him “the great work of creation and the sanctification of a Humanity born especially in the hours of crisis, but which can only become achieved in peace.”⁵⁵ For Patočka as well, the meaning of the sacrifice of the

front has a religious sense, but he understands it more as a resource for resistance, for addressing the spiritual crisis of the age in the form of a protest, a struggle—one that is in the end not so much *religious* as *philosophical* in character.

It is important to stress that Patočka's reflections on sacrifice are strongly rooted in his critique of metaphysics, the outlines of which we have already begun to explore above. And if we look more closely to the development of Patočka's thinking about metaphysics—or, better, the end of metaphysics—we can easily identify where this theme of sacrifice finds its roots: namely, in Patočka's attempt to articulate a philosophy of freedom, inspired by Heidegger, Sartre, and others, that is to take the place of the "integral humanism" and subjectivism of metaphysics. In his earlier essays, above all in "Negative Platonism" (1953), Patočka argued that the humanism of metaphysics lay in the assertion that the essence of the human being is that of the subject of a comprehensive understanding, of an absolute grasp of the whole, one that "provides a final, concrete meaning to the entire universum."⁵⁶ The collapse of metaphysics and the rise of modern science entails a crisis of metaphysical humanism, though one that does not necessarily render the implicit subjectivism of metaphysical humanism impossible, but rather provides it a field of unlimited expansion at the cost of its increasing meaninglessness. And this meaninglessness, this paradoxical emptying expansion of subjective life as the technical accumulator of force is, as we have seen, for Patočka the ontological condition for the technoscience characteristic of the twentieth century.

Let us leave the question concerning technology aside for a moment, and instead look at the possible experience of freedom that Patočka believes remains a hidden potential in this transition from metaphysics to modern technology. Patočka wants to argue that precisely when the figure of the power and force of knowledge has become predominant, there opens in the meaning of freedom the potential for a countermovement that has its ground in the negativity of freedom. Freedom cannot simply be limitless expansion; at its core it remains a risk, a relation to a non-objective origin that does not offer itself as a field to be occupied or a thing to be dominated: "[. . .] freedom is a matter of experience: it is the experience of a *risk* we can take or avoid."⁵⁷ The risk at play here is a relation to the whole that stands outside of the claims of the stable and the finished, the established and the perceived, a standing in relation to what opens the movement of our understanding without thereby assuming the form of the understood—amounting to a peculiar kind of exposure that is specifically "negative" in character: "For that reason, too, 'negative' experiences are decisive for the experience of freedom, showing as they do that the content of passive experience is trivial, transient, and insubstantial."⁵⁸

Thus the aim here is to articulate a conception of freedom that is intrinsically non-metaphysical, but for all that eminently *historical*, as that which "has no substrate."⁵⁹ But at the same time this experience of freedom, this groundlessness of pure historical existence, points us to the origin of metaphysics itself, to the extent to which metaphysics is a response to the possibilities of a relation to the whole of things opened by freedom. Freedom is precisely the originary opening to the whole, on the non-objective ground of all objectivity that we have already seen in the figure of *polemos*:

Only because we are always beyond all objectivity, because no objectivity is adequate to it, does the whole confront us, since as an actual aggregate of all finite beings it is, naturally, quite inaccessible to us.⁶⁰

The idea of a freedom embodied in negative experiences, with their non-objectivity, risk and distance, and relation to the uncovering of the whole, clearly finds an important development in Patočka's account of the front line experience. Likewise the later text we cited, this time from 1967, "The 'Natural' World and Phenomenology," adds a key element with which we are again familiar from the discussion above of *polemos*—that of conflict or strife.⁶¹ In fact two senses of conflict are relevant here: the first is the conflict of risk itself; the negativity of freedom is necessarily conflict, because freedom is always the setting into motion of its own non-objectivity, thus coming into tension with the fundamental tendency of human beings to become diffused in and through their roles, and with that their tendency towards reification: "Every free relation comes to abolish this objective diffusion, evoking a state of being threatened and its own being-threatened with it. Every free relation is necessarily a conflict. Free life is necessarily a conflict."⁶² Thus free life is essentially a project, not a given something or the substrate of something; the human being is not a thing, but a free open to the possibility of being, yet one that brings with it the necessity of wresting itself away from its diffusion in objectivity. Free life is in conflict with itself to the extent to which it must make itself into something: "Conflict so understood is a form of self-reproduction, a part of the earthiness of life, of its relation to earth the provider of which all life is a part."⁶³

What does self-production mean here? It is not limited to the self as an achievement, an established subjective life, but involves the self as risk, as precisely an openness to freedom. Patočka describes this openness as a risk that takes the explicit sense of a *wakefulness*, a specifically finite self-wakefulness:

Conflict is necessary as the conflict of wakefulness. [. . .] Wakefulness is a renewal; it is an authentic unconcealment of life, not in its past depth and passive givenness as a gift, but in turning to its dependence on assuming, on making its own, what, as a finite destiny, cannot be avoided, what *comes* inescapably yet is precisely what makes it possible not to waste oneself trivially, not to diffuse oneself in turning away from oneself.⁶⁴

Thus conflict, freely pulling away from the dead burden that life becomes in its tendency towards alienated objectification—or what he will soon call "life's bondage to life"—leads Patočka to a second, deeper sense of conflict, one no longer so much tied to the earthiness of possibility as the acclaim and affirmation of mortality itself:

Conflict in this second sense is first of all a conquest of what is dead in oneself, of the distraction with the recurring movements of an alienating presence [. . .] Deadness is death that has seized our life behind our backs, draining it under the pretext of preserving it, of repeating its movements. Paradoxically, this deadness cannot be vanquished except by acclaiming mortality, by acclaiming that from which deadness seeks to escape and what it confirms in its escaping.⁶⁵

"Deadness": the death of the free openness to the possible that life itself imposes upon us, in the ineluctable manner of reification and alienation in the service of preserving life "at all costs," that maintains its domination through the constant threat of the disruption of its manner of procurement. This is a radicalized form of Teilhard de Chardin's "defeat of quotidian slavery," it is nothing short of the defeat of death, of

that peculiar kind of death that afflicts the living. Freedom is required to either acclaim one's death, or avoid it through the movement of a deadness that extinguishes its manifestation, its meaning, but only at the same time by affirming its being. The affirmation of genuine death, not the deadness of a suspended relation to truth but of the free relation to the negativity of death, breaks the bondage of life with itself.

If sacrifice is the key to the meaning of the front, it is only because this acclaiming of mortality is the key to sacrifice. There are two formal ontological elements here: the first is the acclamation of the total, absolute exposure to death—death, as Heidegger puts it, as the possibility of my impossibility, the possibility of the closing of that open that allows for my possibility as such.⁶⁶ Second, the human being, as *ek-sisting*, thus becomes the fulcrum of that which projects the whole towards its end; the human being becomes the life that puts earth and sky to question, revealing the whole. Sacrifice then becomes interwoven in the drama of manifestation, of the world, as it unfolds in the horizon of conflicted life, one in and through which something higher comes into being:

But to pose a question to the earth and the sky means to sacrifice oneself so that something other could be, so that the earth and the sky would not only reveal themselves but would become a manifestation of something higher. Only through this most primordial turn is the higher possible at all.⁶⁷

The negativity of freedom thus shows itself to be a kind of check against a slide toward anonymity that threatens to cover, to conceal the possibility of the higher; sacrifice itself is in turn such a check, and cannot be understood outside of this movement of uncovering, or truth. In Patočka's 1973 Varna lecture, this danger of the loss of the higher in the breakdown of the hierarchy implicit in the ontological difference forms the basic line of interpretation of Heidegger's critique of technology. The essence of technology is an uncovering, a manner in which being is disclosed, thus a realization of manifestation; but it is an uncovering that at the same time conceals the openness that it makes possible:

The uncovering that prevails at the essential core of technology necessarily loses sight of uncovering itself, concealing the essential core of truth in an unfamiliar way and so closing man's access to what he himself is—a being capable of standing in an original relation to the truth. Among all the securing, calculating, and using of raw materials, that which makes all this possible is lost from view—man henceforth knows only individual, practical truths, not the truth.⁶⁸

As in the 1967 text, sacrifice is again interpreted in the Varna lecture as a counter-movement, a check of negative freedom against ontological decadence; yet here the metaphor is not wakefulness, but a *drawing back*:

[. . .] a sacrifice means precisely drawing back from the realm of what can be managed and ordered, and an explicit relation to that which, not being anything actual itself, serves as the ground of the appearing of all that is active and in that sense rules over all.⁶⁹

Yet how is such a gesture of sacrifice even possible, and more: how is it to offer a point of response and resistance to the decadence of the age? Patočka emphasizes its effective

invisibility; this is also a theme of Teilhard de Chardin's: those who do not belong to the line, who remain out of reach of its power to saturate, stand as it were on the opposite side of an immense gulf of understanding and comprehension. This strangeness ultimately leads to something paradoxical about speaking about sacrifice at all, if we don't mean by it something familiar as a kind of spiritualized economic category that would be readily comprehensible to everyone—"why are we speaking of sacrifice at all and not simply of resources, of their utilization and consumption?"⁷⁰

The point is a key one. Patočka emphasizes that the concept of sacrifice is originally of "mythico-religious" origin, where it follows the logic of an attempt to evoke, or bind into action a higher power from the position of a lower order. The logic is thus one of exchange; we give something up in order to gain something else, and the power of sacrifice lies not only in the capacity to give up everything, to the point of giving up life as a whole, but also an implicit connection between the orders of higher and lower power that is revealed in this act. This means that the "force" that sacrifice relies upon in the mythico-religious context is bound precisely to the experience of a *hierarchy of being*, which is precisely what is absent in technological civilization.⁷¹ Thus either sacrifice has no meaning apart from its economic sense, or the experience of sacrifice is an exception, it cannot be understood technologically, precisely since it implies the recognition of an order of being.

Thus the question is how we can speak of sacrifice in an age that "promises to exclude this experience and for which there exists nothing like a sacrifice, only utilization of resources."⁷² Only to the extent to which we can discern in existence the tension, the conflict, between a life that consumes, that forms the pattern of an order of mobilization and consumption, and the consumption of life itself. This tension in texts such as the Varna lecture is understood explicitly as an *act*, and one that sets itself up as a kind of *protest*. Yet the idea of sacrifice as protest also leads to an important distinction that Patočka wants to draw between two types of sacrifice: the first is a naïve sacrifice, such as in the case of wars and revolutions, which are determined by a kind of "preliminary" understanding of its sense but which remains wholly passive; the second a "voluntary self-sacrifice," which retains the pattern of the consumption of oneself from the passive or naïve sense of sacrifice, but now with the explicit intention of protest, one that flows directly from an explicit as opposed to a preliminary understanding: "The entire mode of acting needs to be understood as a protest, not against individual concrete experiences but, in principle, against the understanding by which they are borne."⁷³

Any protest seeks the application of a force, a power, and with that to threaten or at least to risk violence; any protest seeks to make visible what ought not to be, thus what ought to be changed, and it can only be meaningful from some basis, from something that gives the protest its initial force and power. What is the power behind sacrifice so understood? Patočka here reveals an intrinsic ambiguity: on the one hand there is no force, nor can there be, since the dimension of truth at play here has nothing to do with power or force in any sense. Its meaning lies elsewhere:

The sacrifice becomes meaningful as the making explicit of the authentic relation between the essential core of man and the ground of understanding which makes him human and which is radically finite, that is, which is no reason for being, no cause, no force. [. . .] For, considered in itself, the ground of understanding is no

force; it is quite the contrary, something like a light or a clearing which makes manifestation possible.⁷⁴

Philosophy, then, might be imagined as a spiritual posture grounded in sacrifice, understood in this sense; it is at once a wakefulness toward openness and a pulling away from a regime of force and power, a posture in and of itself invisible and unrecognizable to the modern age, but which at the same time resists by putting it into question. But this possibility of philosophy stands in tension with the possibility, even need for the possibility of protest, itself inherently political—that yearning for philosophy as a political force, as a voice that carves out a space in the world for itself.

In fact one might argue that, in the sixth of Patočka's *Heretical Essays*, the result is that the front, the secret of which is sacrifice, is more an independent figure of protest than of philosophy. The philosopher may perhaps draw from the secret of the front, but it is the front line soldier, and not the philosopher, who stands closest to the source of resistance.⁷⁵ More, this protest of the front remains as an ever implicit, silent experience of sacrifice that is no longer summed up in the legacy of the First World War; it continues on as the war morphs into a sequence of a myriad of totalizing and oppressive forms:

Currently war has assumed the form of that half-peace wherein opponents mobilize and count on the demobilization of the other. Even this war has its front line and its way of burning, destroying persons, robbing them of hope, dealing with them as with material for Force being released. The front line is the resistance to such “demoralizing,” terrorizing, and deceptive motifs of the day. It is the revelation of their real nature, it is a protest paid for in blood which does not flow but rots in jails, in obscurity, in life plans and possibilities wasted—and which will flow again once the Force finds it advantageous.⁷⁶

“When at last the peace will come desired by all nations (and first of all desired by me),” writes Teilhard de Chardin, “something like a light will abruptly become extinguished on Earth.”⁷⁷ In a sense Patočka is calling for a recognition that this light still burns, that it still continues, to again evoke a phrase of Teilhard de Chardin's, to produce “a tear in the crust of banalities and conventions,” thereby opening a window “onto the secret mechanisms and profound layers of human becoming.”⁷⁸

Conclusion

For Patočka, the philosophical project of the care for the soul, as a transformed relation to truth in revolt against the pre-historical, mythical understanding and experience of human existence, comes to an end, receiving its *coup de grace* in the nihilism of the nineteenth century, the horrible meaning of which first becomes evident in the First World War. Europe has died, and in many ways: Europe died when it succumbed to a will to possess, to domination, to the technical rationalization of the day that makes possible an apparently limitless release of force; it dies in the combination of a destructive nihilistic suicide and a trivialization of the very sense of any ideal, resulting in a relentless minimization of the meaning of human existence into the dull cycle of production and consumption.

What comes after, once Europe is dead? The answer to this question is much more inconclusive in Patočka's thinking. The front, however poignant and powerful Patočka's descriptions may be, is not a new life, a vision for the future, but only the manner in which the historical essence of humans continues to trouble from within the otherwise relentless nihilism of contemporary humanity. Thus in a literal sense *nothing* comes after, or at least nothing about which it would make any sense to describe as belonging to the European heritage of the care for the soul. The meaning of the wars that brought about its death provide a subterranean front of resistance, of protest, a figure of sacrifice that belongs completely to the night, and thereby remains wholly inscrutable to the day. There is no program here; the front line soldier is not the philosopher; the "solidarity of the shaken," that famous phrase so often quoted in discussions of Patočka the dissident intellectual and spokesperson for *Charta 77*, is not the rebirth of a philosophically oriented culture. If philosophy, in the sense of an explicit human relation to the truth, taking the form of the care for the soul, remains at all an historical possibility—thus if history itself remains historically possible—it will only be as something that can unfold in the face of the daunting legacy of its own catastrophic failure.

That being said, it is also the case that, in many of Patočka's writings where he engages these questions, questions of philosophy, of Europe, of the care for the soul, one comes away with a definite impression of a call for a renewal, for the rebirth of a Europe after Europe. In this respect Patočka shares much with Husserl. But the end result of Patočka's thinking, it seems to me, is rather different. He is one of those thinkers of the past century who had a very definite sense that, after the suicide of Europe, the axis has shifted, and the situation fundamentally transformed in ways we do not fully understand. What it means to do philosophy, to be a philosopher, is not something that we need only to remember and renew; for we have wholly uprooted our traditions from any meaningful relation to an authentic experience of our historical existence, leaving only the problematicity of that existence left as a rapidly vanishing sense of latent promise.

There is of course much to remember and perhaps even something to renew, and the city in which we live, whether as Europeans, post-Europeans, or non-Europeans, is for better or for worse deeply marked by the experience of thinking unleashed by philosophy. Clearly the legacy of philosophy is essential to any narrative of European history, which means that there is still much to do for the scholars. Yet for all that, the question is very much open as to what extent the openness of human existence to the whole can still find a definite shape that we would still be able to call "philosophical" or even "European." Patočka's thought remains a challenging attempt to pose this question, in a manner meaningful for the post-European condition.

Notes

- 1 We here quote from page 120 of the English translation: Jan Patočka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, trans. Erazim Kohák, ed. James Dodd (Chicago: Open Court, 1996). [Czech: *Kacířské eseje o filosofii dějin*, in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 3: *Pěče o duši III*, ed. Ivan Chvatík and Pavel Kouba (Prague: Oikumene, 2002).]
- 2 Patočka, *Plato and Europe*, trans. Petr Lom (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002). [Czech: *Platón a Evropa*, in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 2: *Pěče o duši II*, ed. Ivan Chvatík and Pavel Kouba (Prague: Oikumene, 2002)]; Patočka, *Éternité et historicité*, trans. Erika Abrams (Lagrasse: Verdier, 2007) [Czech: *Věčnost a dějinnost* (1950), in *Sebrané spisy*

- Jana Patočky, vol. 1: *Pěče o duši I*, ed. Ivan Chvatik and Pavel Kouba (Prague: Oikoumene, 1996); Patočka, “Europa and Nach-Europa. Die nacheuropäische Epoche und ihre geistigen Probleme,” in *Ketzerische Essays zur Philosophie der Geschichte und ergänzende Schriften, Ausgewählte Schriften II*, ed. Klaus Nellen and Jiří Němec (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1988), 207–287.
- 3 Edmund Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie*, *Husserliana VI*, ed. Walter Biemel (Hague: Nijhoff, 1976). [English translation: *Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973).] Patočka, who first met Husserl in Paris in 1929 and subsequently developed close relations with the founder of phenomenology through the 1930’s, was also a member of the Prague based *Cercle philosophique*, the organization that invited Husserl to visit Prague in 1935. The lectures Husserl gave in Prague, together with a parallel series of lectures given the year before in Vienna, form the basis for Part I of the *Crisis*. On Patočka’s relation to the *Cercle* and Husserl’s visit to Prague, see Patočka, *Texte—Dokumente—Bibliographie*, ed. Ludger Hagedorn and Hans Rainer Sepp (Freiburg: Karl Alber/Prague: Oikoumene, 1999), 176ff.
 - 4 *Přirozený svět* appeared in a second Czech edition in 1970, which includes an important afterword: “‘Přirozený svět’ v meditaci svého autora po třiatřiceti letech” [“‘The Natural World’ Reconsidered Thirty-Three Years Later”]; see Patočka, *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 7: *Fenomenologické spisy II* (Prague: Oikoumene, 2008), 265–334. This afterword, along with the original 1936 dissertation, is forthcoming in an English translation by Erika Abrams. Also cf. an important French translation of the original 1936 text that appeared in 1976: *Le monde naturel comme problème philosophique*, trans. Jaromir Danek and Henri Declève (Hague: Nijhoff, 1976), which includes another interesting afterword. On the three movements of human existence, see Patočka, *Body, Community, Language, World*, trans. Erazim Kohák (Chicago: Open Court, 1998), 143–162. [Czech: *Tělo, společenství, jazyk, svět*, ed. J. Polívka (Prague: Oikoumene, 1995).]
 - 5 See Patočka, *Was sind die Tschechen? in Schriften zur tschechischen Kultur und Geschichte, Ausgewählte Schriften V*, ed. Klaus Nellen, Petr Pithart, and Miroslav Pojar (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1992), 29f; also the first of Patočka’s *Dvě studie o Masarykovi* [Two Studies on Masaryk], “Pokus o českou národní filosofii a jeho nezdar” [An Attempt at a Czech National Philosophy and its Failure], in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 12: *Češi I* (Prague: Oikoumene, 2006), 366–422. An English translation of this study can be found in *T.G. Masaryk in Perspective*, ed. Milič Čapek and Karel Hrubý (New York: SVU, 1981).
 - 6 Patočka, *Plato and Europe*, 9.
 - 7 See Patočka, *Pěče o duši III*, 517–588, for Patočka’s own German translations of the first three of the *Heretical Essays*.
 - 8 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 5.
 - 9 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 7.
 - 10 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 9.
 - 11 “Open comportment, however, ever dependent on phenomena, is of a temporal-historical nature; it is always in movement, coming out of the darkness and flowing into the darkness of concealment, and with respect to meaning breaks up into various partial movements. Only one of these is oriented to the theme of openness, manifestation, unconcealment and its transmission. Others focus on the rooting of humans in the open realm of the common world of humans and on the protection and preservation of that world.” Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 10–11.
 - 12 See Patočka, *Plato and Europe*, 57–58.
 - 13 See Patočka, *Body*, 148–151; also Patočka, “The ‘Natural’ World and Phenomenology (1967),” in *Jan Patočka. Philosophy and Selected Writings*, trans. and ed. Erazim Kohák (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 260–268. [Czech: “Přirozený svět a fenomenologie,” in *Přirozený svět a pohyb lidské existence*, vol. 1, ed. Ivan Chvatik (Prague: Archivní soubor, 1980).]
 - 14 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 12.
 - 15 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 15.
 - 16 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 32.
 - 17 See Patočka, *Plato and Europe*, 46–49; *Heretical Essays*, 19–21.

- 18 “Prehistory, however, is the presupposition of history not only for reasons having to do with the presence of the past in explicit documents but, first and foremost, because history represents a distancing from and a reaction against the period of prehistory; it is a rising above the level of the prehistorical, an attempt at a renewal and resurgence of life.” Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 31.
- 19 Patočka, *Plato and Europe*, 49.
- 20 See Patočka, *Plato and Europe*, 56–57; 71–72.
- 21 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 153f.
- 22 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 38.
- 23 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 38.
- 24 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 38–39.
- 25 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 42; Patočka is here citing DK B 113. See Hermann Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (Berlin: Weidman, 1910).
- 26 So Patočka, *Heretical Essays* 42–43: “To delimit a thing according to its being, however, means to see it in terms of the way it enters into openness (the realm of the individuated *cosmos*) by emerging out of the darkness; it means to see the lighting of being over all that is, the open night of what-is. That, though, is the work of the wise, the work of the philosopher.”
- 27 Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 65. [German: *Einführung in die Metaphysik* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1987).] See also the discussions on *polemos* in Nicolas de Warren, “Homecoming. Jan Patočka’s Reflections on the First World War,” in *Phenomenologies of Violence*, ed. Michael Staudigl (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2014), 219–223, and Sandra Lehmann, *Der Horizont der Freiheit. Zum Existenzdenken Jan Patočka’s* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2004), 84–95.
- 28 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 39.
- 29 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 41.
- 30 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 43.
- 31 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 44.
- 32 See Patočka, *Plato and Europe*, ch. 5, 71ff.
- 33 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 82.
- 34 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 101.
- 35 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 102.
- 36 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 101–102.
- 37 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 67: “Christians coming face to face with the human poverty of meaning, absolute and global, do not give up but assent their faith more energetically, the more graphically that poverty is presented.”
- 38 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 108.
- 39 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 83.
- 40 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 116.
- 41 See Peter Trawny, “Die Moderne als Weltkrieg. Der Krieg bei Heidegger und Patočka,” in *Jan Patočka and the European Heritage. Studia Phaenomenologica* 7 (2007), 377–394.
- 42 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 116.
- 43 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 97.
- 44 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 92–93.
- 45 See Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 77.
- 46 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, trans. Kate Sturge, ed. Rudiger Bittner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 83 (2[127]). [German: *Nietzsche Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe*, vol. 12: *Nachgelassene Fragmente 1885–1887*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (München: de Gruyter, 1999), 126.]
- 47 This despite some rather trenchant criticism of Nietzsche on the part of Patočka. Cf. “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 121 in this volume. [Czech: “Kolem Masarykovy filosofie náboženství,” in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 12: *Češi I* (Praha: Oikumene, 2006).] Nevertheless, the critique has more to do with Nietzsche’s “solution” to European nihilism, namely the eternal recurrence of the same, than the diagnosis itself. For an interesting contrast, compare the essay on Nietzsche by one of Patočka’s students: Krzysztof Michalski, *The Flame of Eternity. An Interpretation of Nietzsche’s Thought*, trans. Benjamin

- Paloff (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012). [Polish: *Plomień wieczności: eseje o myślach Fryderyka Nietzschego* (Warsaw: Znac, 2007).] This volume includes a translation of the extant correspondence between the young Michalski and Patočka; see below, 223–269.
- 48 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 121.
- 49 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1966), 9–24. [German: *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, in *Nietzsche Kritische Studienausgabe* 4, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999), 11–28.]
- 50 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 133.
- 51 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 125.
- 52 Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, “The Nostalgia of the Front,” trans. Nicolas de Warren, in *Phenomenologies of Violence*, ed. Michael Staudigl (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 253–254. [French: Teilhard de Chardin, “La Nostalgie du front,” in *Écrits du temps de la guerre* (Paris: Grasset, 1965).]
- 53 Teilhard de Chardin, “Nostalgia,” 253.
- 54 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 130.
- 55 Teilhard de Chardin, “Nostalgia,” 255.
- 56 Jan Patočka, “Negative Platonism,” in Kohák, *Jan Patočka*, 108. [Czech: “Negativní platonismus,” in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 1: *Péče o duši I*, ed. Ivan Chvatík and Pavel Kouba (Prague: Oikumene, 1996), 303–336.]
- 57 Patočka, “Negative Platonism,” 193.
- 58 Patočka, “Negative Platonism,” 193.
- 59 Patočka, “Negative Platonism,” 196: “The experience of freedom has no substrate, if by substrate we understand some finite and positive content, some subject, some predicate, or some complex of predicates. It has the negative character of a distance, a remove, of an overcoming of every objectivity, every content, every conception, and every substrate.”
- 60 Patočka, “Negative Platonism,” 196.
- 61 Patočka, “The ‘Natural’ World and Phenomenology,” 266.
- 62 Patočka, “The ‘Natural’ World and Phenomenology,” 266.
- 63 Patočka, “The ‘Natural’ World and Phenomenology,” 266.
- 64 Patočka, “The ‘Natural’ World and Phenomenology,” 266.
- 65 Patočka, “The ‘Natural’ World and Phenomenology,” 267.
- 66 “*To be* means to be in an absolute uniqueness, exposed to a total threat. The threat is absolute when it threatens everything, when nothing remains beyond the threat. In the absolute threat, however, the earth dares immensely beyond itself, handing itself over to the abyss.” Patočka, “The ‘Natural’ World and Phenomenology,” 267.
- 67 Patočka, “The ‘Natural’ World and Phenomenology,” 267.
- 68 Patočka, “The Dangers of Technicization in Science according to E. Husserl and the Essence of Technology as Danger according to M. Heidegger (Varna Lecture 1973),” in Kohák, *Jan Patočka*, 331. This text is reprinted in this volume, 13–22.
- 69 Patočka, “The Dangers of Technicization,” 332.
- 70 Patočka, “The Dangers of Technicization,” 335.
- 71 Patočka, “The Dangers of Technicization,” 336.
- 72 Patočka, “The Dangers of Technicization,” 337.
- 73 Patočka, “The Dangers of Technicization,” 338.
- 74 Patočka, “The Dangers of Technicization,” 339.
- 75 Nicolas de Warren makes a similar argument, citing this as one of Patočka’s “heresies.” See de Warren, “Homecoming,” 233.
- 76 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 134.
- 77 Teilhard de Chardin, “Nostalgia,” 255.
- 78 Teilhard de Chardin, “Nostalgia,” 255.

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Part II

Nihilism and the Crisis of Modernity

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7 On Masaryk's Philosophy of Religion (1977)

Jan Patočka

Translation of "Kolem Masarykovy filosofie náboženství," the second of Jan Patočka's *Dvě studie o Masarykovi*, in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 12: *Češi I* (Prague: Oikumene, 2006), 366–422. An English translation of the first study, "Pokus o českou národní filosofii a jeho nezdar" [An Attempt at a Czech National Philosophy and its Failure], can be found in *T.G. Masaryk in Perspective*, ed. Milič Čapek and Karel Hrubý (New York: SVU, 1981). Translated by Jiří Rothbauer, revised by James Dodd, Christina Gschwandtner and Ludger Hagedorn.

Keywords: moral philosophy; Kant; Dostoevsky; nihilism; philosophy of religion; Masaryk

At the very moment that Kant's criticism in the *Critique of Pure Reason* spelled the end of rational theology as the foremost metaphysical discipline of its time, he conceives a new, essentially moral theology. In his important book on the ontological proof¹ Dieter Henrich speaks of this new theology as the foundation of a new revealed theology of becoming, of the word, which comprehends God only from his relation to the human. Henrich claims that this new theology becomes part of the prehistory not only of pragmatism but also of Feuerbach and Nietzsche.² Kant's moral theology is not a revealed theology. His doctrine on the postulates is purely rational, although to be sure built essentially on *practical reason*. One might say that at the moment when metaphysics as the science of the highest being in regard to its essence, its inner determination, reaches its end, it is replaced by a new science of God conceived from the point of view of the meaning of human life in the context of the overall meaning of the universe.

The condition for the origin of this new theology is modern mechanism, which once deprived of the accompanied rational metaphysics must turn, conceived metaphysically, into a purely materialist doctrine of nature, now essentially deprived of all meaning. One could speak of a new theology, a new metaphysics of meaning. Never before had it been either necessary or possible to reflect on the "meaning" of the world and of life. That being said, it is only natural that philosophy did not at once break away from metaphysical problems, that it did not immediately turn to the concept of meaning and its systematic exploration.

Kant is hence the first and foremost thinker of meaning, although he himself in no way systematically uses or analyzes the concept (although it is one of the fundamental concepts of human reason). For Kant, the meaning of the world and of life is evident in terms of its purpose and value. Inasmuch as this fundamental concept of meaning has not yet been separated from its reflective objectivations and determinations

(such as precisely purpose and value), the problematic of meaning could not develop in an equally systematic manner or unfold the full breadth of the spectrum it covers: It still remains bound to the concepts of traditional metaphysics and its essentially ancient Platonic and Aristotelian foundation.

When studying modern intellectual history, we are rarely fully aware of the enormous³ significance of the collapse of rational theology accomplished by Kant, whether in regard to philosophy or to life itself. In fact, from within the framework of the modern projection of what-is as beings, we tend to underestimate the importance and systematic value of this rational theology. There is here a certain anachronism, which lies in the fact that the successful uncovering of entities as the basis of our comprehension of them removes the essential being of these entities ever further away from us. We have grown accustomed to considering the mathematical project of nature as the evident basis for all interpretations of nature and spirit. The defeated antithesis—the counterpart to this project, source of the mathematical naturalism of the “scientific” vision of the present—no longer exists for us. We do not see that, without it, this point of view could never have been deployed within the framework of the Christian worldview valid at the time.⁴

With the rise of rational theology the hope was revived in modern man⁵ that this newly discovered rational method would be capable of proving the fundamental truths of Christianity, the *praeambula fidei*, stripped of all non-rational elements (did not the entire Middle Ages blend faith with knowledge in one way or another?), *a priori* with mathematical certainty. The same way of looking at things was to guarantee the immateriality and freedom of the soul, the existence and the truth of God (intelligibility as the basis of the structure of the world, the meaningfulness of the world, even if it was mechanical in its functioning; the veracity of human knowing, even if it was essentially enclosed within our “ideas”) and hence eternity, all of what Kant was later to re-baptize the postulates. Symptomatic here is the argument employed by Descartes against what Henrich calls the logical objection to the ontological proof, according to which it would be contrary to all mathematics and all cognition *a priori*. The importance of rational theology reveals the naiveté of the late Enlightenment in those numerous modern attempts to see in this argument a subterfuge of Descartes, intended to shield his physics from ecclesiastical pressures. That is quite a subterfuge, quite a wonderful artifice, which the most eminent thinkers of the “age of genius” believed for a hundred and fifty years! It was rather the opponents (who from the start were not lacking) who had reasons to conceal the consequences of the bankruptcy of these arguments in regard to the conception of the world. One need only to read through Descartes’ replies to the objections by Hobbes and especially Gassendi⁶ (where already we come across that “empirical” objection so effectively employed by Kant) in order to realize that Descartes does not eschew even rhetoric in order to make his point of view prevail. Such *larvatus prodeo*⁷ would border on bad faith! Only exceptions such as Pascal knew about the dangers of the “God of philosophers and scholars.” While the battle still raged and despite the mounting skepticism of the age, the outcome of the fight remained undecided, and one could regard the *proofs* of “eternity” as a scholarly specialty which has no significance for important human ideas.

Also the fact that Hegel and Schelling, as Kant’s heirs and adversaries had renewed onto-theological metaphysics, undermined the realization that Kant had inaugurated a new style in the metaphysics of eternity, oriented toward the *meaning* of the world and of life. This new style established by Kant, with its primacy of practical reason and

the reflections on ultimate purpose in the *Critique of Judgment*, would become the terrain for the discussion of metaphysical questions for a long time, whether or not one accepted or rejected the Kantian solution. The exceptional importance of Henrich's book appears to me to reside in the fact that he provides the concrete content for that concept of rationalistic onto-theology that, in the opinion of later generations, had been relegated to the rank of a mere empty intention.

The considerable influence of the anachronism we have been discussing, even on the great thinkers of recent times, is especially evident in Husserl's *Crisis*. Sections 3 and 4 emphasize that the great enthusiasm of the Enlightenment characteristic of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries comes from the idea of a new universal rationality initially established in mathematics, then in mathematical mechanics and physics in general. This motif was however soon to enter a crisis because this new (mathematically universal) rationality

could bring unquestionable success only in the positive sciences. But it was otherwise in metaphysics [. . .] Universal philosophy [. . .] took the form of system-philosophies which were impressive but unfortunately were not unified, indeed were mutually exclusive. [. . .] The belief in the ideal of philosophy and method, the guideline of all movements since the beginning of the modern era, began to waver.⁸

The reader cannot fail to have the impression that the cause of skepticism was the opposition among different successive systems. Yet the cause did not reside in the diversity but, on the contrary, in the shaking of what had constituted the unity of these systems—the rational proofs of the existence of God, especially the Cartesian proof based on the concept of *ens necessarium*.⁹ Reality had been effectively deprived of meaning in the course of the modern history of ideas, but in a manner very different from the process described by Husserl. The alternative of objectivistic naturalism and subjectivist transcendentalism which, according to Husserl, forms the axis of the modern struggle for the meaning of being, leaves entirely to the side the predominant metaphysical problematic which, in reality, fills entire centuries, while the Husserlian alternative only appears with its collapse, that is to say, with Kant. The role of Kant in modern transcendentalism, but at the same time also that of Descartes, consequently becomes distorted.¹⁰

While in onto-theology one speaks of God as a being, *ens*, regardless whether it be *maximum* or *necessarium*, moral theology only attributes qualities relative to the moral determination of the world to the divinity,¹¹ such as intelligence, goodness, justice, the capacity of being the creator and legislator of the world (thus omnipotence). One of the most important facets of this theology is *harmony* (between nature and morality, happiness and the law), because it is on this harmony that all the postulates of practical reason rest. This harmony is in turn the condition for the tendency to strive to bring about the realization of the ideal of the highest good, that is, the proper end of pure practical reason, which is the realization of human happiness in conformity with (or on the condition of obedience to) the moral law. God as guarantor of the realization of this harmony, resting as a vanishing point in infinity, is an indispensable condition for this ultimate purpose of the world:

And so practical reason gives us a pure moral basis for assuming this cause (since we can do so without contradiction), even if only for the sake of avoiding the risk

of [having to] regard that striving as wholly futile in its effects and of therefore allowing it to flag.¹²

Important for the subsequent development of this problematic is also the idea that postulates cannot be isolated from one another, and that they all carry the same final design, according to which the world and moral action in the world do not appear to be in vain. To the extent that, with immortality (indispensable to infinite improvement) and the existence of a Creator God and Providence of the world, one postulates a spiritual life beyond the bounds of terrestrial life, moral theology may also be characterized by the *idea of immortality* or eternity.

One motif, the principle as such of the meaning of life, that is to say the moral existence of man as an infinite responsibility and respect for the sacred law of duty, in this triple idea of eternity proceeds from a reflection on the essence of humanity as supra-empirical within the practical domain. The other two postulates have empirical premises: an effective discordance, the lack of harmony between moral merit and happiness, and the vanity of the sensible world without an intelligent author and legislator.

Kant also drew the portrait of an upright man who takes himself to be “firmly persuaded that there is no God and (*since, as far as [achieving] the object of morality is concerned, the consequence is the same*) that there is also no future life.”¹³ This means that a person like Spinoza finds himself caught in the following dilemma: either deny that there is a moral purpose to the world and take it to be devoid of any value (and, doing this, weaken respect for the moral law, given the fact of the non-existence of an ideal final purpose and thus prejudice moral sentiment), or accept this moral purpose with all of its conditions and consequences.

What Kant describes here could have looked at his time like a drama concerning only few individuals who managed to penetrate the problems of reason and skepticism all the way to the dialectic of pure practical reason. Yet the mathematical project of nature deprived of all transcendent support and endowed with meaning only in relation to relative human ends, that is to say in a technical fashion, would soon have a widespread effect on the masses, torn from the tranquility in which they had maintained confidence in the good intellectual conscience of the upper (that is, “cultivated”) classes. The problematic of Kant’s Spinoza thus becomes the problematic of modern man in general. Poets could sense the powerful dramatic tension contained in it. Theoretical reason in its imperfection projects the image of a nature without end and stripped of value, of a whole that is at bottom silent and “absurd,” the object of Pascal’s horror. For this imperfection is in itself a moral command. It comes into conflict, not so much logically but factually, with the moral law in the proper sense. The inevitable result will be that, in a world where the empirical domain is dogmatically taken for reality itself, morality will not only appear to be in vain but, in light of its ultimate outcome on empirical terms, despicable: preaching doomed to failure. Science (without the support of critical philosophy) becomes a comportment that, conditioned by morality, threatens man morally, and can even morally destroy him. In any case, it is a bone of contention, a source of tension, seduction, and temptation. And all this is not accidental but necessary, truly a tragedy.

Portraying humans in their spiritual struggle, subject to this moral peril and weakening, salvation beckoning in the guise of an absolute purposefulness finally

acknowledged: Is this not the essential theme of modern poetry regarding the condition of contemporary humanity? Indeed, the poets first grasped and expressed the metaphysics and the theology of meaning before the philosophers were successful in mastering them with their own means. It is perhaps the very purpose of a great modern work of literature to show how “we feel urged by the moral law to strive toward a universal highest purpose, while yet we feel that we and all of nature are incapable of achieving it,”¹⁴ how our aspiration toward this final end weakens once we limit ourselves to the empirical, the temporal, the natural, and how in our quest for our own happiness man does not attain the final purpose of his nature “for it is not in his nature to stop possessing and enjoying at some point and be satisfied.”¹⁵ Expressed in Kant's own terms, a great modern literary work explicates the meaning of human life by demonstrating it in the life of someone who has passed through skepticism and taken part in the collapse of reason in its pretension to the absolute, where doubt has led all the way to negation and the brink of suicide. Such a person is someone who in unrestrained egoism ventured to the point of destruction of his fellows, only to rise again, struggling forever to purify himself and reach the supreme end.

We are certainly entitled to speak here of a philosophy concerned with the meaning of life, of a metaphysics of meaning, if it is clear that no human action is possible without meaning, and if on the other hand it is true that without an absolute and total meaning all sense making collapses. All of this, it seems to me, is implicitly presupposed by Kant. Yet, at the same time Kant also infers that meaning must be grounded in something absolute, in an overall purpose to creation. For this reason, life without an orientation to a supreme goal can only appear to Kant—and subsequently to Goethe—as deprived of meaning.¹⁶ As to whether meaning and purpose are one and the same and what is their relation is not a question that Kant, for whom the explicit problematic of meaning is alien, addresses, thus fixing the problem for a long time to come within the domain of purposiveness. Yet by observing how his critical philosophy defines the problem, one can at least say that the person who yearns for absolute knowledge, and no less but even more the one who drives skepticism to the point of negating any ultimate purpose and its adherent postulates, is guilty of violating the boundaries of finite human reason and of revolting against the purpose assigned to human life: he is guilty of the titanism and of the nihilism that go hand in hand. Nihilism and the “overman” are hence inseparable. Masaryk claims that the word *Übermensch* originally comes from Goethe, the poet of *Faust*.¹⁷

In short, Kant substitutes for an absolute onto-theology a moral theology relative to human life. His concern is to replace the ancient divine objective order with a new order on a human foundation, but one that will be no less viable, persuasive and supra-subjective. The foundation of this new edifice is the moral law and the respect for the law as what makes the good in human nature possible. Here then is what is worth living for, here is the basis for a “meaning to human life.”

Kant, however, does not analyze the concept of meaning. He does not expound on this “so that” referred to by our voluntary comportment, by our concrete practical activity; he does not provide a phenomenology for this. Instead, he concentrates on the concept of purpose: not as a subjective “so that,” which makes life possible, but as an objective purpose that can be recognized or believed. It is a purpose that is not proposed *by us* but serves as an objective support for what we do propose for ourselves. It is true that in Kant this support does not have objective metaphysical value, but it is a possible basis for a *moral* teleology. Thus instead of providing an analysis

of the basis for the possibility of this “so that” in general, Kant occupies himself with constructing an objective teleology capable of providing practical support for human moral comportment, so that this activity would not be taken to be futile and contradictory.

This manner of justification results in the method of postulates, which turns the *transcendent concepts* of a Creator God, of Providence and personal immortality, into objects of the experiences of moral freedom and justified faith. Without these *realities*, without the objective ends anchored in these concepts, human life has no support and its meaning falters.

The concept of rational self-love—in conformity with the moral principle of acting out of respect for an unconditional law—nevertheless demonstrates that Kant’s moral subject, in whom is contained the purpose of the universe, is closed in on itself . . . as much by rational self-love as by the simple principle of happiness as a maxim. It remains incomprehensible what would make possible a change of course, a reform of the fallen, evil man.

This problem can be formulated still more dramatically, and the very manner in which Kant poses the question can be submitted to critique. If the purpose of the world and of life is to be tied to the vanishing point of that final harmony toward which the infinite aspiration for moral perfection tends, then this implies the recognition of discordance and evil as facts. Does this not mean, however, that it now becomes possible to pose the question whether the ultimate purpose of the world and of life, the purpose of creation, is really a moral one? Is a moral purpose really capable of giving meaning to the world or does it not only lead to rendering evil eternal, once it has been admitted as constitutive of meaning? At first glance such a protest against the moral meaning of the universe can be characterized as a revolt against God. Yet could this question not represent instead a critical incentive not to take certain sclerotized, eternalized aspects of the empirical world and of its concept of happiness as ingredients of the highest ideal?

In my view, Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky attempts to present in his work precisely such an argument against the “moral vision of the world” that implies an acceptance of the current conception of life, with its disintegration into mutually separated subject-monads egoistically closed up within themselves, with its calculus of merits, faults and penalties. (The thinkers of German Idealism also advanced similar arguments against Kant, but the originality of Dostoevsky in this respect is incontestable.)¹⁸

This polemic is developed most explicitly in the conversation between Ivan Karamazov and his brother Alyosha in Book V of the *Brothers Karamazov*. The dialogue between Ivan and Alyosha in the chapter “Rebellion,” in Book V of volume II of the famous novel, may be regarded as a succinct discussion of the concepts of Kant’s moral theology. This theology, as we have seen, is built on the concept of a purpose of the world and life, on the possibility of acting toward the realization of the highest good, on a phenomenology of moral life, of the feeling of respect, recognition, obedience and humility, and on the notion of harmony between moral merit and happiness, between spirituality and sensibility.

It seems to me therefore that the position adopted by T. G. Masaryk, according to which this dialogue is a matter of teleological argument and of theodicy in a traditional metaphysical sense,¹⁹ does not hold up to examination. Teleological argumentation and theodicy belong to that onto-theology superseded by Kant in the *Critique of Pure*

Reason, when he demonstrated that all metaphysical arguments are based on the same illusion of having supposedly realized the ideal of pure reason. Theodicy presumes an insight into the nature of ultimate reality, into “things in themselves,” a passing beyond the limits of finitude. Ivan, however, speaks neither of the harmonious nature of the whole, nor the “harmony of the spheres.” He sounds like a disciple of Kant when he says:

I, my dear, have come to the conclusion that if I cannot understand even that [i.e. that parallels may meet in infinity], then it is not for me to understand about God. I humbly confess that I do not have any ability to resolve such questions, I have a Euclidean mind, an earthly mind, and therefore it is not for us to resolve things that are not of this world. [. . .] All such questions are completely unsuitable to a mind created with a concept of only three dimensions. And so, I accept God, not only willingly, but moreover I also accept his wisdom and his purpose, which are completely unknown to us [. . .]²⁰

This is to speak, in a way that could not be clearer, in the style of the *Critique of Judgment* about the ultimate purpose of the universe: “I believe in order, in the meaning of life, I believe in eternal harmony, in which we are all supposed to merge, I believe in the Word for whom the universe is yearning [. . .]”²¹ It is evident from the use of the future tense that he is thinking here in Kantian terms and that the “harmony” in question is not the harmony of the spheres but rather the ultimate purpose of the world and of life, which requires believing in eternal life.

Another expression for the same thing is the “world’s finale,” the “moment of eternal harmony” which will be enough to move all hearts, calm all indignations, redeem all crimes and all spilled blood.²² Dostoevsky’s harmony is the Kantian ultimate purpose of the universe, accessible only in eternity, in a manner incomprehensible to us, but morally certain.

It is in this spirit that we also need to interpret Ivan’s confession of faith confirming his belief in God and in an ultimate purpose: he believes in them to the extent that he is an agent, that he acts in the world, that life always supposes some hope in an ultimate purpose. Yet is this final end of the universe really and *necessarily* the one imposed on us by Kant’s imperative? Here Ivan seeks to demonstrate that even the logic of the postulates is not apodictic, but hypothetical. The postulates and their consequences, the ideal of the highest good, the moral purpose of the universe, are not, as Kant would like to suggest, absolutely necessary; they are necessary only *conditionally*. This condition is that we want to act and that the meaning of this action consists in happiness as a reward for moral merit, i.e. the condition that the “meaning” of this action is something that has already been decided. Yet to speak of the “meaning of action” is to say that discordance, evil, and pain are nevertheless allowed, necessary not apodictically but only on the order of facts, and that the world was built with their assistance and on their foundation. Of course one could object that this is the price of the moral meaning of the world. For something like moral worth to exist, there must be suffering and injustice. For the world to know of moral life and its values, something of this kind is necessary. *Yet is it necessary for the world to have a moral meaning?* Is the morality of moral worth necessary and justifiable? Once we thus enter the domain of morality, we likewise enter the sphere of a God with whom one negotiates, the sphere of a moral God with his rewards and punishments,

the moral sphere as the domain of *do ut des*,²³ of merit, guilt and remuneration, of transcendental keeping of accounts.

Ivan's argument is analogous to Kant's argument against rational theology. Just as the Kantian refutation of onto-theology is founded on the impossibility of providing content to the concept of a necessary being, Ivan grounds his refutation of moral theology on the impossibility of proving that a moral purpose of the universe is apodictically necessary. The moral purpose of the universe has no apodictically binding effect even if we dismiss all claims relating to the relativity of morality and of moral norms. Precisely the principle of *redeeming someone*, or of harmony requiring *payment*, is possibly an outright disqualification of any moral purpose for the universe.

This is likewise the meaning of the fact, otherwise difficult to understand at first, that Ivan bases his argument on the *suffering of children*. This has been taken by some interpreters (such as Krag)²⁴ to be a sentimental rhetorical maneuver. In reality (even taking into account the analogy shown by Krag between the facts pertaining to the suffering of the children invoked by Ivan and the reference to Tatyana's decision in Dostoevsky's speech on Pushkin,²⁵ on which Krag's entire argument is based), the argument regarding children who do not know the difference between good and evil but whose suffering serves to "complete the sum of pain necessary" for the ultimate moral end of the universe, has a very precise meaning. By acting and by resolving to act the adults have already decided to side with this moral meaning; they have placed their bet and put themselves at risk. "I am not talking about the suffering of grown-ups, they ate the apple and to hell with them, let the devil take them all, but these little ones!"²⁶ The children, the innocents, are beyond good and evil in the moral sense, outside the moral universe, but they are dragged along by the logic of the moral purpose of the world. Where is the necessity in this? Does not this fact render all inner necessity of a moral world questionable from the outside?²⁷ Does this not show the need for conceiving everything again, differently? Is it not necessary now to conceive of God other than from the point of view of moral conflict? Is this conflict itself not proof that we have believed in God in the wrong way, that we have implicated him in our antinomies and contradictions? Is all of this not the concrete way of saying: (the) God (of morality) is dead? The moral God, the God of Kant's postulates, will then be the postulate of a suffering man, not in the transcendental but the empirical sense:

I want to see with my own eyes the hind lie down with the lion, and the murdered man rise up and embrace his murderer. [. . .] All religions in the world are based on this desire, and I am a believer. But then there are the children, and what am I going to do with them?²⁸

Ivan renounces "harmony" (that is to say future harmony, situated in the infinite) and its God, the God of morality.

It is not worth one little tear of even that one tormented child [. . .] Not worth it, because her tears remained unredeemed. They must be redeemed, otherwise there can be no harmony. But how, how will you redeem them? Is it possible? Can they be redeemed by being avenged? But what do I care if they are avenged, what do I care if the tormentors are in hell [. . .]?²⁹

Is it not clear here that this protest against the "spirit of revenge" is at the same time a denial of "moral theology," just as we find it in Nietzsche?

That Ivan affirms that he has faith in God (obviously not the God of morality) is the most difficult thing to understand in the whole discussion. Perhaps one might suggest the following hypothesis: The refutation of the moral purpose of the universe leaves the one who has refuted it with two possibilities. Either there is another meaning, as yet incomprehensible, or there is no meaning at all, in which case there is obviously no longer any moral meaning. It would be impossible to base an argument on the categorical imperative; all that is left is one's own arbitrariness, which can take two forms: an objective form, in which I exclude others in my pursuit of happiness, and a subjective form, in which I exclude myself.³⁰ "Everything is permitted"³¹ then defines the nihilist solution, while still keeping something else in reserve. Perhaps one can qualify as belief in God the hope invested in this second always possible option—the affirmation of a God who does not make evil something compatible with the world.

Ivan's dilemma leaves its author indecisive and skeptical, as if he had glimpsed a positive solution but was unable to embrace it. He lacks a genuine approach, a passage from possibility to reality, and this is why he remains, from a practical perspective, in a nihilist position. A skeptic of Ivan's kind represents a specific variety of the "underground" man.³² The underground man agonizes over the fundamental reality that for him others are hell, that they alienate him from himself, but that this alienation at the same time makes up the entire substance of his own life, such that he is unable to free himself from it. He lives in dependence on "others." Which others? No one in particular. He is under the heel of an anonymous otherness. The others are a pretext for him to "amuse" himself by provoking and humiliating them. Humiliating them not out of malice, but out of an understanding that he has of his own proper emptiness and nothingness. Distancing oneself, keeping others at arm's length and in a position of inferiority . . . but *eo ipso* falling subject to this tendency in such a way that it becomes my own substance, my own self, such that I become a negative, unpleasant, intolerable anonymity. This *negative* mediocrity is condemned to comprehend the smallest gesture on the part of another from this same point of view, searching and finding the same tendency of self-distance, of outpacing, hindering others, that anonymous and constant competition of all against all. If this competition is my nature, my being, then I am really and unambiguously without any substance of my own. The underground condition is torture, in that the anonymity in which most people permanently and comfortably dwell is *understood* by the underground man, without him being able to renounce it and free himself from it. The underground man is alienated and he knows it, but this knowledge is sterile, morbid, simply a way to lacerate oneself, forced to revel in itself and to find its content or balance in this self-torture. There is no escape from this position, neither repose nor satisfaction, but there is also a sort of perverse delight, a selfish enjoyment—the enjoyment of one's own nothingness.

The underground man is "terribly self-loving." He is infatuated with himself, irritable and irascible, immeasurably over-sensitive with respect to himself, even though this self is false, paltry, entirely determined by this constant competition. At the same time he knows his own insignificance, he understands himself to be the petty cause of his own triviality, he demeans himself, thus precluding any humiliation that may come from the outside.

In the opinion of the underground man, the "normal" person, the self-righteous one who is sure of himself and of his right is intellectually limited. For his part, the

underground man is well aware that others do not have any more real substance or content than he does himself; he knows that normal people live just as much at the expense of others and depend also on this anonymous otherness, although they do not know it. This last point makes the underground inhabitant conscious of a certain superiority, but it avails him no advantage, no confidence in action; he is only left with retreating into himself, into his perverse self-torture.

In a sense, the underground man has gone farther than the naively anonymous: He knows that he is never justified, but always null, always culpable, that for him there is no excuse, that he is responsible even for that of which he is not the author, precisely because of his situation of being a man determined from the outside, without substance, without the possibility that things will ever be different for him. The underground man keeps running up against this wall—he has been placed in his situation, but he accepts it, he assumes responsibility for it and, because of this, confirms his “guilt.”

The underground man is “without qualities”; there is nothing positive about him, nothing indubitable, nothing irrevocable. All of his determinations are given from the outside, but at the same time they are also his own doing—he is free without being free, “condemned to freedom.”

Although devoid of any positive content, able to “endorse” different meanings freely just to let go of them again, the “underground man” becomes a steadfast defender of his own negative freedom, a combatant against the “laws of nature,” against any attempt to reclaim something eternal and definitive.

Taken as a whole, the underground man is a negative anonymity who torments himself with his negative relation to others, that relation of tension and competition that definitively separates us into closed monads trying to surpass and restrain one another. The skepticism in which he lives is in fact a negation, a negation of the possibility of a common, unifying meaning other than diffusion into reciprocal dependence. For this reason, nothing appears to him more naive than the desire to define any stable and precise human “interests” from which it would be possible to unite and harmonize *pro futuro* human character, aspirations, and future. All of this falls prey to his truly caustic skepticism, the prime target of which is the “normal man.”

The “normal man” is an anonymous figure who still does not comprehend his own negativity. He lives on the surface of things and is thus unfamiliar with the “underground.” Life is plain to him, he lives in the light of day, he is unaware that what he takes to be things built on solid ground are in fact his own acts and free projects.

The underground man has fought his way to freedom, albeit to one completely negative. Nothingness is the substance of his existence. From this it is clear that he can only be an adversary to all liberal ideas, the enemy of determinism, utilitarianism, and the idea of infinite progress. Is there a way for the underground man to free himself from his negativity? Can he find a way out of his tortured situation?

There are indications that this is possible. Dostoevsky undoubtedly had no intention of being satisfied with the concept of existence as pure nothingness; he wanted to reach something positive, an overcoming of the underground condition. One of the most concise descriptions of such an overcoming is provided in the short story titled *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man*.³³ This story appears to me key to Dostoevsky’s concept of a “conversion of life.” This “ridiculous man” is also a variant of the

underground man. He worries terribly that he looks ridiculous, perhaps since his very birth; the more he learns, the more he realizes how ridiculous he is. This means that he is enslaved by otherness: He lives according to the manner in which others see him and according to what he is in their eyes; he *is* as he is seen, he sees himself, he lives his life as the victim of others, the victim of ridicule. While the “underground man” understands that the others are just as negative as he is himself, all the while unable to draw from this awareness any advantage for himself, the “ridiculous man” is to the very ground of his being a victim of the others’ gaze, the gaze that provides him with his alienated self. This alienated self is at the same time his secret. Although it tortures him, he conceals it with an infinite sensitivity, a shame bearing the mask of pride. What is essential is that this shame and this pride increase to the point of becoming intolerable. Once the unsustainable is reached, sensitivity becomes replaced with its opposite, absolute brutishness, profound boredom, indifference. There is no other defense against this agonizing hypersensitivity other than absolute apathy without limit, sheer boredom. When everything injures it, the soul has something at its disposal that can become at once a rampart and a weapon. It is thus that a *profound boredom* emerges within us, not in relation to anything particular externally or internally or to the course or episodes of our life, but to something prior to everything that dominates all of this—namely profound non-interest, non-sensitivity to anything and anybody:

Such boredom is still distant when it is only this book or that play, that business or this idleness, that drags on and on. It erupts when “one is bored.” Profound boredom, drifting here and there in the abysses of our existence like a muffling fog, removes all things and human beings and oneself along with them into a remarkable indifference. This boredom manifests being as a whole.³⁴

It is into such profound boredom that the “ridiculous man” sinks, when he becomes overwhelmed with “the conviction that everywhere on earth *nothing mattered*.” It makes no difference whether the world exists or whether one is surrounded by utter emptiness. “I began to sense and feel with all my being that *nothing existed around me*.”³⁵ A funny nothingness! Things have not vanished, but it is as though they had never been there . . . to the point to which there emerges something like a doubt as to whether all of this might not disappear along with me, with my consciousness, with my self! This is not just a simple reminiscence of Schopenhauer. It is an expression of the experience of nothingness—not that there is nothing, but that the “nothing” is there. Things amount to nothing, and it is the same with one’s own “states,” with pain or the feeling of sadness: they are as if faded, they do not “touch” me, they are strangers to me like the things outside that have lost all significance.

What is “ridiculous” about this man is precisely this insignificance, the lack of possibilities open to him that he would be able to “take seriously.” Everything is somehow emotionally “related” to me, even I myself—and within me, within this emptiness, all motion breaks down. I feel and see my own emptiness as the very nothingness of things “which used to exist in the past; then I concluded that even in the past there had not been anything, but that for some reason it had only seemed as if there had been something.”³⁶ It seems that this tedious insignificance extends to all dimensions of time. Is there a more expressive illustration of what a contemporary thinker has characterized as “the basic state-of-mind [*Befindlichkeit*] of anxiety,”³⁷ the

distinction between anxiety and “profound boredom” being a mere nuance? What does it mean to be afflicted with anxiety, if not the collapse of significance, the collapse of the meaning of everything that we have encountered to this point, and on this basis the collapse of the *world* in which we have lived? What then is left? To consummate this nothingness by means of an act no less indifferent, namely eliminating oneself. And, by eliminating oneself—perhaps—eliminating everything? In such a mood, recollections of readings or fragments of Schopenhauerian “philosophemes” insinuate themselves. Yet what is important here are not these ideas in themselves, but rather the fact that this extreme disposition of mood, within which the significance of things or of oneself is impossible, lends them an aura of singular concreteness and imperiousness, an unexpected urgency. Evidently the final decision, postponed by indifference, demands nevertheless some sort of gesture, some break with immobility. A little star, pity for a poor sodden little girl, afterward brutally driven away, provides the impulse. Yet another delay follows during which the “ridiculous man” dreams.

How is it that pity for an abandoned little girl and her anxiety is capable of at least partially breaking through this profound boredom, the boredom which has already turned into that tense anxiety wherein everything loses its meaning, so that “the nothing is here”? How is it that an unhappy child, encountered by the ridiculous man as a thing in the world, has not lost all significance? How else but from the fact that this anxiety is based on a hypersensitivity, namely the hypersensitivity concerning an alienated submission to an anonymous otherness, yet an anonymous otherness that is itself still a relation to the other, no matter how failed or ruined? All understanding, the entire significance of everything, is in the end based on comprehending the other as such. The entire pyramid of decadence and alienation had been erected on this original foundation. It is as if a glimpse of such an understanding happens in the episode of the “ridiculous man” and the little girl, a kind of comprehension of the question on which all answers depend, the change of direction toward greater suffering and nothingness has suddenly become visible. In this initial breakthrough, “nothingness” has not yet become anything positive, has not revealed itself as “truth” as some other reality, but rather as the key to *everything*. One only feels as if somehow this nothingness, this lack of all meaning able to speak to us and thereby give us life, has shifted. It has turned us back, risen up between us and all things, between us and all beings of the same kind as us. As if inviting us to enter, as if fascinating us with the horror of its emptiness, forcing us to let go of that last branch to which we cling desperately. And yet something has *opened* with this invitation! We have not been *delivered*, but there is something more here that makes it possible for us to take a step back with respect to all that has been, all that about which it can be said that it exists, is present and may be absent, might come and go. An abyss has opened, but an abyss is after all still a space. If one cannot walk in it, one can certainly *fly* there. And does not the horror of the void stem from what we comprehend of the nothing and from wanting to treat it as if it were a *thing* that can be grasped, tread upon, manipulated, commanded?

In his dream, the “ridiculous man” is where we are in dreams, namely with what truly interests us, “skipping” certain distances not only in space but also in time. The “ridiculous man” is at the point of suicide; he carries it out by putting a bullet in his heart. The extinction of meaning is followed by the erasure of the physical presence of things. Only negative sensations remain: obscurity, coldness, then also humidity . . . and pain. Perhaps this deficient mode of existence will prolong itself into infinity?

Now, however, a profound call emerges out of his shattered heart (to the “Ruler of All Things”—a prayer and a plea, but at the same time also damnation and condemnation; the invocation shows that the gesture has not yet been achieved but that the separation, from which “pride” and “disdain” ensue, is still there; slowly, he detaches from these) and now he begins to *fly*. Flight means that the heart, existence itself, being-in-the-world as such, has been *detached*. It has been detached from things, from its separation, and from its false being that had opposed it to others in the name of “otherness.” This is why, when addressing the stranger carrying him, one still hears one last allusion to separation: “You know that I am afraid of you, and therefore you despise me.”³⁸ Yet just as anxiety and its distress intensifies, contempt begins to vanish . . . and suddenly the Sun appears, a familiar and inexpressibly sweet sentiment! “A sweet, welcoming feeling roused an ecstasy in my soul: the old, familiar power of the light, the same light that had given me life, made my heart respond and restored it, and I sensed life, the former life, for the first time since my burial.”³⁹

It is now clear that this has nothing to do with some mystical fantasy, but with a profound conversion away from existent things and their unveiling toward the illuminating truth of Being that reveals the difference between beings and Being. This is the difference that forms the proper being of the human being, the fundamental possibility embedded in the structure of human life and realized on the ground of limit-experiences that provide access to the triple alienation from oneself, from others, and from Being.

This also explains the singular circumstance that one does not speak of a *specific* truth, of some proposition or other expressing something objective or existent; one does not speak of any “cognition” that has been achieved. The “ridiculous man” “recognized” the “truth”; but what he recognized cannot be communicated, it is not the content of any statement, it does not describe any reality, thing, or happening. One might speak of *truths* in this way but not of the Truth. Even Plato’s prisoner freed from the cave does not know certain truths but the Truth and his difficult ascent is at the same time a liberation. Plato does not use the metaphor of flying but of a double *blinding*: one in which the captive must dis-habituate himself from the shadows that he had known up to that point, and the other where he is not yet accustomed to the new, intense light, first that of the day, then of the sun itself. The “ridiculous man” has recognized the Truth, an object of neither proofs nor doubts, because proofs and doubts have to do with *truths* and not with the Truth. The Truth is the source of all truths, but it has no need for them.

What then is *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man*, were we to carry out a more detailed interpretation? Nothing less than a testimonial to the two aspects of things, the two fundamental possibilities within which man exists and can exist. Originally he lives in alienation from himself, from others, and from Being. Alienation, separation: things are alien to man, they are mere instruments or tools for him, means at his disposal that he controls and that belong to his everyday life of need and consumption. Here things appear to him only relative to himself and only inasmuch as they fit into the boxes that his “world” has arranged in advance, so that while at work, at rest or during any other occupation or activity, he would find each in its place. Yet, this functioning is a functioning *for each self individually*, in strict separation from and tension with others. Although things are there for us, they always imply using the lives of others; they presuppose, rely on, and carry out the appropriation of and the alienation from others.

Everything has been turned into a thing, and the most important thing, the prized possession we do not want to lose is ourselves. From this follows our closing ourselves off from others, our concealed yet public competition of all against all, our increasingly pronounced opposition to others as life advances.

Only the fact that our life is initially lived at this superficial level makes possible a *conversion*, an inner transformation that, without demanding a miraculous intervention from above or from outside, is capable of revealing the ground of this process that is apparently self-evident, but more often an inconspicuous and unobserved happening. The underground man does not have the final word. Is it even possible to say that Truth dwells inside man, that it is human in nature? For the light did not initially reveal itself *in* man, but *above* him. Man is not the creator of Truth, but someone who is abandoned to it or immersed in it . . . there where he is capable of renouncing all he clings to as his own.

Being is initially revealed as the “Nothing,” as the shock that, like a flash of lightning, halted all work at the assembly line of relative meaning, which had hid its finitude from itself. “Nothingness,” then, appears like a flash of Being. This lightning bolt (Heraclitus says “*Keraunos*,” thunderbolt, “steers all things”)⁴⁰ is not only a cold light in which everything freezes. On the contrary, Being appears as that by virtue of which everything opens up: It takes place as the wonder that everything *is*. This opening up of the whole, just at the moment where *nothing* remains of the initially isolated “why” and “wherefore,” shows what *always still remains*, what always again opens up the present and, with it, all of what can be gathered, which leads us toward this whole. This wonder, due to which we are no longer among tools, instruments, equipment (*Zeug*), but among *being*, is a union, an opening up that one may thus designate with the word “love.” Being is turned toward us, as if it had returned – and it has gathered us to itself, to others, to things, to ourselves.

The extreme disposition of profound boredom, within which the call of conscience is first heard, summons us to return from mundane simple complacency to the obscurity of the uncomfortable whence and whither. With the revelation of the “nothing,” it becomes an acute stupor that indicates or hints at being, not as something to which we could desperately cling, but rather as something that can now be beckoned to reveal itself, to show itself. “The anxiety of those who are daring cannot be opposed to joy or even to the comfortable enjoyment of tranquilized bustle. It stands—outside all such opposition—in secret alliance with the cheerfulness and gentleness of creative longing.”⁴¹

At that moment the “ridiculous man” may therefore dream of a new earth and of new people, illuminated by this new light, people who are happy and full of love. These people are free of everything that opposes them to each other. Their life is not built as a secondary synthesis on the basis of a primary monadization. Their “different understanding” is essentially the comprehension of the fact that Being does not divide, but originally unifies and brings to agreement. And now suddenly that harmony, which the moral purpose of the world had removed to an infinite distance, is right here.

And something else emerges at the same time: Although these new people also die, they die reconciled and without fear. They die having known fullness and not emptiness. And this fullness is what matters, not indefinite continuation. On the contrary, continuation is worth nothing, if it means persisting in deceit and sin, with all their accompanying evil and malice. The sequel of the dream teaches this with the history of

the fall and the repetition of earthly unhappiness. This is not an empty repetition, but one understood to be full. And what does it matter that it was a dream! After all, a dream is no less a presence of the world and of things than is the state of being awake. And the main insight remains: Being is neither thing nor entity but what opens things and entities, binding everything to itself with the invincible power of love. And love does not belong among the things and contents of this world, but by the side of immortal Being. Being is not what we love, but that *through which* we love, what *gives* us to love, and on the basis of which we let things be what they are, we see how things consist in themselves (*Bewandtnis*) and do not refer them primarily and essentially to ourselves.

The myth of the golden age, which Dostoevsky undertakes next in reference to the "other world," is centered on the relationship that people of this world have toward things and their knowledge of these things. The knowledge possessed by these people is not our science; it does not consist in the decomposition or analysis of things, carried out by the skeptical search for the hidden essence of life. It is precisely this essence that is somehow "obvious," though perhaps not in our conceptual manner. Rather, it is something like a sympathetic understanding; the closest example in our world would be the artist's love that lets things unfold in themselves and out of themselves, a love that converses with trees as its equals, a love as if akin to the stars and yet tied in deep gratitude to this earth. And as in art, there is a whole here as well, on one hand the world into whose splendor everything ascends, on the other the depths of the earth out of which every being emerges and into which it returns.

Yet why is the myth of the golden age—where humans do not understand on the basis of an analytic and originally alienated science, but devote themselves to Being that floods them with a stream of love granting the entirety of the whole—followed by the myth of original sin and of the fall? This is even more mysterious given that, after awakening from the dream of the golden age and its torturous end, the revelation of the Truth remains, neither affected nor eclipsed by the fall. One might respond: Neither the "men of the golden age," nor those who have once "known the Truth," are protected from succumbing repeatedly to that which divides, alienates and constitutes the condition for all transgressions, even the most serious. Why do we, however, learn nothing particular about the cause of the fall, nothing about a single event that would pave the way for it? Because no event is commensurable with this outcome, just as the fruit of paradise is without a common measure. Thus original "sin" insinuates itself like a game, a simple vertigo, the temptation of a "what if?" at the crossroads of truth and lie. However insignificant the pretext, life here receives a new omen: What had so far occurred under the sign of affirmation, now takes place under the sign of negation. For deceit divides, it can only operate with the intention of separating and dividing—separating oneself from things, from others, setting oneself as the master over Being in spite of its essence not being under our control. It is obvious that deceit itself is already a fault, it is a consequence and not a cause. The cause is the possibility of abandoning the right path, which even the fortunate, as free beings, retain within themselves. According to Kierkegaard, this possibility is nothingness, contained in anxiety. Anxiety would thus be equivocal, the anxiety of the fall as well as the anxiety of "flight" and of conversion. This ambivalence is perfectly natural. The anxiety of the fall is the nothing that watches over those who are fortunate. The more radical anxiety of flight and of reversal watches over the whole of life and is known first as the voice of conscience calling life back to itself from its alienated

desolation. This is only possible if we let go of every reliance on something existent, if we take a step or a leap, daring to fall or fly off into the void . . . there where only Being *may* manifest its presence.

How, then, does a tiny temptation seduce us to the bloodiest murders, to the tearing apart of humanity, the confusion of hearts and tongues, to hatred and spiteful relationships? At least it here becomes obvious that the sphere of morality, of love on one hand and of guilt on the other, is not the place for settling accounts and for vengeance. Guilt cannot be calculated; essentially, nobody is without fault, the bloodiest of crimes may develop from the smallest of seeds; nobody is exempted from the possibility of contamination for which the responsibility never ends. This and nothing else is the meaning of the famous doctrine, impossible in the eyes of the moralist, that everybody is accountable for everybody else. Everyone is guilty of everything—*nota bene: nobody* is without guilt—that is, no *human being* is inculpable. There is no righting of wrongs, no redemption of guilt, there is only a universal acknowledgement and admission of one's own guilt, hence everyone's guilt. Yet, this acknowledgement is in the truest sense identical to personal confession, to exposure, refusing the mask of society's excuses, evasions and pretexts. "All are guilty" becomes false when it is understood to relieve, to serve as an alibi, to *alleviate*. "All are guilty" is instead an *increase in severity*; the only one entitled to use this expression is the one who *wants to have* a conscience. "To want to have a conscience"⁴² is the only manner in which we may "judge" and "affect" the other in the *authentic* sense of the term.

This is how, in broad strokes, Dostoevsky's doctrine on love might be presented. It should have become obvious that Dostoevsky opposes, on the one hand, the concept of love as an instinct and, on the other hand, the idea that moral life is based on reason, duty, and the postulates of pure practical reason. While Krag takes this to be the doctrine of an artist,⁴³ I would maintain that this point of view is already included in the one I am attempting to explicate here, provided that the artist is open to Being's favor for the world, for that whole in which each part has the possibility of being what it is, inasmuch as it does not violate things but frees them from mere servitude and the concealment of their own inner being. That this doctrine is not *solely* that of an artist does not require any further proof.

Love, as instinct and as moral imperative, subjectivizes moral life, in that the former subordinates life to the instinctive self, while the latter subjects it to the thinking, intellectual self. Both, however, take division as their point of departure, they depend on it and build on it their justification for what is good—moral "progress" in the first instance, the "postulates" in the second.

The intention in elucidating the connection between Kant's philosophy of postulating a purpose for creation, i.e., his moral theology, and Dostoevsky's work has been to show how this philosophy of a moral purpose of the universe becomes in Dostoevsky a strand of discussion and polemic about a vision, which deals with the dramatic meaning of human existence. It becomes immersed in the phenomenon of meaning and the privation of meaning, instead of attempting to rely on a moral theology or moral teleology. The author's *own interpretation* of this process is an entirely different matter. He believes his own engagement to have transcended the rationalism of European philosophy and to have found a way to the simple faith of the suffering and the humble. His goal is thus the faith of the simple, expressed in the following terms:

Though with us there is sin, unrighteousness, and temptation, still, all the same, there is on earth, in such and such a place, somewhere, someone holy and exalted; he has the truth; he knows the truth; so the truth does not die on earth, and therefore someday it will come to us and will reign over all the earth, as has been promised.⁴⁴

What is remarkable in this statement is that meaning is not primarily demanded for one's own sake; what is most important is that it exists at all. The spurned, the miserable and the sick do not see themselves as the ones on whose account the truth exists, but as the ones who are willing to suffer, to be humiliated and to lower themselves for its sake, so that it would exist somewhere in this world.

Has the connection with Kant been established sufficiently? So far we have relied only on the interpretation of Ivan's dialogue with Alyosha in the fifth book of the *Brothers Karamazov*, where the allusion to a "future harmony," an indirect citation, provides evidence for Kant's influence on Dostoevsky's thought. But we can equally point to the notable study by Golosovker,⁴⁵ which explicates the whole figure of Ivan Karamazov as the embodiment of the antinomy of pure reason. It also offers what is perhaps the only evidence of an explicit reference to Kant in Dostoevsky's correspondence. (Right after his release from prison in February 1854, Fyodor Mikhailovich asks his brother Mikhail to send him a number of books, including a French translation of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and Hegel's *History of Philosophy*, and he adds: "My entire future depends on it.") In particular, Golosovker shows how Dostoevsky interprets the Kantian antithetic of pure reason, namely that he approaches it, in a consistent fashion, from the point of view of "eternity," that is to say, of those postulates from the *Critique of Practical Reason* that together form a whole: freedom, God, and the immortality of the soul. He bases this on a section in the *Transcendental Dialectic* entitled "On the interest of reason in these conflicts"⁴⁶ where Kant articulates his whole idea of philosophy. The conflict between thesis and antithesis is a necessary conflict of human reason that strives for the unconditioned and when, in the experiential series, it attempts to approach the final conditions that limit empirical synthesis *a priori*, it runs up against four fundamental problems. Here philosophy promises results which "would leave every other human science far behind in value, since it would promise to ground our greatest expectations and prospects concerning the ultimate ends [. . .]."⁴⁷ Success on this point would by far surpass the grandeur of the mathematical plan of natural science. Antinomy, however, prescribes modesty to philosophical reason: Instead of posing brilliant theses regarding whether the world has a beginning in time and space, whether there exists a simple essential substance, whether it is necessary to posit a free will or an absolutely necessary being as the source of all contingencies, or the corresponding antitheses, it offers only a reflection on the question of knowing whether this conflict of reason with itself is not a simple misunderstanding whose clarification may perhaps not realize any speculative pretensions, but may lead to a "rule of lasting tranquility over understanding and sense."⁴⁸ Such then is Kant's goal: to find a basis for both moral theology (which for a long time he had believed to be the only foundation for the meaning of life that has force and influence) and for the uninterrupted progress of the natural sciences. He desires a reconciliation between the two, such that on the one side moral life will not be weakened in view of the unlimited extent of a value-free nature, and on the other side that the momentum of natural science will be protected from the

dogmatism of speculative theologians. Transcendental idealism is to guarantee both, carefully distinguishing between the ideality of experience and the reality of things in themselves. The objectivity of experience is a mere representation, although of course subordinated to laws and based on formal *a priori* principles that allow for its unlimited intellectual and cognitive domination. It is impossible to think the objectivity of experience as a whole without contradiction; the world is a mere idea, the idea of a task proposed by our reason, namely how to dominate the empirical and sensible domain infinitely through intellectual understanding.

Thus the empirical objectivity of our everyday world contains in itself something ghostly that makes us consider it as something that exists completely independent of us and which turns out to be a lie, not individually (an error) or singularly, capable of being eliminated by reference to broader contexts (sensory illusions), but as a deception of systematic and synthetic reason itself.

According to Golosovker, at least if we understand him correctly, Dostoevsky reads Kant's philosophy in the sense that there is something diabolical in this illusion of our reason as it is manifest in the antinomies; the real devilry lies in the hell of reason that finds itself unable to detach from contradicting assertions about "eternity." Yet Kant's solution to the problem, transcendental idealism, appears cheap and philistine to Dostoevsky, because it intends to create an idyll (on the one hand, the learned pedantry demanding peace and quiet for its work, on the other, the obedience to an absolute discipline in "acting out of a sense of duty"), where in reality there is a tragedy, illustrated above all by the two brothers Karamazov: Dmitri who, in his passionate actions, unknowingly fuses two different truths, the truth of the thesis and that of the antithesis; and Ivan who, as a philosopher dedicated to the passion for understanding, plunges violently into the embrace of the antithesis, yet *in practice* is unable to give up the thesis. The two brothers are consumed in the blaze of the antinomy. Smerdyakov, who relies on Ivan to provide him with a clear conscience after his crime, perishes as a victim of the practical conception of the antithesis: Having relied on a merely relative meaning to existence, he cannot bear his awakened conscience, he cannot bear practical "truth" and destroys himself. And the devil, who maintains the antithesis according to which the phenomenal world never ceases to exist, is the isolated antithesis that survives, because it does not and cannot have a conscience.

It is not, however, our task here to reproduce an interpretation demanding and extensive enough so as to encompass all of Dostoevsky's metaphysics. What is important for us is the fact that the masterpiece by this great author presents itself to the interpreter, in light of the antinomies, as a duel between Dostoevsky and Kant. Dostoevsky takes the antinomy of reason more seriously even than Kant, if that is possible, because he does not see in it the conflict between an illusory world of the senses and the world of true reality, but rather as the conflict between two realities, two worlds. The sensible, phenomenal world is after all the world where humans suffer and rejoice, where their decisions and destinies play out, and thus this world has its own consistency, its own type of existence, precisely what in the course of our lives, ignorant of its mediated character, we take for existence itself. Dostoevsky accepts the problems of the Kantian antinomy as those of reality, as problems that demand solution not simply for intellectual reasons, but because behind them lies the meaning of human life without which people cannot exist. Yet how are the two to be joined: the gravity of antinomy, the despair of not being able to resolve it, and the refusal of the Kantian solution, according to which we live in a world that is nothing more than a

phenomenon? The gravity of Kant's moral theology finds its complete expression in the antinomies, which have a moral and heuristic meaning, but are not themselves cognitions. Yet if they are not cognitions, how does one take them seriously, how does one attach to them the overall meaning of life?

Dostoevsky opposes the concept of love to the moral exposition of the postulates and to the Kantian thesis in general. Yet this concept, which he believes capable of serving as a support for the Christian solution represented by Zosima and Alyosha, depends on a unique kind of phenomenology of the meaning of life which, it appears to me, is neither Kantian, nor Christian in the traditional sense. It is that phenomenology that I attempted to analyze in the explication of the *Dream of a Ridiculous Man*. While it undoubtedly deals with gaining life's meaning via an overcoming of the threefold alienation, thus with approaching and connecting to other people and things in the world, the traditional Christian concepts, such as transcendent divinity and immortality, seem to represent marginal ideals here rather than the foundation on which everything rests. Rather, this foundation is positivity, openness, and love. Perhaps one is able to say that Dostoevsky's solution consists in finding a meaning that is not bound to traditional metaphysics, not even in the form defended by Kant, the form of moral theology. Decisive in this discovery of meaning would then be the conversion referred to by the epigraph of the novel, taken from the Gospel of John: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."⁴⁹ The seed and key to all meaning lies not in the super-reality to which no road leads directly from experience, but in the non-real, in the difference of the being of the world and Being, as experienced by Zosima's brother Markel shortly before he dies (when from spite and negativity he suddenly turns to loving kindness, gratitude, to love and happiness), and similarly later by Zosima himself before the duel, and also by Alyosha once he overcomes the rebellion inspired in him by the failure of the miracle to occur.

"If we do not die. . ." We know that finitude, death, is not an end in the objective sense, an end that one may experience. Death is the extreme possibility that can only be seized by each individual alone, in such a way that, from something remote and abstract, it grows into that great presence of the event that shatters everything hitherto significant on the side of things and of one's own self: every hope, every desire, every rejecting resistance. Meaning reveals itself in relation to this, not as a gift sent to humans from above, not as a reward for merit, not as retribution and compensation for offenses. Meaning is that for which we must battle and to which we should devote ourselves. We are its shelter and reality, which possibly, with the openness to the being of others and of things whose care is entrusted to us, enables the hope of witnessing the emergence of a new life, a new land, perhaps even something of the divine.

Dostoevsky thus discovered a new continent of hitherto unknown meaning, but he believed to have found only a new passage to a familiar continent, that of traditional theology. Christian theology speaks of love and so does the regenerated man in Dostoevsky. But are they speaking of the same thing? In Christianity, love means primarily divine love, yet, we first need to give meaning to the word "divine." The significance of conversion does not flow from God and his relation to us, which we do not comprehend. The inverse is much more the case: It is from a new meaning revealed to us that we may glimpse something like divinity on the horizon of the newly discovered world, where we are not alienated from Being, from things, from the others

around us, from ourselves. Yet non-alienation, proximity, gathering, this is . . . happiness.

In contrast, the world of the non-“regenerated” man is characterized by alienation, phantasmagoria, the oblivion of Being, it is the world of Kantian experience, of the empirical domain, of antithesis. Smerdyakov and Rakitin, those haters who revenge themselves on the world for their estranged selves, are both at home in it, and Ivan Karamazov anticipates that a way out must exist. Through the gesture of generosity performed out of respect for a higher law he rises above the antithesis, yet he still has not come to know real conversion, its potency and the adherence it inspires.

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At the end of the 1870s, thus in the period when Dostoevsky’s life and his literary career both culminate and come to an end, the alternative “homicide–suicide” is rediscovered and independently elaborated as a pathological dilemma of modern society, an alternative that has its origin in the weakening of morality as a consequence of the loss of religious faith, of the belief in “eternity.” Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk who, according to George Gibian,⁵⁰ still seems to be unfamiliar with Dostoevsky when preparing his first major work, *Suicide as Mass Social Phenomenon of Modern Civilization*, undertakes in this text a sociological analysis of this phenomenon of crisis. The book appeared in 1881, the year of Dostoevsky’s death, and it is not likely that a last minute discovery of his work would have had a significant impact on the book’s concept or its elaboration. Masaryk relied on older sociological studies, mainly German, from which he takes, at least in part, the idea that the loss of faith is the essential cause of the modern tendency toward suicide.⁵¹ The discovery of the work of Dostoevsky, in whose writings homicide and suicide as consequences of the loss of faith in eternity (despite the difference between his conception and that of Kant and Goethe) play an important role, occurs much later and leads Masaryk to an intensive study of Slavic literature and history of ideas, the outcome of which was to be Masaryk’s attempt at a Czech national philosophy.⁵² On the other hand, the threat that the tendency to suicide and violence pose to modern humanity became for Masaryk the axis of a lifelong philosophical-sociological meditation on subjectivism, titanism, and pessimism as symptoms of socio-pathological and disruptive results of this morbid condition.

There can be no doubt that Masaryk was profoundly enthralled by Dostoevsky and that this author embodied for him an issue that both inspired and provoked him in its incomprehensibility. Even if externally an analogy can be drawn between their respective conceptions of homicide and suicide, in reality they are profoundly different.

Dostoevsky’s murderer–suicide is a materialist unbeliever. He only acknowledges the empirical world in its scientific interpretation, “the laws of mathematics.” This is why there is a direct line to Dostoevsky from Kant and his theory of the phenomenal world, his criticism of onto-theology, his moral theology, and his doctrine of the purpose of creation.

Masaryk, who knows from sociology that cases of suicide following murder are relatively rare, formulates the inverse idea: suicide is the result of modern subjectivism.

The modern man, then, is in a peculiar manner, subjective. It may be said that he takes upon his own shoulders the whole guilt of life, he reproaches himself; but it

may also be said that his suicide is as it were a delirium of subjectivity, an annihilation of objectivity, as though he were destroying the object that irritated him.⁵³

This analysis is very dark. What exactly is meant by the word "object"? Man is not able to undo practical objectivity, he cannot destroy the object, nature, the world; nothing can deprive him of the phenomenon of objectivity. However, objectivity may *lose its meaning* for him. It is this phenomenon of the loss of meaning that needs to be more closely examined when reflecting on "the loss of the object." In this regard Dostoevsky went further, with his description of the "underground" and of that profound boredom that leads to immobility and inaction, revealing the indifference of everything and gradually turning into stupor and anxiety, the presence of "nothingness."

He also went further to the extent that he discovers that this insignificance is not the utter loss of all sense, but only appears as such to one who adheres without reserve to reified, "objectified" life. The shaking of significance affects alienated life which then, as nothing else exists for it but actuality, things and creatures, sees no way out other than cutting short this torturous insignificance. Yet the torment of insignificance really lies in the fact that man is deprived of "meaning," that he cannot live without a "why" for his activities; for no relative meaning satisfies him, unless he is able to relate it to another meaning that is universal and non-relative, whether it be already known or still hidden.

Thus one might say that the modern tendency to suicide is a consequence of the fact that the "objective" supports of traditional humanity no longer suffice, whether it be "eternity" in the religious sense or the pursuit of estrangement in pleasure, in the endlessly varying and multiplying opportunities of consumption and "trials" of the will, whether the latter be the will to risk, the will to pathology, or even, at the extreme limit, the will to self-destruction.

Subjectivism, subjectivity, is not in the proper sense the cause, but the revealing moment, that which aids and abets the shaking of false and alienating "objective" supports situated in the "practical" and "subsistent," the realm of the external environment.

This shaking as such also does not mean anything necessarily negative (surely it does not of itself have to result in a tendency for suicide), if the question of meaning is not exhausted by the alternative of the subject and the object, if meaning is not narrowly conceived of as purpose, if the human need for absolute meaning is not conceived, as in the tradition that extends from Plato to Kant, as the need to *possess* an absolute value in the form of punishments and retribution or even, as in Nietzsche, as a satisfaction of the will to power in the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same.

The situation is thus insufficiently analyzed when Masaryk, after having retranslated it into the subject-object alternative, concludes:

A modern man, if he wants to overcome the tendency to suicide, must become objective, very objective. The great question for a modern, thinking man is: what view of the world will make and keep me objective, will maintain equilibrium between me (the subject) and the matter to be judged (the object)?⁵⁴

That said, it is only as a subjective idealism that modern subjectivism represents a disadvantage with regard to objectivism. God and nature are no less objective for critical or absolute idealism than they are for realism. Masaryk, however, as we will see later, inherited from Brentano a prejudice against Kant and post-Kantian idealism.

Masaryk was a very independent pupil of Brentano. It would appear legitimate to claim that it was the Brentano of the 1870's that instigated his study of Auguste Comte, which explains the presence of indelible traces of positivism, along with some corrections from Mill.⁵⁵ From Comte come the main concepts of his philosophy of history. He takes from Brentano his aversion to German philosophy, above all to Kant and post-Kantian idealism. In his eyes Kant is a rationalist subjectivist, he fails to overcome Hume's skepticism that (according to Brentano) can be refuted with the calculus of probability. As with Brentano, one also finds in Masaryk motifs from pre-critical rationalism (the substantiality of the soul, the existence of God as subject of knowledge).

He replaces the Comtean philosophy of three stages with the idea of two stages: an uncritical, authoritarian, mythical stage (under different forms and in different areas of life and spirit), and a critical, empirical, scientific stage. Theology is in his eyes an "organ" of myth, philosophy the organ of science. The fundamental opposition of history is thus established: theocracy (authority, myth, metaphysical philosophy) against democracy (scientific method, Protestantism, empiricism).

At the beginning of his career as a thinker, Masaryk examined the tendency to suicide as a symptom of the crisis of modern society and its civilization. Our aim here is not to give a sociological critique of this work; many objections to it could be made that were already raised against Durkheim's thesis, which also, at least partly, had its origins in Comte.⁵⁶ The important thing is that Masaryk's analyses only apparently rest on sociological empiricism and statistical analysis, in reality they are for the most part the work of philosophical speculation. The same holds true at the opposite pole of his life: toward the end of his career as a thinker, Masaryk returned to the suicide-homicide opposition and attempted, in his reflections on the world war, to demonstrate that the war of 1914-1918 had not been a war like the others, but rather a global crisis and revolution in which the suicide-homicide opposition had extended, by means of a "violent objectivation," to the point of becoming a tendency for murder on a planetary scale. The basic cause remains identical to that of the tendency for suicide: moral weakening due to the loss of faith, modern subjectivism, titanism, and pessimism.

In this way Masaryk completely sociologizes the philosophy of the meaning of life, built around the idea of the moral dilemma belief/non-belief. In my view it is therefore inexact to consider him an existentialist thinker, or a precursor of this genre of thinking.⁵⁷ Masaryk is much more the herald of those sociologizing philosophers (such as Hannah Arendt) who are attempting to clarify the present state of human society (especially totalitarianism and other aspects of mass civilization) on the basis of "nihilism" and other related phenomena.

My skepticism of the thesis that would present Masaryk as an existentialist also and above all rests on the comparison that we have attempted to establish between him and Dostoevsky. It is true that not only is Dostoevsky not a *philosopher* of existence, he does not present to us conceptual reflections that would belong to the genre of those of Pascal or Kierkegaard. Yet, his concept of the human being is such that the

characters, the comportments and the actions that he stages and describes invite the existential interpretation that we have attempted to formulate above. Nothing even remotely analogous to this is to be found in Masaryk, his philosophizing moves within the sphere of objectivity. It follows that Masaryk may be capable of admiration for Dostoevsky's artistic skill and for his moral authenticity, while not having any true understanding of him. In effect, Masaryk's interpretation of Dostoevsky is for the most part embarrassing. This perplexity is further proof that any approach to the existential domain is essentially lacking in Masaryk. What other explanation could there be for his inability to see the meaning of the "inaction" of Dostoevsky's heroes? That the specificity of Dostoevsky's conception of love escapes him, and that, in the religious teaching of Zosima, he only sees a mysticism of the Platonic or neo-Platonic kind? In these matters only Masaryk's notes on the sociology of religious confessions are original and profound (here we are thinking above all of his critique of Orthodoxy that Dostoevsky undeniably idealizes and uses uncritically as the basis of his own approach).

Considering the fact that Masaryk had discovered the theme of suicide (as well as the suicide-homicide opposition) independently of Dostoevsky, and that the idea of a weakening of vital and moral energy due to the loss of "eternity" is found similarly expressed not only in Dostoevsky and Masaryk, but in Nietzsche as well, all three being thinkers of crisis, skepticism and nihilism, it is necessary that we inquire into the genesis of these motifs in the thinker in question. Masaryk himself says that he was searching for a scientific philosophy, that for him philosophy signified above all morality, sociology, and politics, and that he had nothing but revulsion for metaphysics, that "survival [. . .] of medieval Scholasticism."⁵⁸

As Masaryk nowhere quotes the *Critique of Judgment*, it seems improbable to us that these ideas had their source in an explicit reflection on Kantian motifs (this could have been the case with Dostoevsky, either directly or through some mediator or another, for example Schiller). On the other hand, the statement "metaphysical experience I found in art and particularly in poetry,"⁵⁹ the reference to Goethe's *Faust* as a canonical literary work⁶⁰ (he knew *Faust* by heart as was not unusual in Austrian high schools of the period), would appear to indicate that this work by Goethe could have served as the basis of his meditation. Faust, a suicide by skepticism and murderer by unhindered egoism, Faust the despot, "ruler [. . .] in accordance with the old aristocratic régime," the overman, "of lordly nature" (*eine Herrennatur*), a tattered dilettante who, "out of despair," skips from one activity to the next,⁶¹ is in Masaryk's eyes the epitome of modern man, of his wretchedness and his crisis, of his undefeated skepticism.

If we are not mistaken about the significance of the dialectic of practical reason, above all with regard to the dramatic tension with which the moral theology of the *Critique of Judgment* is charged; if the moral struggle of man weakened by skepticism in his aspiration toward the highest good and limited to nature pure and simple is one of the principal motifs of the author of *Faust*, then perhaps we could affirm that Masaryk draws his idea of the cause and the content of the modern crisis *indirectly* from Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, from its reflections on the ultimate purpose of creation and on its meaning for man as moral agent. Thus the declaration made by Masaryk in the pamphlet entitled "The Fight for Religion" may be an echo of Kant: "Regarding its contents, religion is a solution to the problem of eternity; not only a theoretical one, but also practical: for the problem of eternity must be lived by man."⁶²

(This undoubtedly does not mean simply experienced, but understood rather in the sense of Kant in his reflections on the ultimate purpose of creation: only moral man, acting in conformity with the moral law, sees what conditions and phenomena of moral life, what postulates of reason and what sentiments are entailed by “eternity”). “Religion means living *sub specie aeternitatis*—it means becoming aware of our relation to the world, becoming aware of the meaning of life, authenticity [. . .]”⁶³

Given the foregoing, is it too much to affirm that Masaryk repeats certain Kantian ideas, albeit without a clear sense of their origin? Whether we like metaphysics or not, whether we take it from abstract thinkers or the works of the poets, the fact remains that we cannot live without it, that we enter its domain whenever it comes to dealing with matters of theology, of man and the world, of finitude and of eternity. Nor did Masaryk escape this fate. In his articles on the philosophy of religion,⁶⁴ he attempted to establish a critique of Kant. Drawing from Hume and empiricism, he expresses, in the spirit of his “democratism,” his aversion to the *a priori*. Yet in the end this “criticism” is so inferior to its subject that today merely repeating it is sufficient to show its indefensibility. Very briefly: His exposition on the history of the term *a priori*, which he reduces to the “myth” of Plato, passes over the fundamental, elementary phenomena on which the concept is based. He sees the relationship between sensibility and the understanding as a simple opposition, an “acute dualism”—a conception that is in itself completely insufficient.⁶⁵ His claim that the opposition is not so acute is both stale and unfounded.⁶⁶ And it is a fault of scholarship not to distinguish between cognition and thought: if I cannot *cognize* things in themselves, this does not necessarily mean I cannot *think* them. To say that consciousness, understood as reflection, is a phenomenon (and not a thing in itself, the mental substance of Descartes, the intelligible substrate of our life, the “immortal soul” outside of the form of our inner intuition which is time) in no way expresses skepticism toward our subjective introspective experience. Only the dogmatists who do not yet understand the basic principles of critical philosophy can believe to have reached the substantial foundation of the soul by way of an analysis of what is inwardly given—as was the case with Brentano.

Even if Masaryk’s interpretation of Kant presents grave inconsistencies that indicate the superficial character of his reflection on Kant’s philosophy of religion, the motifs he unknowingly borrows from Kant do not exercise any less of a durable influence on his thought. He praises Kant for having placed emphasis on the activity of the intellect, especially its synthetic activity, and on synthesis in general. Yet at the same time he takes as the principal and fundamental “error” of Kant’s philosophy to be that “the senses and reason are [. . .] absolute opposites.”⁶⁷ What, then, is the task of this synthesis, if not to form a union of what is given in sensibility and what is thought in judgment, the union that, according to Kant, is the only thing that qualifies as cognition? And how is synthetic activity to be analyzed, if not according to a manner of arriving at its “pure” components, none of which contain anything of the other? Masaryk speaks of certain cognitions given by the senses, and others given by reason (more correctly, understanding),⁶⁸ but the originality of Kant, without which it is impossible to understand him even in the most rudimentary form, resides precisely in the fact that cognition never derives from the senses or from reason considered purely in and for themselves. It is true that Masaryk says that “synthesis, synthetic activity” gives rise “to the concept of a given thing [. . .], for example of this or that body, in which sensuous elements are combined with forms of spatial extension perceived deductively, categories of substance perceived deductively, and perhaps still other

categories.”⁶⁹ But as to *how* they are unified, what makes possible this synthesis of the empirical and the rational such that it does not result in chaos but in an *object* of which one is able to have empirical and other cognitions . . . this remains an enigma to anyone who, according to Kant, does not know that thought always relates itself necessarily to the given and, in the final analysis, to the empirical data of sensibility. At the same time, one would be unable to comprehend that this necessary connection is the main reason for the *Critique*, which prohibits the construction of reality in thought or the ability to “invent” reality in any degree or manner.

After having briefly described the nature of the *a priori* from Plato to Descartes and Leibniz, Masaryk adds: “We see, then, whence Kant got his uncompromising noetic dualism.”⁷⁰ Yet this is precisely what has *not* been demonstrated, for this entire tradition knows the opposition between cognition that proceeds from reason and cognition that proceeds from the senses, while Kant only knows cognition that proceeds from synthesis. Thus Masaryk’s exposition is misleading. And the reader understands even less what is actually meant by reason and its ideas, around which the whole *Critique* revolves, in that it is precisely a critique of rational theology, of onto-theology, and that this alone makes moral theology possible and necessary, that theology on which ultimately rests Masaryk’s own thesis concerning the indispensability of the idea of “eternity,” morally “experienced,” for an energetic moral life that is capable of navigating between the twin obstacles of suicide and murder, the obstacles that have so often brought modern man to the breaking point and have provoked an enduring state of crisis in society.

It is now evident that Masaryk’s idea of Kant as a sort of Faust originates in his mistaken reading of Kant: Kant would consider Faust’s desperation and his nihilist skepticism precisely as passing beyond the limits of humanity and of a human reason that can neither deny the existence of “eternity” nor derive from skepticism any legitimacy for the denial of freedom and of the moral law. Kant would think of this transcendent negativism, this negative metaphysics, as titanism, as rebellion, as a transgression of human rights and limits. Nevertheless, because Masaryk does not see clearly the true relation between the philosophy of Kant and Faust, he invents his *own* concept of titanism as a subjectivism that sets itself up as the creator of the world, but which cannot be anything but a fiction where man searches in vain for a support for his life and, not finding one, easily capitulates in the struggle for life. He subsumes under this conception both the Kant-philosopher and the Faust-skeptic, doing violence above all to the conception of Kant: Kant is not at all skeptical about the world, it never occurred to him to doubt “things in themselves,” nor that things are precisely as they reveal themselves to us in phenomena.⁷¹ Neither is he an idealist in the sense of believing that the world is a subjective invention of ideas in their reciprocal relations.⁷² His doctrine is that the cognition of the world is far more mediated than the contemporary sciences of nature or even rationalist or empirical philosophy claim; and it is precisely by elucidating this mediate character that he resolves the contradictions of the older sciences of nature and of philosophy.

Just as Masaryk does violence to Kant in order to fit him into his conception of subjectivist titan and skeptic, he also does violence to Faust and Goethe (in that he takes Faust to be Goethe’s mouthpiece). He presents us with an image of a tattered Goethe, a “colossus of dilettantism,” that is to say eclecticism, who never “overcame skepticism” and thereby *remained* a skeptic. Yet Goethe is also neither a subjectivist nor a skeptic. In his eyes nature is an objective reality, even one that is

alive, colorful, accessible in its originality, very different from its image in the mathematical natural sciences.

The hypothesis according to which modern subjectivism is essentially responsible for the skeptical crisis which deprived European society of its belief in eternity is in itself extremely dubious. Not only is it difficult to imagine that a concrete motive for suicide or murder could be drawn directly from abstract idealist doctrines (which are moreover often oriented against the materialism that deprives beings of all value and all meaning). Masaryk does not even attempt to construct any concrete model of suicide or murder based on subjectivism. He only accuses Dostoevsky of not having shown in his stories of suicide the same thing articulated in his abstract theses, namely that suicide stems from a lack of faith.⁷³

Masaryk contrasts Dostoevsky's images of suicide with his own "logical" theory. "Logically," suicide is supposed to result from materialistic atheism. But what does Dostoevsky see to be the contrary to atheism? Neither a simple "taking something to be true," a conventional nod to a "confession of faith," nor a rationalist theology, whether metaphysical or moral. He considers belief in God in the true sense of the word to be that existential turn in which Being turns its radiant splendor toward us, allowing us to address all things with love and to let them blossom in its light. It is only here that we are in the presence of a passage beyond the isolation and alienation from Being, separation from others, from things and ourselves. Where sentiment and unshaken tradition reign, they may maintain an individual in moral and vital fortitude. Where however differentiation and analytical thinking dominate, it is useless to attempt a secondary synthesis that will never attain a real whole. It is here that, after differentiation and alienation, competition, the underground, leveling off and their correlates, pride comes into play, the feeling of superiority, the over-man. It is here, in the domain of the underground, of profound boredom and nascent anxiety, that the regime of absolute misery establishes itself: the alternative of homicide–suicide imposes itself with all its force. In Dostoevsky, the suicidal person's reasoning alternates with plans for a secondary uniting and bringing of happiness to all those who have gone through the experience of alienation, and these plans and arguments essentially belong together: They are the same desperate attempts of man to install himself in the place that belongs only to Being, without which we amount to nothing, through which alone life is given to us. Theoretical rationalism—and this is what our science is—will never be able to encompass the whole. That's fine, when it does not claim to be full-fledged knowledge. Yet in practice, rationalism leads necessarily into disorganization and chaos. *Therefore* Dostoevsky claims that society cannot become fully human without "love." And *therefore* Ivan Karamazov finally argues also against moral theology. To me, Dostoevsky's concept of suicide does not at all seem to be as inconsistent as Masaryk would have us think; it is far more complicated and requires one to keep in view a wider range of phenomena; the alternative of homicide–suicide belongs to the realm of life that is alienated and as a whole fallen; it is not the only possibility of alienated man.

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In his philosophy of suicide, Masaryk is close to the Kantian idea that without "eternity," without the correlates of an immortal soul and divine providence, man is sick, morally weak. This is a weakness that, Masaryk adds, is manifest on the social plane as crisis, as a pathological state that can be objectively demonstrated based on

the tendencies to suicide on the one hand and, on the other, the psychosis of war which expresses itself in global conflict. This objective, sociological proof is at the same time aimed at contributing to the overcoming of this crisis by revealing the necessity of “eternity” for moral recovery—which, it goes without saying, also includes the integrity of a will to life.

Masaryk here has Christianity in mind, which he glorifies in *Suicide* as the great religion of both moral and societal recovery, a recovery operative, for example, in the case of the decadent world of imperial Rome. That said, it is a little strange that he neglects the fact that original Christianity did not know immortality in the sense of an undying individual soul, but only the conceptually quite different concept of resurrection, the *gift* of life. Although this theme is essential for moral theology, it is not addressed in Masaryk's writings. But this is only one of the objections that we can raise against the aim pursued in this work on suicide. Of even greater importance is what Nietzsche deduced from his reflections on the significance of Christianity for life that we find at the beginning of his planned *magnum opus*.⁷⁴ In Christianity, the belief in an ultimate, “true,” eternal being, persistent in itself, the belief in a God, has the following characteristic: It gives meaning to the world, it even justifies evil, it gives indispensable knowledge of values, it provides human self-respect and consequently reinforces both his love of life and his trust in knowledge—it thwarts skepticism. In short, belief is a means of self-preservation. It is almost as if we were listening to Masaryk:

For those people who are irreligious, suicide frequency is very high. The suicide tendency is not found among religious peoples, at least not in any significant degree. [. . .] where the suicide tendency is generally low, one and the same cause must exist which arrests the appearance and development of a morbid flight from life. And that cause is religiosity.⁷⁵

Yet it is precisely the fact that Christianity (our modern form of religion) is a means for reinforcing the will to life that draws Nietzsche's skepticism: It is a means of the *will*, but the will is not an argument, the will is a manifestation of the subject and of its interests. This reflection itself, arising from a *suspicion*, makes evident the internal contradiction of Christianity, expressed in the following aphorism:

The collapse of Christianity—brought about by its morality (indissoluble from it), which turns against the Christian God (the sense of truthfulness, highly developed in Christianity, is *disgusted* at the falseness and mendacity of the whole Christian interpretation of world and history. A backlash from “God is truth” into the fanatical belief “Everything is false.” Buddhism of the *deed* . . .⁷⁶

According to Nietzsche, Christianity itself contains the seed of nihilism, of skepticism, the negation of all meaning and life.

This is what explains, despite an analogous positivistic point of departure—religion as a self-defense of life—the totally different attitudes of Nietzsche and Masaryk regarding the question of suicide and war. Where Masaryk judges both phenomena from the point of view of the humanistic ideal, of the love for man and especially for the weak and oppressed, Nietzsche proclaims a “severe” morality: These phenomena are equally susceptible to the positive appreciation of an elimination of

those who are incapable of bearing the world as it is. The great difference between the position of Masaryk and Kant, on the one hand, and of Nietzsche, on the other, resides in the concept of nihilism that Nietzsche introduces as a fundamental motif of his philosophy of history. The crisis of modern humanity is not merely a transition between two positive, organic stages in the development of society. It is much older, and has its origin in the efforts of man, since the beginning of the metaphysical interpretation of the world (Plato, Christianity), to project his desire for a lasting reality of meaning beyond the world and the reality here down below, to posit the “good,” “love,” unity, reconciliation, in short, all value, in a “true world,” an ideal world, which thereby devalues this world.

Thus the tendency for suicide is not necessarily bad. As an expression of pessimism, of passive nihilism, it is at the same time a symptom and radical cure—the only real world is ridding itself of its illnesses. Against all assertions of the other-worldly one must oppose a fundamental, basic insight with immense implications: there is no “other world,” no Platonic realm of Ideas, no punishments and rewards for the immortal soul; the world of the postulates of practical reason does not exist any more than their foundation, the moral imperative *a priori*; noble morality, to employ the language of Nietzsche, has a very base genealogy. The genealogy of all heretofore existing “values” is base, as is truth as a value; they all originate in the “lowlands” of life which, in its basic instincts—the will to persist and to overcome resistance, including the resistance of oneself, the will to overcome one’s self, to surpass the degree of power attained at any given time—reveals the proper essence and foundation of all reality. Truth itself is nothing other than the tendency of life to self-affirmation. Life and its will to will, to will further and higher, reveals the body and power as the origin and ground of the whole. The truth of things, the mystery behind all being-becoming (nothing withstands the current, everything in the end is willing and becoming), is the will not only to survive, not only to adapt (this is what Darwin missed), but to overcome, to conquer, to rule. Nietzsche’s materialism of the act is not the materialism of physics and physiology, but that of the lived body, anthropomorphism become a metaphysical principle.

The man who overcomes the beyond, the man who is fully of this world, at once consummates and overcomes nihilism. He consummates it, because he has seen through that devaluation of all values for which, since the dawn of time, the projection into the beyond of human self-surpassing provided the metaphysical basis and historical foundation. He overcomes it, because the will to the earth here below, the will to power and to will, provides him with a new principle of valuation. Such a person, having overcome all metaphysical negation by means of a new affirmation, is no longer the tattered human being of European history to this point, he is superior to him, he is the overman. In the place of otherworldly ideals, he sets to the task of becoming master of the earth, of submitting the planet to the will to will. It is clear that this end will not be attained through peaceful means. What Nietzsche proclaims is the history of the coming two centuries. He sees them full of wars, of struggles terrible in scope and deployment of means. These wars will be ideological, waged between the “last men” who know only petty, relative aims, men of half-measures who represent the values of nihilism, and the “new type” of human being who submits himself to the discipline of the will and institutes an obedience to a new order that has at its disposal all the forces of earthly technology and does not hesitate to make use of them not only to destroy, but also to create. The world is to fall under the domination of a creative, but brutally hard animality.

Crowning this metaphysics of worldliness is a new doctrine on time and eternity. In a passage of the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant asks what the value of life would be in abstraction from its moral purpose: It would have none at all, he says,⁷⁷ for who would want to start over with life according to a plan in which all moral value has been eliminated, leaving behind only pleasure? The perfectly worldly man, however, the overman, is the one who, in the face of all the details of this seemingly contingent life, says: once more! The world, finite storehouse of energy lost in the infinity of time, must, after immeasurable eons, repeat itself. This mechanistic metaphysics is something in which one can believe, it does not contradict any idea essential to technological science, which itself expresses the world in terms of the force that we comprehend in a more essential manner "from inside" as will to power. The truth of the technological universe is thus ultimately time, which forms a circle; the moment where the future and the past merge, where the infinity of successive nows traditionally called eternity is replaced by a new time, a time of freedom and of a decision about everything as a whole. The intervals between the repetitions of life are equivalent to non-existence; abstract time quadrillions (as Ivan Karamazov says in his dialogue with the devil) have no practical weight: the only thing that is relevant are the moments of decisive action, where we take part in determining the shape of the cosmos forever and ever, where thus the (over-)man assumes the role of the deity, where the world appears to him as the plastic medium of his domination.

With this doctrine of the eternal recurrence of the same, Nietzsche's response to Plato and Kant is complete. Oskar Becker⁷⁸ has shown (following Andler and Abel Rey⁷⁹) that Nietzsche's mathematico-physical argument is an effective refutation of Kant's first thesis and thus also of the doctrine of the antinomy of pure reason in general. Yet, Nietzsche's proof, being purely objective-mathematical, leads to a concept of the universe as combinatory game which excludes freedom as well as an understanding of the essence of the world as will. The interpretation of the center of energy as volitional is, in this physical-mathematical proof of the eternal recurrence of the same, purely epiphenomenal. What takes place are mechanical processes, the will is merely a "translation" of this mechanism into subjective language. The inverse is impossible, because the will to self-overcoming does not lend itself to the same analysis of finite combinations, which is the provenance of the eternal recurrence.

The eternal recurrence thus demonstrated physically is hardly compatible with, let alone identical to, the metaphysical ground of the world as will to power. The will is open compartment, the objective cyclical process is simple subsistence. Nietzsche's "subjectivism of the body" must amount to physicalism in order for it to become a metaphysics of utter worldliness and this-worldliness, at least to the extent that he wants to rely on the antithesis, an infinite cyclical process filling the infinity of time without contradiction. Thus eternity will exist not in transcendence but in absolute this-worldliness, in the form of endless repetition; but this is not the eternity in which freedom, a new value and meaning, or the Dionysian deity, has arisen.

Whether this endless repetition will mean an eternal resurrection in the sense of a revitalization of us who are now living our finite lives, depends again on metaphysical presuppositions, which are not self-evident. One of these non-evident presuppositions is the *principium identitatis indiscernibilium*: two absolutely identical forms of the same are not possible. All could be repeated down to the smallest details and yet not be the same, were we not to presume the validity of this principle. Immense periods could be repeated down to the smallest detail and yet, what is repeated would not be

the same *individually*. It will be and was “the same” an infinite number of times—but only as *homoion*, not as *tauto*. Therefore we are either entitled to place only a single period from which all others are indiscernible, in which case life as a whole is lived only once; or repetition is not repetition of exactly the same, and individuality need not be repeated.

At the very moment when it attempts to bring into play a decision about the whole and the deity, the Nietzschean systematic of this-worldliness thus leads finally to the catastrophe of an eternal cyclical process that is absolutely void of meaning. The problem of meaning is decided in such a way that an absolute lack of any meaning, any intelligibility whatsoever reigns supreme. Alas, how is any polemic against the metaphysics of a transcendent world to come about? How can the system itself be endowed with meaning? It would be necessary to deny the problem itself, the very sense of the question of meaning, if the “physico-mathematical proof” of eternal return were to be declared the proper metaphysical foundation of the whole system.

Yet, conversely, if this proof is invalid, then the system loses the supporting pillar that had given it the semblance of necessity. Eternal return would be an “idea” that could inspire the actions of individuals devoted to the fanaticism of worldliness, and who aim to be the proprietors of the total and exclusive truth of Being. As an inspiring idea of this kind, it enters into competition with other conceptions, perhaps with the total non-ideality that is characteristic of the intellectual fickleness of the present age.

This fickleness manifests itself outwardly as the vague discontent of all of those who are disengaged, undecided, and uncertain, who, according to Arendt’s analyses, form the mobilizable army of active nihilism in totalitarian regimes. Without having foreseen the concrete form of this path to the abyss that he sensed and expressed for the entire civilization of Europe, Nietzsche became the thinker of the struggle for the planet, of a conflict on a planetary scale which, in his words, was to shape history for hundreds of years.

With his “subjectivism of the body and of this-worldliness,” Nietzsche attempts to refute the metaphysics of the purpose of human life and to bring to an end the way it had been conceived by Kant in his aspiration to give metaphysics a new orientation after the failure of onto-theology. According to him, this-worldliness does not impose itself—as it does for example in Comte—by means of peaceful intellectual evolution. Just as this-worldliness is forced to fight battle internally for the heart and soul of man, that is, not the “last” man but the superior man, so also externally it only comes to power—if it does at all—through struggle, by means of secular conflicts. Something in this view of the wars of the twentieth century and perhaps also of the centuries to come reminds us of Masaryk and his concept of world war as an ideological conflict, a conflict that stems from the same root as the modern tendency to suicide. In Masaryk, this root is subjectivity that lacks all support, while Nietzsche defines it as nihilism.

Nietzsche and Masaryk stand on opposite sides of the barricade. According to Nietzsche, the fault lies with “nihilism,” our fate which consists in man’s *will* to hang onto something beyond the world, instead of consistently planting his own two feet on solid ground. According to Masaryk, Nietzsche’s position is a “violent objectivation” by means of which the morally unstable titan-“overman,” overestimating his possibilities, strives to overcome his inner weakness.

It appears for the time being that Masaryk’s philosophy of compromise, this Enlightenment humanism that combines positivist perspectives with Kantian motifs,

has been sidelined as an ideological construction by the Second World War. Yet, one cannot really say that superhuman worldliness was a determining factor in the wars of the twentieth century. From an ideological point of view, the wars of the twentieth century represent conflicts between the representatives of "half-measures" who laid claim to traditional and humanistic religions, and the nihilism of totalitarianism which laid claim to this world, albeit not in the form of the strict discipline to which the development of the "overman" necessarily submits. Nietzsche's appeal still reverberates as this-worldliness, increasingly no longer taken as a simple fact, but called for as an obligation, something that cannot be ignored, what must not be accepted as something indifferent, but rather as an *achievement* with which paradoxically a deeper meaning is associated.

This problem of a deeper meaning contained in that from which man seeks to flee, what makes him afraid and from which he hides himself, is perhaps Nietzsche's great secret. Yet in this, assuming it is a correct reading, Nietzsche agrees to a large degree with Dostoevsky: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain [. . .]." This, however, calls for a full examination of the entire problem of meaning, formulated by Kant and the post-Kantian tradition only in terms of purposiveness. Indeed, it requires a reflection on the *real* meaning.

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The nihilism of the current age has taken a relatively simple form, approximating Nietzsche's "last man": It consists in the evident conviction that only relative meaning exists, that is, relative to human life. As human life is—despite all that modern technology and organization may offer for its consolidation, security and augmentation—something necessarily precarious, *any* meaning will always be shakable and, if it not already shaken, this may happen in the near future. Man has always defended himself from this by taking refuge in anonymous impersonality, where he assures a provisionally unshaken condition of the life of each individual by substituting for individual life a leveled averageness that remains unaffected by any shaking. Here it has to do with preventing the possibility of any shaking from the outset by offering the most varied assortment of relative meaning possible, among which one is able to flutter from one item to another, such that the question of an overall meaning never arises. This is an even more pressing issue inasmuch as work for modern man no longer represents the servitude that had seemed to have been part of his nature and the human condition, so that now he feels liberated in this regard and as a result—and perhaps also for other reasons—he is more shakable than ever before.

Under the power of things and his own way of life, the man of this period of nihilistic decline has opted more often for the Kantian antithesis, even where he still maintains some sort of traditionally and institutionally religious behavior. "Eternity," to speak with Kant, has become an empty phrase for him and no longer functions as an active impulse. It no longer protects his life but threatens to shake its significance and relative meaning. Man "objectifies himself," as Masaryk says, in a manner already described by Pascal as "*divertissement*": distraction, flight from one's own innermost, most extreme and ultimately inevitable possibility.

We have seen in Dostoevsky how this flight into anonymity is disrupted by the very tendency that carries it, by this "distance" which leads to the fragile negativity of the "underground man" who sees intellectually through anonymity, but remains unable really to break free from its clutches. The next level, the "ridiculous man," already

knows “profound boredom” and anxiety. Then comes the turning point, illustrated by Zosima’s dying brother Marcel, by Zosima himself on the day of his duel, or by the “mysterious visitor” before his death, but above all by the “ridiculous man” after his suicide in the dream.

In all these experiences one sees manifest what a great contemporary thinker had elucidated in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*⁸⁰—the revelation of the “nothing” as a guise in which Being presents itself in its difference from beings, from the content of the world. What becomes apparent is the discovery of the incommensurable positivity of Being, the discovery of meaning (that is of something comprehensible or significant) beyond the limits of significances drawn from the relation to human life, its reinforcement and extension. It is a meaning that begins where all relative significations and all relative meanings come to an end. Is this then a meaning that cannot be realized?

Such a thesis would still be premature. In any case, these experiences require a revision of the entire philosophy of the meaning of human life; I have attempted to sketch its development from Kant onward. We have seen that this new metaphysics of meaning maintains at bottom a close affinity with the old onto-theology; born from the rubble of its collapse, it nevertheless bears the indelible traces of this theological point of departure.⁸¹ Already in Kant, obviously in keeping with the views of the old theological metaphysics, i.e. the metaphysics of the “true world,” this metaphysics turns into a philosophy of values. The values of eternity are answers to the question “why?” and they relate to a “goal.” The philosophy of the postulates is a philosophy of the *purpose of creation*. In connection to this, the meaning of human life is conceived in terms of purpose, and purpose in turn as what provides man with certainty, the self-confidence that moral life is not in vain. On the one hand, this raises human life to eternity, it lends it the value of an eternal and indestructible being; on the other hand, it gives an infinite impulse to moral life by making it a divine collaborator. By contrast, a world without these postulates, without these transcendent values, would appear “devoid of all value.” It is thus manifest that this philosophy of meaning understands meaning essentially as *purpose*. As such, it also determines the problematic for the future. Even Nietzsche will formulate the essence of nihilism by stating that “the goal is lacking; an answer to the ‘Why?’ is lacking.”⁸²

The philosophy of meaning thus finds itself on a path that perhaps renders it hopeless. Purpose is definitely something endowed with meaning. Yet it remains to be seen whether it is right to consider purpose and purposefulness to be the basis and center of all meaning. Purpose is always viewed as a reality; as the object of an action, it is meant to be realizable (even where, as in the case of Kant’s postulates, it has to do with something immediately unrealizable in this terrestrial life—it is precisely the fact that the end is inaccessible here below that conditions belief in the *reality* of a life after death); yet meaning in its foundation is free of this characteristic. *Purpose* is therefore something essentially ontic, existent; even if one may not be able to say of it at such and such a moment “it is, it exists,” there is nothing absurd in holding that “it will exist” as soon as it is fulfilled. For *meaning* is essentially ontological, that is to say, non-existent. The foundation of all meaning is the same as the foundation of any understanding whatsoever, namely Being that makes it possible for us to approach beings but that itself withdraws at the same time. In our practical activity also we do not see that all positing of real purposes presupposes this fundamental comprehension, that all significance, all values, all goals, in the final analysis, have their basis in the

understanding of this "is," "is given," "is open," "is present," pronounced in advance of everything that concerns the care of our life.

A great thinker who for a long time dominated contemporary philosophy has shown in one of his masterful essays⁸³ how the collapse of significance (the fact of clinging to one's own life and its cares) is made possible by a "step back" from the entirety of beings and the emergence of the distinction between beings and Being, which here is initially encountered as difference through "nihilation,"⁸⁴ through the presence of *nothing* in the *non*-interpellation of things, in the fundamental disposition of anxiety. The "no-thing" is here a moment of meaning that remains unaffected by the collapse of everyday significance tied to one's own life and its interests, but which only here comes to the fore. And this meaning is essentially centrifugal, eccentric; it refers to things, it reveals for the first time the immeasurable positivity of the fact that they *are*. Thus things have shown themselves in the light of a new meaning, they manifest themselves in the light of a new, enigmatic light, in the twilight of this un-concealment, of this primordial truth, the condition of all of the many truths and un-truths, errors and illusions to which life is exposed.

At the same time, as already noted, this unconcealment through "nihilation" is grounded on the fundamental disposition of anxiety. For anxiety radically confronts us with the situation of finitude: Without being the authors of that situation, we are brought face to face with the final, ultimate, unsurpassable and irreplaceable possibility of absolute non-existence.

It is this attunement which, on the one hand, signifies the collapse of relative significance, of relative meaning, and, on the other hand, discloses to us our "being-in-the-world" founded on the difference between Being and beings, thus a meaning which, disclosed by the collapse, does not itself collapse but remains intact in the catastrophe of all reality, being itself non-real, non-existing.

This turning point in the question of meaning has far-reaching consequences for the metaphysics of the meaning of life as conceived by Kant. The primordial distinction, the originary difference (between Being and beings), reveals itself to be the origin of all understanding of any being whatsoever, the condition for the possibility of any truth in the sense of "understanding something as something," and of any judgment that carries this understanding into language. If man is at all capable of an "open" comportment, that is, founded on the comprehension of things and of beings, it is only due to the fact that he is a human being by virtue of this difference.

This difference functions continuously in human life, in open comportment, but in such a way that, creating the field of openness wherein things may emerge and, as such, show themselves, it conceals itself and retreats into the background. The *discovery* of the difference is linked to the shaking of all relative meaning and its reign. It is thus necessarily connected to suspending and thwarting the flight from finitude by turning into and toward things and thereby into the reassuring anonymity that "provides shelter" from the shaking. For this means that the finitude of being-in-the-world is definitive and certain. *The avowal of finitude does not mean, as Kant thought, to pass beyond the limits of human reason.* To affirm with certitude that being-in-the-world has a definitive end is not a titanic revolt, it is nothing other than a pure explication of the phenomena.

It follows that the philosophy of postulates is to be rejected entirely. The problem of meaning as the purpose of creation, which presupposes a "true," higher, transcendent world, is wrongly formulated. Meaning as a purpose to which man ascribes the value

of eternity, on the basis of the postulate of a “true world,” is to be dismissed as a topic for serious philosophical discussion.

We are hence left with two possibilities. One is Nietzsche’s understanding: there is no “other world” (no “true world”) on which man may rely in his aspiration to reconcile merits with rewards (the “highest good”). Nevertheless man, or better the new type of man, the man of the will to power, the “overman,” may ascribe to himself the highest value, the value of eternity and of “divinity,” on the condition of postulating a new kind of justice (the institution of planetary hegemony) and the eternal recurrence of the same, that is, eternity in the “now.”

Nietzschean eternalization and divinization of the overman is an eternalization of the constructive and of creativity, but at the same time of passion and instinct, thus of the body. It is the triumph of the maxim: “all is allowed that is favorable for the overman” in his will to seize control of the planet through the rule of the chosen and disciplined, instituting a new “justice” without conscience.

The will to power as the source for the reevaluation of all values is the absolutization of the bodily subject. Yet this absolute bodily subject still has the character of the will, and the will is a species of *cogitatio*. The will to power is an open comportment toward others and toward things. As such, it presupposes the difference between Being and beings, which, however, the absolutization of the body does not see, but instead allows it to fully retreat into the shadows. The will to power signifies this retreat of the basis of all understanding, such that subjectivity comes to the fore in the form of an unconditional, rigorous and brutal animality.

This is, as Heidegger points out in his work on Nietzsche, the culmination of the fundamental tendency of metaphysics since its very beginnings in Plato, the tendency to emphasize identity over the difference between Being and beings, until finally all traces of the difference vanish in the absolute anthropomorphizing of all what-is and all goings-on—becoming as representation of the will to power.

But is not this manner of speaking again anthropomorphically teleological? After all, meaning is an ontological category that, originally, in its primordial being, is indifferent to human values, cares, and purposes. This is indeed so: Meaning as the basis of all understanding is the primordial difference between Being and beings, it includes neither purpose nor anyone’s intention (as Hegel says, for example, that the absolute wants to be, and is, with us). This difference has no purpose or intention. It is also a mere metaphor when we say that it is originally homeless among beings and that it wants to live with us, or that it closes itself to us, that it escapes from us and conceals itself from us, veiling itself in forgetfulness. But all of *our* intentions, values and aims depend on the manner in which this primordial difference is applied, whether we arrive at an understanding of its non-appearance as the mysterious presence of an immense richness, or rather strive simply to extract from it that gift, that message, that serves the purpose of elevating ourselves to the rank of masters of the surrounding world, those who through thought and action dominate what-is.

In one chapter of his book on Nietzsche, entitled *Being as the Void and as Abundance*, Heidegger speaks of Being as the key that opens up all understanding and thus also meaning:

Being reveals itself to us in a variety of oppositions that cannot be coincidental, since even a mere listing of them points to their inner connection: Being is both utterly void and most abundant, most universal and most unique, most

intelligible and most resistant to every concept, most in use and yet to come, most reliable and most abyssal, most forgotten and most remembering, most said and most reticent.⁸⁵

And concerning this basis of all meaning, Heidegger does not hesitate to employ anthropomorphic metaphors such as the “sending” of being which today reveals itself “as the release of Being into machination [*Loslassung des Seins in die Machenschaft*], [. . .] so as to allow its truth to become essential for man out of man’s belonging to it.”⁸⁶

Does not this expression seem to refer to the intentional activity of some being? In reality, this has to do with *our* teleology, with our possibility of understanding or not understanding meaning, of pursuing it or striving to subordinate it, and *this entire* intentionality, *this* teleology, even if human, our own, is conditioned by something which is neither human, nor an aspect or property of the human being, because it lacks existence and is not at all a being.

In short, our life acquires meaning through the understanding of that on which it is founded, the comprehension of that which, in a hidden, privative and negative form is always there, but the inexhaustible richness of which reveals itself in the misery of our final abandonment to relative significance by virtue of which we have arranged for our provisional residence among things and established our domination over them.

Heidegger himself never explicitly posed the question of meaning, the question of its possible forms and modifications, such as truth, purpose, value or property to its fullest extent (except regarding the concept of truth). He also never posed the question of partial and universal, relative and absolute meaning. His grand view of metaphysics as man’s attempt, by gaining control over the “sending of Being” (*das Geschick des Seins*), to place himself in the center of beings as their master, ultimately as master of the earth, is indeed a truly philosophical understanding of the origin that gives meaning even to those processes of the contemporary world that are the most devoid of sense, but we find here hardly any indication of a possible future positivity of meaning. In this regard, the elder Zosima and his pupil Alyosha, with their simple depictions of a turn toward Being, toward the neighbor, toward things, toward “service,” can still be of practical use today. That is not to say that people generate meaning themselves in the family, in work, through knowing and creativity. Such an objection can be dismissed, for what good is a family without access, without an openness toward the neighbor as neighbor? What good is that domination over things which devastates them? What use is a knowledge that is just a form of facticity, that is, of the will to power? And what value has a creativity that is not the humble openness to the mystery of Being and existence, but the mere performance of an isolated virtuosity?

It is not the purpose of this work to develop the problem of meaning in its full scope and implications. As one of the greatest minds of philosophy himself admitted, this problem has not yet been consistently posed. It simply seemed to me that we could to some extent understand and explain this omission and retrace the path that led to it. It seemed to me that one could draw attention to it, not by offering speculations about the metaphysics of otherworldliness, reflections on that upon which the meaning of experience is based (such as for example Kant’s moral teleology, his speculation regarding the purpose of creation and its intellectual presuppositions), but by following a path analogous to that of Dostoevsky, by exhibiting phenomena of relative and convulsing meaning, phenomena such as the conversion of the significance of life

where, in the apparent loss of all meaning, one finds something unshakable as a path toward the projection of new possibilities of life, which are not properly speaking already given, but which only can and must be conceived.

Meaning is a problem that cannot be fully elaborated here. Our reflection serves only as a historical *prolegomenon* to this problem and its phenomena. These are phenomena such as “having a meaning” (what has meaning are the things of use, but also the surrounding world as landscape, as center of reference) or sense-bestowal (meaning is *given* in this sense only by the *wherefore* something has a meaning). Our discussion further hints at phenomena such as the self-evident manifestation of *relative* meaning, it demands the significance of the *shaking of this meaning*, the loss of meaning; the signification of the conversion of *life* in regard to the meaning that it might *offer* or give. Furthermore, it wonders about what *problematic* meaning signifies and in what sense problematic meaning may after all mean something positive. The relationship between meaning and purpose, meaning and value, must be investigated on this foundation and in this broad context. Meaning cannot be deduced from purpose and purposiveness with some sort of self-evidence that is taken for granted; in our life, *purposes* only result from the reflective grasping and determination of what has and gives meaning.

For a phenomenology of meaning it would be crucial to show how the human world is a function of the two intertwined aspects of having and giving meaning, of how both are imprinted on language, and what sort of problems of meaning, of its transmission, of its decline and its revival are posed by language.

It would appear that this phenomenology is only now, in a barely systematic form, possible. Up to now human thought has revolved around the justification of the good and justice through the construction of a “true world,” another reality, intended to compensate for the imperfect and finite one here. This was initially accomplished through a theologization of ontology, later through an open moralization by way of the method of moral postulates, the aim of both being to ground life on an eternal and in-finite beyond. Nietzsche was the first to refuse categorically an “other world.” He did not, however, refuse the infinite resolutely enough. Yet once man understands that all meaning is radically finite, that *Being* is finite, that the difference between Being and beings, which is the source of all meaning, is only possible insofar as it is the foundation of a finite being, he ceases to fix his gaze *beyond* this world and instead turns his focus to what stands *in front* of him. Man faces a tremendous challenge, namely not to claim meaning for himself, not to attempt to lay hold of the meaningfulness of the universe for his own benefit but, but on the contrary, to comprehend *himself* as a being existing out of meaning and for meaning, living for what gives rise to a world full of meaning, sacrificing himself so that the meaning whose foundation “is” outside of beingness can take root, make a home, and grow in him. To understand oneself as the one destined for an unshakable gift to which nothing relative can be compared, see oneself as a being who after an auspicious beginning cannot and does not have the right to demand that kind of *happy end* that philosophy has constructed from Plato to Kant.

Several facts are related to this: (1) Contemporary theology is itself stepping back from the notion of the postulates and turning toward the idea of commitment and hope. (2) We reflect increasingly more on Nietzsche’s protest against the “spirit of revenge” that burdens the doctrine of the postulates and the Kantian conception of the highest good. In Kant, this spirit of revenge finds harsh expression in the idea that

justice must be carried out when requiring the death of the guilty instead of some sort of mercy that would really qualify as sentimentality. (3) Theology no longer dares to postulate or demand something like eternal life. Finally (4) the meaning of life cannot be tied to any claim, to any demand that would be *ours*, of whatever kind. One can concur with Kant as the point of departure for all metaphysics of meaning only on the point that meaning is something *for the sake of which* we are allowed to live, *for the sake of which* we are claimed and engaged, but not as something that itself would have any obligations to us. *Meaning as such* is itself the principal gift. Meaning is an openness that jolts that sufficiency with which our everyday significance, with its values and purposes begins, and mostly also ends. This is why the conversion, characterized as a *step back* from beings, brings about an openness: It constitutes the fundamental gift of meaning, a gift freely given, beyond quantification, beyond all calculus of merits and penalties. Precisely in this lies the meaning of suffering, of oppression and privation felt as a phenomenon by all conscientious and responsible people; for none of these things in themselves divide or close off (at least unless they are tied to claims, requests and pretensions, in which case they evidently turn into their opposites). Such egocentrism, which cultivates and develops a "natural ego" that corresponds to no one of us, is the very opposite of meaning and alienates us from that openness in which authentic human being consists.

Openness, however, also means understanding that any positive meaning, purpose, or value is never *purely* positive, that they will always be afflicted with negativity, that no-one may dare to claim the possession of such purely positive meaning, defending and legitimating oneself by its means. Openness takes into account the inevitable guilt of each of us. Clearly this does not mean that it would yield to despotism or even violence. Yet, each negative feature of someone else's behavior provides a mirror for our own negativity, our own culpability, and guards against absolutizing our own neediness, not making virtues out of necessities. No one among us possesses what one could call total knowledge, an *epistémé* of good and evil. We are constrained to conjectures within the limits of the real knowledge of our ignorance, a process that demands an openness for the other and for ourselves. It is in this way that one has access to the otherwise incomprehensible statement "everyone is guilty for everyone else, and for everything," access to the sense of universal responsibility, which is not revealed in a claim but in a dedication to the cause.

It is not our intention *here* to elaborate the system of meaning in its entirety. Just one more remark on the problem of "meaning" and "time," taking account of the role of time as "eternity" in the conception of meaning found in the postulates. "Eternity" is postulated in regard to the ineluctability of responsibility and also, in Kant, in relation to merit and just retribution. Time and eternity are here concepts of worldly realities. The meaning that is supposed to be accomplished through them is the value of justice as remuneration. Yet, this idea of remuneration is something that "closes off." Compensation in return for merit, whether in a positive or a negative sense, does not open us to others, it only concerns the individual closed off in himself, isolated from everyone. With the postulation of a concept that proceeds from the extrapolation of non-original time, this "fulfillment" is then projected into the uncertainty of future lives or the future life. Original time is not to be found on the side of "eternity," we find it rather in relation to the finite temporality of our being-in-the-world, which is in its essence limited. Time itself does not have a place among beings, it belongs to Being. The uncovering of meaning as openness undoubtedly poses the question of time in a

new way, yet not in a way that refers us to a postulated eternity, but to that original time in which all openness takes place, to a time without which no understanding, and thus no meaning, are conceivable.

Notes

- 1 Dieter Henrich, *Der ontologische Gottesbeweis* (Tübingen: Mohr 1960), 187, note 1.
- 2 Here we want to signal another filiation that also leads to Nietzsche.
- 3 Starting with this point there survived in the author's estate several pages of his own translation into German under the title *Kant—Dostojewski—Masaryk*. Individual divergences are listed in footnotes.—Eds.
- 4 One is justified in considering the Christian need for certainty regarding the salvation of the individual soul as a condition for the shift in the principal conception of truth, effected by Descartes, from truth as revelation (and tradition), to truth as certainty. Descartes' philosophical point of departure thus shared some common ground with the Christian tradition that allowed for the ensemble of this newly conceived philosophy, above all given the seductive transparency of the mathematical proof of the spiritual world as *praeambulum fidei* taking hold in the Christianity of the epoch. The success was not immediate—it was opposed by the traditionalism of theologians, clinging to their habits, and the customary caution of these guardians of ecclesiastical authority—but it was considerable and deepened with time.
- 5 The Czech word is *čověk*, which is an inclusive term. Here and in the following, we translate as *man*, since there is no better solution in English. Generally, we decided not to use gender inclusive language, since this would have changed the entire character of the original text.—Eds.
- 6 Cf. the third (Hobbes) and fifth (Gassendi) sets of objections in René Descartes, *Oeuvres de Descartes*, ed. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, vol. 7: *Meditationes de prima philosophia* (Paris: Vrin, 1904). Hereafter AT. [English translation: "Objections and Replies," in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 2, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).]—Eds.
- 7 "I wear a mask" or "I enter the stage masked." Patočka is probably also referring here to a famous appearance of the phrase *larvatus prodeo* in Descartes' *Cogitationes privatae*, where he explains that he decided to enter the stage of the world in the manner of an actor, i.e. wearing a mask. See Descartes, AT X, 213.—Eds.
- 8 Edmund Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie*, *Husserliana* VI, ed. Walter Biemel (Hague: Nijhoff, 1962), 8. [English translation: *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern, 1970), 10f.]
- 9 Latin for "necessary entity," "necessary being."—Eds.
- 10 This last passage was reformulated in Patočka's German translation of the text as follows: "The manner of how reality was gradually stripped of any meaning by modern science and philosophy was therefore far different from the way this process is recounted by Husserl; we could perhaps even dare conjecture that Husserl's alternative between objectivistic physicalism and subjective transcendentalism works more to mislead, rather than to enlighten here, as it is factually dictated by a viewpoint akin to Neo-Kantianism (only after the split between subject and object had itself been accepted as a philosophical term did it become possible to understand Descartes as a transcendentalist)."—Eds.
- 11 Cf. Henrich, *Gottesbeweis*, 187.
- 12 Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft. Immanuel Kants Werke*, vol. 5, ed. Ernst Cassirer, (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1912–1922), 527 (§86, Comment). [English translation: *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 336.] Hereafter KdU, with German/English references.
- 13 Kant, KdU, §87/342, emphasis mine. We want to emphasize here the Kantian origin of that "grand idea of immortality" expounded by Versilov in Dostoevsky's *The Adolescent*. [Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Adolescent*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Vintage, 2003).—Eds.]

- 14 Kant, KdU, 527/335–336 [§86]: (Wie) “nach einem allgemeinen höchsten Zweck zu streben wir uns durch das moralische Gesetz gedungen, uns aber und die gesamte Natur, ihn zu erreichen unvermögend fühlen [. . .]”
- 15 Kant, KdU, 510/318 [§83]: “denn seine Natur ist nicht von der Art, irgendwo im Besitz und Genüsse aufzuhören und befriedigt zu werden [. . .]”
- 16 In the German version from the author's own hand this idea is formulated as follows: “This is implicitly presumed by Kant; and it needs to be added that we must agree here with the sage of Königsberg: any moral meaning may only be grasped as absolute and total, never relative; and should purpose and meaning indeed be one and the same, then also life without focus on an absolute purpose must be marked nonsensical.”—Eds.
- 17 Cf. T. G. Masaryk, *Světová revoluce. Za války a ve válce. 1914–1918* [World Revolution. During the War and in the War. 1914–18] (Prague: Čin, 1925), 417. [English translation: T. G. Masaryk, *The Making of a State. Memoirs and Observations 1914–1918*, trans. H.W. Steed (New York: Howard Fertig, 1969), 342.] Hereafter *Světová revoluce* with Czech/English references.
- 18 The purpose of these lines is not an exhaustive explication of Dostoevsky. I will not try to drink the whole ocean, but only to show how certain literary episodes in Dostoevsky's work fall into the context opened by moral theology and to indicate how themes fundamental to Dostoevsky—the “underground,” the paradox of culpability without guilt (the culpability of “all for all”) and the turn toward the positive, toward universal love—are explicable in a relatively natural way from the analytic of human being-in-the-world that developed later. In doing this, I wish to suggest at the same time the possibility that these motifs, which the worldwide recognition of Dostoevsky's work has made the subject of meditation for other philosophers and poets, would perhaps not have been possible outside of a development driven more by the philosophy of the meaning of life of which in Dostoevsky himself we find no conceptual, philosophical elucidation in the proper sense. Nevertheless, there is without a doubt no other author of the nineteenth century whose “psychology” more manifestly resists all explication from the point of view of the “present-at-hand” (of that which can simply be stated) and which more urgently demands a fundamental reversal in the approach to the mental and spiritual mode of being, to the mode of being human.
- 19 Cf. T. G. Masaryk, *The Spirit of Russia*, vol. 3, trans. George Gibian and ed. Robert Bass (New York: Allen and Unwin, 1967), 8–9.
- 20 F. M. Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. and annotated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (London: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2004), 235.
- 21 Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 235.
- 22 Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 235f. The question here is not whether Dostoevsky's interpretation of Kant is exact; it is however clear that all these notions are derived from the doctrine of the postulates.
- 23 Latin: “I give in order that you may give.”—Eds.
- 24 Erik Krag, *Dostoevsky. The Literary Artist* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1976), 282.
- 25 Cf. Dostoevsky, “Pushkin (A Sketch),” in *A Writer's Diary*, vol. 2, 1877–1881, trans. Kenneth Lantz (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009).—Eds.
- 26 Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 242.—Eds.
- 27 One might respond: eternal Providence still holds in store for these innocent children their own moral life. But is this not in itself precisely the absurdity, is the pointlessness of their suffering not obvious? On the other hand, if eternal happiness is possible without moral merit, then wherein lies the moral meaning of the whole?
- 28 Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 244.—Eds.
- 29 Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 245.—Eds.
- 30 The logic of subjective arbitrariness is described in “The Sentence” [Dostoevsky, *A Writer's Diary*, vol. 1, October 1876] as the logic of atheism and suicide.
- 31 Among others, cf. the following passage in the novel: “Not only that, but then nothing would be immoral any longer, everything would be permitted, even anthropophagy.” Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 69.—Eds.
- 32 For the following passage see Dostoevsky, *Notes from the Underground* (1864), trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Vintage, 1994).—Eds.

- 33 Dostoevsky, “The Dream of a Ridiculous Man: A Fantastic Story (April 1877),” in *A Writer’s Diary*, vol. 2, 942–964.—Eds.
- 34 Martin Heidegger, “Was ist Metaphysik?” in *Gesamtausgabe 9: Wegmarken* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1976), 110. [English translation: “What is Metaphysics?” in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 87.] Hereafter “Was ist Metaphysik?” with German/English references.—Eds.
- 35 Dostoevsky, *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man*, 943.—Eds.
- 36 Dostoevsky, *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man*, 943.—Eds.
- 37 Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (1927) (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1953), 184. [English translation: *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 228.] Hereafter SuZ with German/English references.—Eds.
- 38 Dostoevsky, *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man*, 950.—Eds.
- 39 Dostoevsky, *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man*, 951.—Eds.
- 40 Heraclitus, Fragment B 64.—Eds.
- 41 Heidegger, *Was ist Metaphysik?* 118/93.
- 42 Cf. Heidegger, SuZ, 288/334.—Eds.
- 43 Krag, *Dostoevsky*, 289.
- 44 Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 30.—Eds.
- 45 Iakov Golosovker, *Dostoevsky i Kant* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1963).
- 46 Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft. Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 3, ed. Royal Prussian Academy of Sciences (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1900—), A462/B 490–A476/B504. [English translation: *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).] Hereafter KrV with German/English references.—Eds.
- 47 Kant, KrV, A463/B491/English 496.—Eds.
- 48 Kant, KrV, A465/B493/English 497.—Eds.
- 49 John 12, 24. Translation from *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books*, ed. Bruce Metzger and Roland Murphy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).—Eds.
- 50 As stated by George Gibian in his “Introduction” to Masaryk, *The Spirit of Russia*, xiii.
- 51 Masaryk, *Suicide and the Meaning of Civilization*, trans. W.B. Weist and R.G. Batson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 84ff. [German: *Der Selbstmord als sociale Massenerscheinung der modernen Civilisation* (Vienna: Konegan, 1881).]
- 52 Masaryk, *Studie o F. M. Dostojevském—s rukopisnými poznámkami* [A Study on F. M. Dostoevsky—including original notes] (Prague: J. Horák, 1932), in *Prameny k dějinám vzájemných styků slovanských* [Resources for the Study of Mutual Slavic Relations], vol. 1 (Prague: Nákl. Slovanského ústavu., 1932).—Eds.
- 53 Masaryk, *Modern Man and Religion*, trans. Ann Bibza and Václav Beneš (London: George Allen, 1938), 48. [Czech: *Moderní člověk a náboženství* (Prague: J. Laichter, 1934).]
- 54 Masaryk, *Modern Man and Religion*, 49.
- 55 These are especially evident in his *Concrete Logic*. Masaryk, *Versuch einer concreten Logik* (Vienna: Konegan, 1887).
- 56 Cf. Raymond Aron, *Les étapes de la pensée sociologique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), 344: the unreliability of data and the insufficiency of statistical analysis; insufficient conclusive force of causal correlations etc.
- 57 Milan Machovec, *Tomáš G. Masaryk* (Prague: Svobodné slovo, 1968).
- 58 Masaryk, *Světová revoluce*, 391/318.
- 59 Masaryk, *Světová revoluce*, 391/319.
- 60 Masaryk, *Světová revoluce*, 416/341f.
- 61 Masaryk, “Goethe’s Faust: Superman,” in *Modern Man and Religion*, 256–286, here 265f.
- 62 Masaryk, *V boji o náboženství* [Fighting for Religion] (Prague: Laichter, 1904), 22.
- 63 Masaryk, *V boji o náboženství*, 22.
- 64 Masaryk, *Modern Man and Religion*.
- 65 Masaryk, *Modern Man and Religion*, 87.
- 66 Masaryk, *Modern Man and Religion*, 87.
- 67 Masaryk, *Modern Man and Religion*, 78.

- 68 “Reason” and “understanding” here render the Kantian differentiation between *Vernunft* and *Verstand*.—Eds.
- 69 Masaryk, *Modern Man and Religion*, 80.
- 70 Masaryk, *Modern Man and Religion*, 87.
- 71 H. J. Paton, *Kant's Metaphysic of Experience*, vol. 1 (London, Allen and Unwin, 1970), 70.
- 72 Paton, *Kant's Metaphysic*, 69 f.
- 73 Masaryk, *The Spirit of Russia*, 35–40.
- 74 This was the claim made with the publication of Nietzsche's so-called “Will to Power” fragments, edited by Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche and Heinrich Köselitz (published posthumously in 1901 and in expanded form in 1906). Cf. the new, fundamentally revised edition of Nietzsche's works: *Friedrich Nietzsche: Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, vols. 11–13: *Nachgelassene Fragmente* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1970–74). English translation of a selection of these texts from 1885–1889 can be found in: Friedrich Nietzsche, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, trans. Kate Sturge and ed. Rüdiger Bittner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). Hereafter KSA/volume, with German/English references.—Eds.
- 75 Masaryk, *Suicide*, 216f.
- 76 Nietzsche, KSA/12, 125–126/83. (From Notebook 2, Autumn 1885–Autumn 1886.)
- 77 Kant, KdU, 514n/323–324n30.
- 78 Oskar Becker, *Dasein und Dawesen* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1963), especially “Nietzsches Beweise für seine Lehre von der ewigen Wiederkunft,” 41–66.
- 79 Charles Andler, *Nietzsche, sa vie et sa pensée*, vols. 1–6 (Paris: Bossard, 1920–1931); Abel Rey, *Le retour éternel et la philosophie de la physique* (Paris: Flammarion, 1927).—Eds.
- 80 Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000). [German: *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, in *Gesamtausgabe* 40 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1983).] Cf. also Heidegger, “Was ist Metaphysik?”—Eds.
- 81 In the manuscript follows a section that has been lightly crossed out: “It is true that God is viewed here not in himself, but in his relation to man; yet the entire philosophy of postulates is conceived from a point of view that could be labeled as setting up the conditions of the possibility that moral life may develop with full intensity and energy—these conditions of possibility are thus conceived already as values in the sense that Nietzsche had in mind when he specified his “viewpoint of value” [*Gesichtspunkt des Werths*] as the “viewpoint of *conditions of preservation and enhancement* in regard to complex structures that have relatively lasting life within becoming” [Nietzsche, KSA/13, 36/212.—Eds.]
- 82 Cf. Nietzsche, KSA/12, 350/146: “*Nihilism*: es fehlt das Ziel; es fehlt die Antwort auf das ‘Warum?’”—Eds.
- 83 Cf. Heidegger, “Was ist Metaphysik?”—Eds.
- 84 This is the common English translation of Heidegger's expression *Nichtung*. Patočka himself translates *Nichtung* by a Czech word that would literally mean “de-being-ization.”—Eds.
- 85 Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vol. 2 (Pfullingen: Neske, 1961), 252f. [English translation: *Nietzsche*, ed. David Farrell Krell, vols. 3 and 4 (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 193 (Volume 4).] Hereafter *Nietzsche*, with German/English references.
- 86 Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, 256/196.

8 Jan Patočka's Studies on Masaryk

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The article examines the reasons why Patočka in his last essay (*On Masaryk's Philosophy of Religion*) once again returns to the philosophy of T. G. Masaryk, the founding father of the Czechoslovak Republic, after having dealt with his ideas many times before. Reviewing the development of Patočka's philosophical oeuvre, the argumentation shows that he is compelled to again discuss Masaryk because of their common preoccupation with the crisis of European mankind. It is the relation of this crisis to the realm of Christian religion that is crucial for both thinkers. Yet different from Masaryk and from the young Patočka himself who started his investigations as a believing Christian, the solution presented in his late essays is so diverging from anything Christian that he himself calls it heretical.

Keywords: Czech philosophy; Masaryk; Patočka; phenomenology

The *Two Studies on Masaryk*¹ represent the last works to have been completed by Jan Patočka prior to his tragic death.² At first glance, especially judging from the titles, it is not obvious how these papers relate to the *Heretical Essays*, a book published by Patočka a year earlier.³ Why having drafted his unique philosophy of European history, and having completed his analysis of the circumstances under which the spirit of the historical Europe could become spirit of the world at a time he calls post-European, and which we today title "the epoch of globalization"—why does Patočka go on to turn to a topic seemingly as obsolete and overcome, as the philosophy of the first president of the independent state of the Czechs and the Slovaks that came into existence after the First World War? It is my opinion that this is the question we need to ask in order to arrive at the meaning behind these studies.

The explanation I am about to propose here could briefly be summarized as follows: Masaryk in his essays basically addresses the same problem Patočka does, that is the crisis of European humanity in modern-day history. In a certain respect, Patočka agrees with Masaryk's approach to this issue; but on the whole, he fundamentally rejects Masaryk's concept. However, he does admire his readiness for action, seeing in him the only philosopher in history who was not content with abstract considerations, but managed to turn his ideas into real and tangible results represented by actually founding a factual, functioning state. Apart from this, Masaryk also shares in this issue with Patočka's spiritual father, the founder of phenomenological philosophy, Edmund Husserl, precisely because this is a problem of the crisis of European humanity. Patočka's analysis of this crisis, however, alongside his answer, is so drastically different towards the end of his life from both his predecessors' approaches that he himself goes on to call it heretical. Hence it is my opinion that the confrontation with Masaryk,

whose view he had criticized so many times in the past, kept pressing on him: not only because he could thus again verify and ascertain his own conclusions, but also because his own view on this crisis altered significantly over the years. It also seems that, whereas up until *circa* the middle of the century, the vantage point of his philosophy is that of a Christian believer, in later years his religious attitude gradually takes a different shape.

Masaryk examines the European social crisis of modern times already in his first work and reaches the conclusion that symptomatic of it is the growing number of suicides. His book, written in German, is entitled *Suicide as the Mass Social Phenomenon in Modern Civilization*.⁴ In keeping with the spirit of the positivism of the day, Masaryk subjects his topic to a wide-range sociological analysis based on the assumption that suicidality is the symptom whereby the social crisis is most notably expressed. This conclusion notwithstanding, he proceeds to pose the question regarding the cause of this crisis. He thinks that, “the mass occurrence of suicide seems to be the process of a historical nature, the result of a collective blame of the society as a whole.”⁵ This crisis is to him a historically developed process of social mental disease conditioned by the political and economic situation. This process is identified by Masaryk—and he is certainly not the only one to hold this opinion—as the transition from the traditionally religious world view towards religion-less thinking.

Jan Patočka writes his first larger essay on Masaryk⁶ as a tribute at the time of Masaryk's death in 1936 and at the same time as the review of his teacher Edmund Husserl's visit to Prague, intended for broader public. As the secretary of the *Cercle philosophique de Prague*⁷ at that time, he was the chief organizer of Husserl's truly historic visit the year before. In Prague, Husserl had given several lectures, which form the core to his posthumously published book entitled *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*,⁸ and Patočka now goes on to compare Husserl's concept of the crisis with that of Masaryk. He concludes that both Husserl and Masaryk agree on non-religiosity as symptomatic of the crisis, and they even concur that the cause of this non-religiosity is the “positivistic hypostatization of natural-scientific methodology”⁹ or more precisely, the inability of modern philosophy to cope with the problem of the subject as posed by Descartes. The result of this helplessness in dealing with the newly discovered topic of the subject is modern-day skepticism. For once philosophy set foot on the subjective solid ground of the certainty of Descartes' *ego cogito*, it does not know how to reach objective truth: “it does not know how to resolve the question of how it is that all that is, *is* for a subject, and yet the subject is merely a part of all that is.”¹⁰

But while Husserl strives to solve this philosophical problem and lays out his phenomenology in order to replace the wrong and unsuccessful subjectivism of classical German philosophy with a consequent subjectivism capable of removing the ambiguities, Masaryk shrinks back from the problem of the subject:

Yet Masaryk does not provide an answer to the question [. . .] Whenever he approaches this substantive philosophical question, Masaryk, though so serious and perceptive a thinker, seems to run almost out of breath [. . .]¹¹

The reason why he failed here is seen by Patočka in what religion means to Masaryk:

Masaryk's religion is the central axis of his thought. It sets the tone of his entire life. From the earliest, religious feeling plays the role of the moving spirit in his life. A world without a relation to a personal God is scarcely thinkable for him. Only through this relation does Masaryk understand the meaning of the world and learn to love it, in particular its people. Radical subjectivism makes him recoil as a blasphemy because it virtually superordinates the subject to God.¹²

Masaryk then, in Patočka's view, falls short when it comes to philosophy. On the one hand he is unwilling to walk the path respecting the key role of the subject; on the other hand he rejects positivism. In his view, the crisis of humanity is to be solved using some kind of rationalist theology. This stance, however, Patočka sees as unacceptable: "The objectivistic conception of God [. . .] is untenable. It is vulnerable precisely to all of Kant's arguments."¹³ Still, at the end of his paper, Patočka highlights Masaryk's concept of active faith in the form of an optimistic confidence in divine providence, which enabled him to realize his great political goals. Patočka does so, however, to emphasize his own point that the problem of faith exists independently not only of theology but of philosophy as well:

Faith in the sense of an absolute trust is not a theoretical standpoint, but far more a practical one, a matter of a personal decision which does not follow from theories or rest on arguments, but rather leads to them [. . .].¹⁴

As it seems, this exactly represents Patočka's own stance throughout the '30's, as far as Christian faith is concerned and it is then also the vantage point of his view on the entire problem of crisis. But neither Masaryk's, nor Husserl's rationalism goes far enough to satisfy Patočka here. This is how he sums up his reflections: "[. . .] the problem which flows from the confrontation of Husserl's philosophy with Masaryk is one of personal faith in the context of radical subjectivism." And he continues:

I believe further that without addressing this question we cannot resolve the problem of the spiritual crisis. Husserl's intellectualistic optimism will not be enough.¹⁵ We cannot depend on the teleological idea of European culture; rather, we need to engage ourselves actively in realizing those ideal goods about which we have convinced ourselves that we can live only with them and for them.¹⁶

Although Masaryk did not satisfy Patočka philosophically, Patočka's formula for the solution of the crisis is in 1936 still a kind of combination of Masaryk and Husserl. From Husserl, his radical subjectivism needs to be adopted; from Masaryk, his resolute personal faith which makes it possible to fight this spiritual crisis in society actively.

The stance of active personal faith, for which Masaryk is the role model to him, was adopted by Patočka already in school when he apparently studied Masaryk meticulously. Already in 1930, in a brief but thoughtful review, he welcomed the publication of *Výbor ze spisů T. G. Masaryka* [Selected Reading from the Works by T. G. Masaryk] on the eve of Masaryk's eightieth birthday, to be used in schools. Here, he says that the book correctly guides the student step by step towards the profound depths of Masaryk's conviction, as well as to the roots of his philosophy, and that "the more

serious student will find in it a lifelong program.”¹⁷ With a certain amount of exaggeration we could say that Patočka himself was precisely such a student. For him, however, this did not mean to propagate the Masaryk cult and uncritically parrot his opinion, as would have been usual then but, as we come to find out at the end of the first of his *Two Studies on Masaryk*:

[. . .] through thought penetrating radically into the deep [to gain] insight into that which exists, into its meaning and, as a result of this, into navigating the chaos and storms of today's and tomorrow's [. . .] such was Masaryk's legacy, such his praxis, which was to shipwreck on unrecognized prejudices [. . .].¹⁸

That same year (1930) Patočka reviews a book by the protestant theologian J. L. Hromádka, entitled succinctly: *Masaryk*. He considers it the “most thorough attempt at covering Masaryk to date.”¹⁹ He agrees with Hromádka that Masaryk is no positivist and that he also recognizes the need to overcome positivistic naturalism. He even agrees with Hromádka stating that Masaryk, stuck in theism, can never manage this “as his concept of God is purely philosophical, not specifically religious [. . .] and also because, in keeping with the spirit of positivism, he sees Christian religion as anthropomorphism.”²⁰ Hromádka continues: “Thus, Masaryk cut himself off the road towards understanding that true Christian faith, and the theology built upon it, represents a consequent denaturalization of our thinking.”²¹ But it is precisely on this point that Patočka disagrees with Hromádka:

However, no denaturalization as consequent as demanded by Hromádka is necessary. Faith conceived in Hromádka's manner comes to be an objectified categorical imperative, the awareness of an absolute responsibility conscious of its divine origin. But the essence of faith does not imply any belief of it to have been caused by God himself; such faith would amount to evidence about one's truth [. . .].²²

Patočka grasps the content of faith more simply. It is my opinion that the following formulation by Patočka may be taken for his explicit creed:

God governs all well. This is a living word of faith that corresponds with man's painful moral struggle and is its highest reward. This means, however, that faith is no *deus ex machina* resolving from outside all of human problems. Rather, faith is one of man's functions, no more and no less in the hands of the divine than everything else.²³

Radical subjectivism as professed by Patočka alongside Husserl then needs to be defended against Masaryk, as well as the theologians, without this resulting in losing faith in God. Such a loss is otherwise obviously imminent. In 1935, Václav Černý, a literary scholar, Patočka's colleague and one of his best friends, published the French language edition of his volume *Essai sur le titanisme dans la poésie romantique occidentale entre 1815 et 1850*, and Patočka reviews the book in 1936.²⁴ This occasion is of course again used by him to confront Masaryk. It was Masaryk, after all, who had at one point taken on the problem of titanism. He titled the [third part](#) of his collected articles spanning 1896–1897, which were published under the title *Moderní*

člověk a náboženství [Modern Man and Religion], *Moderní titanism* [Modern Titanism]. Patočka quotes the following statement by Masaryk:

Poetical titanism is a pregnant expression of the age-old struggle for the emancipation of the human spirit and at the same time an attempt at a new spiritual and social order. All philosophical and religious problems culminate therein [. . .].²⁵

Masaryk of course refuses this poetic titanism represented by such names as Alfred de Musset and J. W. Goethe. To him it represents precisely that type of modern subjectivism against which he stands. Metaphysically, according to Masaryk, it lacks a sufficient amount of faith in the objective absolute that would norm life religiously. Seen ethically, it is egoism, an indulgence of both the body and the spirit, a moral egocentrism. Masaryk finds it insufficient to replace the principles that regulate life objectively with subjective rules. In titanism he sees the same thing that Dostoevsky calls nihilism: “a deification of man, enthroning man in place of God as the highest lawgiver.”²⁶ These efforts certainly, in Masaryk’s view, only lead to the destruction of life, both one’s own and that of another, to suicides and wars.

Following this summary of Masaryk’s stance, Patočka goes on “to attempt a moral defence of subjectivism”²⁷ in which he concurs with Václav Černý:

The essence of titanism [. . .] does not lie in subjective arbitrary will which wholly surrenders itself to instincts but in the positing of a moral imperative to which no actual reality can live up, not even with the help of an all-mighty and wholly perfect God (especially not then).²⁸

A titan measures even God against this ideal moral demand, so that face to face with the evil he comes to experience in the world, he finds himself unable to uphold God. The titan’s interpretation of evil is certainly not a Christian one. Evil to him is not a mere privation of being accompanying finite existence, as in traditional scholastics, but rather a self-standing entity. Patočka and Černý, however, go on to say:

Man’s striving to give meaning to his life does not find itself in a blind alley because man gives up the moral crutch of an external command and does not depend on help, on salvation from without; man does not necessarily sink morally thereby, as Masaryk believes.²⁹

Titanism is hence in their view “a quest for a life out of freedom, without a definitive salvation from without.”³⁰

Nevertheless, Černý concludes that titanism is inconsistent, unfinished, and hesitant. It is not entirely atheist; it plays around with the idea of a “finite God,” not wanting to give up a belief in something that could be relied on. But it is obvious that no *finite* God can provide such support. The freedom of human existence which the titan feels and lives is, according to Patočka and Černý, “a mere beginning which signals the coming of a deeper crisis, of a still heavier responsibility and still more painful decisions. The objective dimension must be neutralized for existence into a sheer nothing [. . .]”³¹—and only then may (and here Patočka quotes Jaspers)³² human existence arrive at:

A faith that is valid independent of all objectivity. Out of that nothingness man must first create his world, not by refusing modern subjectivism, but by passing through it to the very end, to the point where it becomes the source of moral strength.³³

Existentialist encounter with nothingness then leads both Patočka and Jaspers in 1936 towards philosophical faith based on radical subjectivism. Let us follow Patočka down this road in order to find out how moral powers spring from this subjectivism.

In 1938, not long after his above cited comparison of Masaryk with Husserl—shortly after the European superpowers, in the absence of the Czechoslovak president, finalized the Munich agreement with Hitler, depriving the state of large portions of its sovereign territory along the border with Germany based on the argument that they are inhabited by Germans—Patočka, together with his colleague Václav Navrátil, wrote a brief commemorative text honoring Masaryk under the title *Před rokem zemřel . . .* [A Year Ago He Died . . .]. And already in the first sentence, we read: “Masaryk should constitute the vital problem for every thinking Czech.” And the text continues:

Even for those of us who venture down other roads in abstract thinking will this type of a fighting scholar forever hold valid: A man who was capable of turning thoughts into acts, to whom thinking and living was one and the same thing.³⁴

Patočka was not satisfied with the fact that Masaryk is “generally worshipped by the nation,” while “beneath the surface of this frenetic cult a certain factual ignorance of Masaryk’s work lingers.”³⁵ He expresses his appreciation that a few detailed biographical studies had been written on Masaryk, but notes that they generally lack any analysis of Masaryk’s philosophic opinion, “so that ultimately we have no definite picture of his position concerning the major ideological-moral movements of his century.”³⁶ Seeing that nobody has in fact filled this gap up until the 1970’s, we might perhaps say that this was also one of the reasons why Patočka, towards the end of his life, made the decision to again address Masaryk’s philosophy in *Two Studies on Masaryk*.

Patočka took up the Masaryk matter again after the war, in 1946—on the 10th anniversary of Masaryk’s death—in a paper entitled *Masaryk a naše dnešní otázky* [Masaryk and our Present Questions]. Again, he reminds us that “the idea of our entire life as a state so far was fundamentally Masaryk’s,”³⁷ and that Masaryk is a philosopher of the modern-day crisis of mankind who “could see all of the new life as a crisis, as a moment of illness, as a state pregnant with horrors and demons.”³⁸ At a time when in the renewed post-war Czechoslovakia the decision was being made on what character its system of government was going to have, Patočka pleads in favor of Masaryk’s democratic humanism. To him, however, this term does not mean a “certain ready-made, dogmatically lectured moral doctrine,” on the contrary: Patočka reminds us that Masaryk:

In place of peaceful ownership, chooses a ceaseless searching; instead of a ready-made ‘truth’ he chooses truth as a quest and a questioning which brings into uncertainty and troubles not only the everyday things, but the questioner himself.³⁹

Let us note how Patočka praises Masaryk for the attitude which shall characterize Patočka's own "Socratic" approach when solving the problem of the meaning of human existence later, in his *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*.⁴⁰ And it must not escape our attention either that Patočka here defends this position, i.e. Masaryk's humanism, against accusations of being skeptically relativist:

Relativism of the skeptical type knows only one level of life; in this, it is in agreement with the old theocratic dogmatism. Humanism on the other hand, recognizes two levels of life and teaches us to live in both simultaneously, which is hard and straining indeed; humanism calls for a profundity in life.⁴¹

These two levels of life are meant to represent, on the one hand, man's everyday secularized living among other people and in nature, and on the other hand, a "positive attitude towards the centre," towards "that rationally not demonstrable and 'objectively' incomprehensible other,"⁴² thus, perhaps, to God. And in closing, Patočka sums up:

Masaryk's questions have never ceased being posed; questions regarding humanity, what the nature of human being is, what his destiny revolves around, how to found his relation towards that which is before the universe, what is in it, and namely towards his fellow creature and fellow creatures within the social groups and on the whole.⁴³

Until the very end, these questions certainly do remain also with Patočka himself.

In the same year (1946), Patočka continues with his appraisal of the importance of the personality of T. G. Masaryk in his article entitled "Masaryk Yesterday and Today."⁴⁴ Again, he stresses explicitly Masaryk's role as a philosopher of history who directly inquired into the meaning of history in general, came up with his answer to this question and proceeded in applying his findings successfully by establishing a democratic state in the heart of Europe. His reasons and report concerning the implementation of this decision are provided in Masaryk's book *Světová revoluce* [The World Revolution].⁴⁵ Patočka points out in his article that what Masaryk says in his book "*on his own account*, in a victorious setting defining his position amid various processes, was often *understood* as the last word of history."⁴⁶ This impression then overpowered other ideas, such as when Masaryk says that "the moral dilemmas of modern man have not yet been resolved."⁴⁷ This lack of resolution was to surface soon enough; during the next twenty years a conflagration took place the scale of which was to leave the First World War far behind. Now, after the Second World War, Patočka again sees himself forced to ask:

[. . .] what are the foundations of modern man's crisis which has manifested itself over such a short period of time in not one, but in two most horrific wars in human history, and what can be the means for resolving this crisis.⁴⁸

In following up Masaryk he again explicates that at the very root of this crisis lies the unresolved, "fundamentally metaphysical question of the essence of man."⁴⁹ It is not his intention to rule out that unresolved economic and social problems have also had a share in this crisis, representing the "accompanying symptoms of bourgeois society's

decline and decay,” but he is not sure whether a “new, socially just, system will alone readily provide sufficient support to man.”⁵⁰ Patočka’s view of the crisis thus remains unchanged for the time being. Using the example of modern-day men of letters, criticized by Julien Benda⁵¹ as nihilistic, Patočka explains that the nihilism of these authors is not the cause of nihilism in the general population, but a consequence of it. He emphasizes once more that human being is not only social, satisfying its everyday needs within this framework, but that it also “essentially and necessarily, on the metaphysical level, relates to something which transcends the reality of this world”; that in its profound nature, human being aims at the final aspect in things, and that this aiming is connected with the fact that “we strive to provide our existence with its essential meaning and give reasons of it in relation to the whole.”⁵²

By metaphysics Patočka here does not mean the “doctrine or science of existence as such” that could possibly be conceived “as an objective view of things, in the fashion that positive science would like to be,” but sees metaphysics:

As an event, an act of our life, of our free human existence [. . .] Never could we be free if metaphysical issues were to be simply stated, resolved through mere positive procedure. [. . .] [M]etaphysics in the ultimate, true meaning of the word is a token of our freedom, our own decision.⁵³

Hence when Masaryk saw the “crisis of the modern man in his skepticism and nihilism, i.e. his disquietude of a metaphysical nature,” according to Patočka this was correct. And Patočka adds: “The metaphysical-religious disquietude does not subside.”⁵⁴ It does not subside although religiosity in the general population is receding. According to Patočka, Masaryk explains it like this: “[M]aturing spiritually, man does not want blind obedience and external organization, such as that built by the Roman Empire and later adopted by medieval Church [. . .] and extended into our modern epoch by Prussian “kingship,” Austrian Kaiserdom and by tsarism.”⁵⁵

And here again the theme of Dostoevsky emerges, which was to occupy Patočka in his last Masaryk studies:

It seems not dubious to me that Masaryk’s philosophy of the history of the modern era—which, notwithstanding its looking to the differences, similarities and lawfulness of the historical process, always retains its concern with preserving the metaphysical core of humanity—is somehow related to Dostoevsky, to his Great Inquisitor and his view of Christian freedom.

Even Masaryk’s philosophy of the origins of the First World War Patočka perceives in connection with Dostoevsky:

Modern man has become free, but this basically means: subjective; therefore, he never stopped suffering by his *malum metaphysicum*, by his finitude, which he seeks to cure by a cramped lordliness [. . .] [H]e seeks to transform his relation to the whole into ruling the whole.⁵⁶

When he fails, he either murders himself or unleashes war and murders others. Masaryk’s analysis of subjectivist nihilism, in which “anything goes” and in which there exists only the whimsy of one’s own interest, is seen by Patočka as valid even for

his own present time. Modern nihilistic crisis that so profoundly impacted the world, as the world wars demonstrated, “naturally cannot be cured exclusively by means of social reforms, but rather by a simultaneous inner restoration.”⁵⁷

Towards the end of this paper, Patočka’s intentions finally become clear. Social reforms, changing humanity’s living conditions: this is what Marxist communists demand with Soviet support following the liberation of Czechoslovakia at the end of the Second World War. It is precisely they, however, who are unwilling to also see the other side of the coin. Eagerly they proclaim their metaphysical materialism where there is no room for the metaphysical-moral aspect of man. They do not want to see that the “social on the one hand, and the metaphysical-moral solution on the other, are *two* [emphasis J. P.] things, which need to be conceived of separately and neither of which directly contains the other.”⁵⁸ Precisely here Patočka intends to promote Masaryk as the one who has understood the necessity of respecting both these aspects of human existence. He does not claim that Masaryk has any ready-made solutions, but that he correctly formulated the actual task. Again, Patočka emphasizes that Masaryk’s philosophy of history shows us:

Masaryk as someone who is involved, who fully engages in resolving the issue of the meaning of life and in laying out this ultimate task he beholds lit up and as if internally illumined the historical development itself.⁵⁹

This Masaryk, whom we are to take for a role model in 1946, does search and wander, but not insofar as the fundamental is concerned. His premise is firm:

[H]is life is a deeply understood unity [. . .] To understand the meaning of life for him is something like entering a new space, different from mere reality, a space the dimensions of which are nothingness, God, humans; in the lightning of this meaning which is highly elevated above everything mundane humanity also reaches its ultimate substantiation, its solidity and strength [. . .] [H]ere ends the possibility of viewing man as an object, and a new, different view of him originates [. . .] seeing man as meaning that is being realized, seeing him as somebody who is searching, finding, wandering, watched by the eye of the absolute. [. . .] Thus, to be sure, Masaryk’s humanity is of course a call to a social praxis: to take on its tasks, to carry out the works of social restructuring in the spirit of equality and justice; but, most of all, it represents a meaning which is comprehended.⁶⁰

Hence Patočka’s position here still remains the same as it was before the war. He agrees with Masaryk’s diagnosis. The crisis is caused by the loss of faith, the loss of trust in the “absolute eye,” the view that God guarantees the meaning of life and history. This faith needs to be renewed, which here means: to understand, i.e., voluntarily decide that the meaning, the course that needs to be taken, is that of the historic realization of humanism, of humanity. There is only doubt about the choice of actual steps and measures to be taken.

The year 1946 is when a short study called *The Consolation of Philosophy* was published; it was written by Emanuel Rádl,⁶¹ a non-conformist Czech philosopher and biologist, during the final period of his long malignant disease, as he was waiting for death. Facing the uncertainties of wartime, Patočka says in the review of this book that Rádl “formulated his own certainty, the certainty of his philosophical belief.”⁶² From

the point of view of our inquiry, Rádl is important for Patočka, mainly because of his understanding for the classical Greek metaphysics. Of his book Patočka says:

Here, the return of Masarykian humanism to the classical metaphysical tradition is consciously finalized: a return to Plato and Aristotle; modern philosophy is criticized harshly for not being capable of creating genuine morality or even comprehending its problem; the replacement of the Aristotelian cosmos with Galilean nature absorbed the sensitivity for all things human, for which classical metaphysics rooted in the Socratic turn had an incomparably deeper understanding.⁶³

By Socratic turn Rádl means the first posing of the moral question regarding man: what is the human good, what is good for humans? The thinkers of old, such as Anaximander, Heraclitus or Parmenides, do not pose their questions in this manner. They are interested in the world as a whole, the cosmos of which humans are only a marginal, blind part. Patočka agrees when Rádl says that the roots of all humanism come from Socrates, and that the whole of European thought is determined in its axial alignment to this humanism. He states this clearly in his next short essay entitled “Czech Humanism and its Final Word in Rádl,”⁶⁴ published in 1948—only several days after the successful communist *coup d'état*—in which he defends Rádl against the assaults by humanists of a different type: the Marxists.

In Rádl's view, the fundamental teaching of the entire humanistic tradition is already present in Socrates: the faith in a moral world which is not created by humans but merely acknowledged by them as that which gives meaning to their lives. [. . .] Rádl, in accord with his own conclusion, then goes on to proclaim the return to Socrates, understood in this fashion; he even claims that [. . .] this teaching will one day—following a long period of wandering—save the world.⁶⁵

Having thus summed up Rádl's standpoint, Patočka asks: “[. . .] is Rádl right in his interpretation of Socrates?” Is Socrates indeed the founder of humanistic metaphysics that proclaims the possibility of accessing the ultimate Good as the sole force ruling the world and also human life? This problem, which is again addressed in the *Heretical Essays* and in the *Two Studies on Masaryk* in the 1970's, is now, at the end of the 1940's, Patočka's main concern in a larger study entitled *Eternity and Historicity*,⁶⁶ which at the time—obviously for political reasons—it was not possible to publish. Its subtitle reads clearly: “Rádl's Approach to the Concepts of Humanity in the Past and Present.”

The question of Rádl's Socrates is answered negatively by Patočka. He disagrees that the historic Socrates was a proponent of positive metaphysical moralism. He is inclined to concur with philologists of the type of Werner Jaeger, who want to distinguish between Socrates on one hand, who does pose the question of the human good, but leaves it unanswered and states reluctantly his lack of knowledge precisely on this supremely important subject; and Plato on the other hand who, in order to answer this question based on Socrates, goes on to build a whole new ideal world of genuine existence, crowned with the supreme idea of the Good, which is not only the true foundation of human morality, but the final foundation for the totality of human existence in general. Patočka's Socrates “does not orient himself using some

higher, transcendental world of morality to be *a priori* perceived as positive,⁶⁷ but again and again keeps examining individual examples of the human good of which people are commonly aware, and points out that none of them stands, or could ever stand for the only one, general and essential meaning or goal of human existence sufficient to be the Good of humanity in general.

Socrates' negative dialectic, however, certainly carries a positive meaning. It does beckon man to further walk on this path and to keep this direction:

This task aims at inner unity and a vital unheard of concentration: so that although there may be no positive, general and meaningful answer to the Socratic question, still the question itself—if there is persistence in asking it—as a relentless effort, will cause in man that which he asks about.⁶⁸

Thus it will cause a man to be good, to act in good will, thus morally, even though he may never really be sure of this. In this effort, in this “uprooting call, Socrates sees the essence of philosophy.”⁶⁹ This is the Socratic care or concern for the soul that we again and again encounter in Patočka's final essays. And he concludes:

[. . .] the soul may gain an understanding of the Good (a negative one, of course, an awareness of one's own ignorance), and thus from nothingness, from inner incompleteness, pass on to take definite shape which, nevertheless, despite its definite fixedness, still remains something living and different from the dead constancy of things.⁷⁰

In the following quotation we already come to hear the voice of Heidegger's *Being and Time*: our soul, “as the only one of all things that there are, possesses the oddity of not only existing, but also having to care for its own life, to strive to be something self-standing and not lost in matters external and alien.”⁷¹ From this, however, a further conclusion follows regarding Socrates' humanism:

Socrates thus discovered man as a being [. . .] originally unfinished, but put at its own disposal in order to learn and understand its substantial will, in order to give its life meaning. To such a being, events must gain meaning; however, a being for whom events have meaning, is a being of history. Socrates is the discoverer of human historicity.⁷²

And if this being has to take care of itself, and decides about its own life and its meaning then it has to be, at least partially, a being who is free. The indispensable component to Socratic humanism, therefore, is the motif of freedom.

In opposition to this concept of Socrates, as we have already said, Patočka sets Plato as the creator of positive metaphysics, as the proponent of eternal, permanent, unchanging ideas, from which there stems the objectivity of moral principles, rules and bans, and finally, the demand for positive scientific ethics. This metaphysics of eternity is precisely that which was followed up and integrated by Christianity. Plato's objectivistic concept of a positive unity of all existence:

Thus strengthens another concept in Christianity, hitherto unknown in philosophy: the theme of creation. The existence that finite things of this world are getting is

not merely a value eventually derived from Value in general, of the Good beyond the realms of existence; it is also a gift from a being that is the perfection as such, the absolute Good.⁷³

Thus the abstract Absolute Good gradually became the Absolutely Good Person, who can be absolutely relied upon, and to whom, therefore, man is bound by absolute obedience. "A motif of supreme spiritual importance for the Christian world, in my view," Patočka says, "seems to be the motif of absolute obedience and absolute reliance on God. Bultmann even speaks of giving up all will of one's own, if it is different from that of God."⁷⁴ Hence the Socratic problem itself remained, as Patočka observes, "*in suspenso* for two millennia, having been arched over by classical metaphysics which prevented the grasping of man primarily in and of himself [. . .]."⁷⁵

On the eve of the sixtieth birthday of J. L. Hromádka mentioned above, Patočka explicitly formulates his view on the difference between theology and philosophy, and on what they have in common.⁷⁶ Hromádka blames philosophy for not being able to recognize and justify the "reality of an absolute norm beyond man and the world" and at the same time to acknowledge the "full reality of the material world."⁷⁷ He asks: "Where is there a philosophy that recognizes the realm of the intellect and sets it apart from the randomness and instinct of natural life, and yet accepts that even material, inanimate, insentient nature has meaning and purpose?"⁷⁸ And seeing that there is no such philosophy, he finds the solution to this problem in Christian faith. Patočka evidently agrees. Nevertheless, as far as theology is concerned, which is supposed to provide reasons for this solution and supply objective judgment on it, he concludes that "the understanding of a theologian, as well as his explanation, remain remarkably dim and never leave the bounds of the mysterious."⁷⁹ Hromádka is obviously content with this. In his view, there exists a "divine meaning" that is inaccessible to humans, and that is why any theological explication of it must remain forever paradoxical to the understanding of common human reason. Therefore it is not the duty of theology to explicate the meaning of the world and life.

Patočka nods to Hromádka on this:

Owing to the faith which is itself a part of a superhuman meaning, an act of mercy of which man on his own is incapable [. . .] suddenly there is indeed present here, in our life, all of that for which man, in this given world, in this empirical reality, only vaguely and silently yearns. [. . .] all of the great deeds of humanity, all of its ideals we have worshipped in the past two millennia, were either directly or indirectly determined or at least tinged by Christianity.⁸⁰

Therefore theology "does not validate itself by 'interpreting' and 'expounding,' by 'grasping': but rather by the fact that the new meaning is indeed present, vitally present in all of our life [. . .]."⁸¹

Only in a concrete historical situation, in the moment of making a decision, when all of life's direction and meaning is at stake, does the Highest address us and demand our unequivocal answer. But we may only comprehend the *fact* of having been addressed; the *contents* will never be fully accessible to our human understanding [. . .].⁸²

Hromádka's objections to philosophy are, according to Patočka, based just on the fact that he assumes philosophy would like "to see itself as something ultimate, absolute, the supreme regulation of life"⁸³—while in reality it is mere abstract, indefinite intellectualism. It does not embrace all of human being and it does not act. Regardless of the most radical attempts at its liberation from the mundane, it contains the decadent tendency towards mere rightfulness, irresponsibility, ethical indifference or complete moral denial.

In the remainder of his article Patočka presents a full-fledged apologetic on behalf of philosophy. Hromádka "does correctly capture what philosophy cannot do . . . , but does not manage to capture its true nature."⁸⁴ Philosophy may be an abstract discipline. Its task is not to experience reality but to think it: nevertheless, this means that something is happening, that philosophy is taking action. Philosophical decisions determine entire historical epochs; they change the way that reality is perceived. But absolute primacy is played by philosophy where understanding is concerned: "There cannot exist for man any meaning, any sense, which would not pass the scrutiny of philosophy, whose conceptual bounds philosophy would not have examined."⁸⁵ This also concerns matters of transcendental nature.

Philosophy certainly cannot be transformed into an organ of faith; but it must have the option of constructing at its utmost limit such possible meaning which is not entirely human and which transcends human understanding [. . .], or it must at least demonstrate what ideological means are insufficient for the accomplishment of this task, that they cannot be used, and why.⁸⁶

This last notion, however, relates to the fact that in philosophy there already exists a tendency to transcend the given. Here again, Patočka agrees with Hromádka's rejection of thinkers who seem to provide an overall positive explanation of the world. He himself sees this tendency as "ideological operations of negative nature": as awareness which "has been present since the beginning in Greek philosophy" and which "in modern philosophy also [. . .] plays an important role," namely that "the ultimate meaning cannot be spelled out and defined on positive human terms."⁸⁷ And it is precisely for such a philosophy that Patočka is henceforth going to strive. It is to be a:

Philosophy that would have no pretense of being everything to man and expounding the ultimate meaning of all existence in a positive way, but rather would show how understanding existence as such guides one's attention outside the realm of existing things [. . .]⁸⁸

The outline of such a philosophy was offered by Patočka in his text entitled "Negative Platonism,"⁸⁹ which was apparently not possible to publish at the time and was circulated only in the form of typescript copies.

The subject matter of the study is summed up in its subtitle: "Reflections Concerning the Rise, the Scope, and the Demise of Metaphysics—and Whether Philosophy Can Survive It." At the beginning of the essay, the concept of humanism is analyzed in the context of the contemporary competition regarding whether metaphysics is going to be surpassed by positivism or by dialectical materialism. "For both, metaphysics represents a state of human immaturity whose manifestation is an inability of the

human mind to grasp reality in its fullness, and a tendency to substitute abstractions for it.”⁹⁰ Where positivists “see all there is to human reality in a finite knowing and [. . .] building up [. . .] its own relative, yet firm and adequate, whole,”⁹¹ dialectical materialism, as the heir of Hegelianism, seeks to arrive at a universal whole which would be substantially human. “The outcome of both approaches, then, is an integral humanism”⁹² as the end result of the historical struggle for human liberation and autonomy that had followed the throwing off of the narrow shackles of medieval theocracy. Both these humanisms, however, precisely because they are being confronted with the problem of the whole, remain in Patočka’s opinion rooted in the old metaphysics.

It seems that Patočka refers here to some ideas from Heidegger’s “Letter on Humanism,”⁹³ then freshly published. This is indicated by some sketches on humanism from the author’s literary estate published by us in his *Collected Works*.⁹⁴ In these notes Patočka follows the historical roots of the concept of humanism from its beginnings in ancient Rome, where this term is used to indicate the fullness of individual human experience uninterrupted by tedious work or public affairs, through its rediscovery in the Renaissance where it gradually gains the meaning of a realm of human autonomy (*humanitas*)—in which man becomes the lord and master of nature—set apart from the realm ruled directly by God the Creator (*divinitas*) as the source and guarantee of meaningfulness to all existence, finally to the complete breaking free of the term from dependency on the divine dimension through total reliance on free human reasoning. The refusal of theology and of metaphysics leads through Hegel to Marxism, through Comte towards positivism.

Similarly as in the previous texts, Patočka’s guide and companion along the way in “Negative Platonism” is Socrates. In Socrates Patočka sees the archetypal philosopher. “Socrates’ mastery is based on an absolute freedom: he is constantly freeing himself of all the bonds of nature, of tradition, of others’ schemata as well as of his own, of all physical and spiritual possessions.”⁹⁵ With his questions he performs “a negation of all finite assertions”⁹⁶ and leaps “into a space in which nothing concrete provides it with support”⁹⁷ and thus “unveils one of the fundamental contradictions of being human, that between the relation to the whole, intrinsic to humans, and the inability, the impossibility of expressing this relation in the form of an ordinary finite knowledge.”⁹⁸

Plato, on the other hand, as we saw earlier, is for Patočka the one who is capable of providing the answer to the Socratic question. In that “space in which nothing concrete provides support,” behind the lines of the rumble of our world of appearances, Plato builds, or more precisely finds, “a different world”: a world of transcendental ideas, a world of absolutely positive realities that offer true vision. Plato is the founding father of metaphysics, while Socrates “did not enter upon metaphysics itself.”⁹⁹ Thus if it is now necessary to overcome metaphysics, we need to “understand even metaphysics itself, taking from it in a purified form, its essential philosophical thrust and carrying it on.”¹⁰⁰

The link with Socratic philosophy in “Negative Platonism” refers to the theme of human freedom and the related ability of man to transcend all that is objectively given in the direction of the “non-existent,” the non-objective “Idea” in the singular which is now the symbol of this freedom and an epitome of everything that constitutes being human as compared to an animal. This theme leads to a new, “a-subjective” concept of human subjectivity: “[The] Idea [. . .] stands above both subjective and objective

existents,”¹⁰¹ i.e., superior to both the course of experiencing and the object content of the experience. “The experience of freedom, to be sure, takes place in man, man is its locus—but that does not mean that he is adequate to that experience.”¹⁰² “Idea [. . .] enables us to see [. . .] not in a purely [. . .] sensory sense in which an animal also sees. Rather, the Idea enables us to see in a ‘spiritual’ sense in which we can say that we see something more than is contained in the given, in what is presented.”¹⁰³ “All conceptions according to which the Idea is not simply that thanks to which we see but also that which we ultimately see are anthropomorphic.”¹⁰⁴ And finally, what is most important in Patočka’s concept of history: the philosophy of negative Platonism “preserves for humans the possibility of trusting in a truth that is not relative and mundane, even though it cannot be formulated positively, in terms of contents.”¹⁰⁵ Negative Platonism justifies human’s plight “for something elevated above the natural and the traditional [. . .] against a relativism of values and norms—even while agreeing with the idea of a basic historicity of man and of the relativity of his orientation in his context, of his science and practice [. . .]”¹⁰⁶

This “new way of overcoming metaphysics,”¹⁰⁷ according to Patočka, stakes its claim in, on the one hand, the field of new theology “which seeks to liberate itself from the metaphysical, and thus also anthropological travesty,” and on the other hand in the field of philosophy of existence, “as it is an expression of a revolt against anthropologism, against integral humanism.”¹⁰⁸

In the 1950’s, as I mentioned earlier, Patočka found himself unable to uninterruptedly continue developing his fundamental philosophical considerations, as he was forced to leave the university and was only allowed in some departments at the Academy of Science to participate in preparing the publication of the works by the seventeenth century Czech protestant philosopher Jan Amos Comenius. It needs to be highlighted here that he undertook this task with full vigor and soon became a world-renowned expert in the field. His main philosophical focus however, needless to say, remained unchanged.

Throughout the 1960’s, as the political situation allowed, Patočka published in the *Journal of Philosophy* of the Czech Academy of Science an elaborate *Introduction to Husserl’s Phenomenology*,¹⁰⁹ which definitely did not present an elementary, easy to understand reading. This caused great interest in his first 1936 publication¹¹⁰ where Patočka attempted to review the problem first put in the phenomenological tradition “by Husserl under the heading of the *natürliche Welt* (later, *Lebenswelt*, the life-world or world of our life).”¹¹¹

For the second edition of the book, published in 1970, Patočka added an afterword¹¹² comparable in size to the original text, in which he indicates the road his considerations had taken in the meantime. He again reconsiders the entire phenomenological tradition and adopts a critical stand on Husserl, as well as on Heidegger, in an attempt to broaden the scope of their reflections to keep even more to the program phenomenology had set for itself in their name. It is still the matter of the crisis in which European humanity finds itself and which to Patočka remains a crisis of meaning in the sense of a moral meaning of individual human existence, as well as the meaning of the history of humanity as a whole.

First of all, Patočka sees that in his 1936 book he did not sufficiently emphasize the main consequences that follow when the mathematically reformulated nature of modern natural science begins to be perceived as the primary, original reality. Mathematization and objectification are incapable of solving the problem of the world

and the problem of meaning. Modern science does not pose questions concerning the meaning of its objects, ignoring the problem of meaning. It is this meaning precisely that Patočka seeks to find when studying the natural world: its description is to him the study of meaning. To this end he lays out his “hermeneutics of the fundamental phenomena of human life.”¹¹³

Human existence is now conceived by Patočka in an explicitly Heideggerian manner as existence. Man is a peculiar creature, differing from all other beings by comprehending itself in its existence, and in this comprehension approaching the things of its world. Man is a temporal being who understands that he always finds himself already in a situation which is the result of something that happened in the past, and he tries to make sense of the possibilities that open up before him for his future being in the world. “It is because existence now no longer lays out its possibilities by way of putting them objectively forth, by projecting them [as in German *vor-stellen*] but rather by way of *concretizing* them, realizing them (or not realizing them, giving them up, abandoning them), that existence can be defined as *movement*.”¹¹⁴ In addition to Heidegger’s analysis of human existence, and by way of radicalizing Aristotle’s concept of motion, Patočka now sketches his original hermeneutics of human life as a doctrine consisting in three fundamental motions which together as three parallel layers co-create the overall movement of specifically human existence and correspond with the three essential necessities and possibilities of man.

The first movement is the movement of anchoring, wherein man relates to what has already been accomplished and what he depends on. The being thrown of the human into the world means here primarily being placed into cohabitation with other human beings who accept him and help him to overcome his innate lack of independence. Only in the eyes of others do I begin to exist myself; only as accepted by others can I enjoy the irresistible experience of being whole, the experience of wholeness in un-wholeness.¹¹⁵

The second movement is the movement of confrontation with the world and with others in the care of sustaining one’s existence: the movement of work and struggle, of guilt, oppression and suffering, of self-projection into things and the related estrangement. The dimension of this movement is the present.¹¹⁶

The third movement, which interests us the most when reflecting on Patočka’s conception of meaning, is the motion of breakthrough in which man breaks loose from estrangement and begins to comprehend himself in his “earthlingness which is, at the same time, a relationship to Being and to the universe.”¹¹⁷ This movement:

Concerns nothing already existent, but on the contrary, that which fundamentally differs from all that exists and which makes any encounter possible: the possibility par excellence, the world. Being as the link between all meaning and the key to all understanding.¹¹⁸

Its temporal element is the future. “The future-based character of this movement carries yet another explicit meaning: that the Being of that which is does not signify a mere ray of light illuminating or not illuminating, but a ray of light illuminating always differently and newly, although always definitely.”¹¹⁹ To the human as a finite being the light of this ray opens up the essential something which makes him human: the possibility of coming to terms with the fact that he may “either disperse

and lose himself in the particular, or find and realize himself in his own properly human nature.”¹²⁰

The natural world of man as a finite being intrigued Patočka since the very beginning in relation to its historicity. It is not surprising then that the third movement is seen by him as already present in the primitive ritual behavior of mythical communities: “it is a change of life, partaking of the marriage of heaven and earth, celebrating their explicit presence and encounter.”¹²¹ And in order to corroborate how profound a mythical understanding may be, Patočka exemplifies his concept of the three movements of existence with the myth of Adam and Eve from Moses’ book of *Genesis*. Blissful life in Eden where man and woman, in the absence of the knowledge of mortality and without a need for differentiating between good and evil, dwelled under the rule of instinct and had no relation to time or the future: this is an image of the movement of anchoring. The expulsion from paradise is related to the recognition of good and evil and culminates in the necessity of toiling in sweat to earn one’s daily bread in awareness of one’s mortality: this is a very well executed image of the second movement.¹²²

For the mythical depiction of the third movement Patočka reaches for the myth “of the divine man, the perfectly true man, his necessary end and his inevitable ‘resurrection’.”¹²³ Along with Walter Bröcker,¹²⁴ Patočka refuses “the New Testament conception of sin as having come into the world through one single person, and likewise being removed by one alone,”¹²⁵ in order to interpret the myth of Christ as a parable of the crisis wherein everyone is involved and where what is at stake is whether human life shall be ruled by that which is or by the “truth of Being.” The God-man takes his stand, facing the fact of human mortality, but not by deriving from it, as the only possibility, the banal truth of *carpe diem*, hardening in his bondage to animal gratification of base instincts and to the everyday hunt for bread, but rather by fully embracing the human possibility of being free to leap over this animal level and live in openness to the whole of the world, to the understanding of where, unaware to man in his everyday existing, it draws its meaning. In this supreme effort he understands that “the event of Being [. . .] has chosen man as the locus of its appearing,”¹²⁶ and that only in responsible service to this “truth of Being,” is the fullness of human existence to be reached.

This confrontation has now the meaning of devotion. My being is no longer defined as a being for me but rather as a being in self-surrender, a being which opens itself to Being, which lives in order for things—as well as myself and others—to be, to show themselves as what they are.¹²⁷

Explicitly fusing the mythical manner of expression with philosophical understanding, Patočka goes on to say: “If the event of being is conceived as that with which divinity is inseparably associated, then it can be said that such a fully true man is rightly called the God-man.”¹²⁸ In this “truthfulness” of his, however, this God-man is perceived by the worldly powers as competing for world dominion, and is inevitably annihilated. “But he will just as inevitably rise from the dead: the truth against which the deadly weapon was wielded [. . .] is no *thing*, nothing within the reach of an innerworldly force of destruction.”¹²⁹ In this sense then, life in the voluntary service of the truth of Being does mean eternal life. The Kingdom of God is here already but everyone must perform the turn towards it on his own. Thus the “community of those

who understand each other in surrender and devotion, and, through the negation of separate centers, cement a fellowship of dedication, a fellowship in devoted service, which transcends every individual.”¹³⁰

At the end is again a reminder that in these mythical expressions Patočka's mind is set on the central philosophical problematic:

The goal Husserl meant to attain with his phenomenological reduction as a fact achievable in philosophical reflection is in reality a result of the communication of existences: their transcending into a chain of beings united not merely by an external link, of beings which are not mere islands of life in a sea of objectivity, but for whom things and objects emerge from the ocean of being in the service of which they communicate.¹³¹

Patočka substantiates the philosophical relevance of this mythical analogy in further elaborating his concept of the philosophy of history using the figure of Socrates. Plato's Socrates is to Patočka precisely that perfectly righteous man who lives in truth—exactly in that peculiar manner we saw already in “Negative Platonism.” He is the man:

Who confounds all those who think they know the truth, focuses his attack above all on those who think they can deduce new principles of life just out of the present, out of what is self-evident and given. Just those kinds of principles for life, for example, that it is good to pay attention to one's own self-interest at any cost.¹³²

His entire existence consists in provoking the community. And so this man, whom Plato describes as the most righteous man alive at the time, gets into conflict with the declining Athens community, the result of which is, similar to Christ, ultimately his condemnation and death. Both Socrates and Christ had a chance to avoid death: Socrates through his rich friends, Christ through his almighty Father. But had they done so, as Patočka explains in a private seminar,¹³³ the meaning of their lifelong effort would have been invalidated. Their devotion to the issue of truth had to reach all the way to sacrificing their life. It is only thus that the “truth of Being” may really be manifested in world history.

In his lectures and papers culminating with the *Heretical Essays*, Patočka shows how the phenomenon of Socrates' life and death lies at the very root of the intellectual movement that we have grown accustomed to calling Europe. I shall try to briefly outline this scheme of European history as conceived by Patočka. Plato reflects Socrates' legacy and writes the first systematic essay on the state in which people like Socrates, people truthful and righteous, will not have to perish. This will require an assessment of what truth means, and what the Socratic “care for the soul” entails. A brand new concept of soul is born, entirely different from traditional mythical imaginings. In Plato there culminates the setting up of philosophy as a power that was never truly a ruling force but with which “from that point on, even the unphilosophical life is forced to make peace [. . .] and in this way itself incorporates certain elements of philosophy.”¹³⁴ Only in Greece did philosophy originate and, despite the catastrophic collapse of Greek political power, its legacy remained: “the legacy of thinking [. . .] about a state of justice found not on mere tradition but on *insight*.”¹³⁵ This is the task

to which the stoics dedicated all their energy: they “were the tutors of mankind in the universal empire teaching universal human tasks—and this empire was once again to collapse.”¹³⁶ Meanwhile, Christianity came into being. This was accomplished by way of specifically molding Jewish religious tradition through Greek philosophy. Solely based on Plato’s doctrine of the world of really true ideas was it ever possible to form the concept of the kingdom of God that represents the realm of real truth and, based on this truth, to go on to start building the kingdom of God on earth.

[T]he very thought itself of the world beyond, of the other, true world, and the thought of a deity who is the essence of pure good—these concepts are to be found nowhere else but in Plato: here, they existed *initially*.¹³⁷

Usually it is said that European civilization rests on two pillars: one being the Judeo-Christian tradition, the other the Greek antiquity. On my understanding [. . .] Europe stands on *one* pillar—and that is because [. . .] Europe is life founded on *insight*.¹³⁸

In the womb of Christianity then, precisely because the Greek philosophical tradition of truth and rational insight had not been lost, modern-day science was born. The victorious conquest led by modern natural science was later to result in the effort to build a similarly successful rational theology. The meaninglessness of such an attempt at gaining knowledge of God himself in an exact manner, *more geometrico*, was revealed by Immanuel Kant. Next, Nietzsche unmasked Christianity as being nihilist. European humanity has found itself in crisis, and this crisis is a crisis of meaning.

As we have seen, Patočka pursued this problematic matter throughout his life. Hence it is no exaggeration to say that he developed all his phenomenological philosophy in order to solve this problem. But whereas he started his philosophical career as a devout Christian tackling philosophical questions supported by his faith, over time he gradually comes to realize that this position is untenable, and he attempts to formulate a solution which—although starting from Christianity—would modify it in such a way that it can no longer be called religious. This is the reason why he himself called his solution heresy. In his *Heretical Essays*, written at the time of the final unleashing of the full fury of totalitarian communist oppression, he managed to unravel and analyze the fundamental problems of our contemporary world that today are superficially referred to as the issues of globalization.

The chief objective of Patočka’s search for meaning is its totality, or as he sometimes almost apologetically says: its “absoluteness.” Already in the *Heretical Essays*, he builds on the insight he shared with Wolfgang Weischedel¹³⁹ that “every individual meaning refers to a global meaning, every relative meaning to an absolute meaning.”¹⁴⁰ His question therefore is this: Is it possible, after Kant and Nietzsche, to speak and think about a global or absolute meaning?

At first glance it seems that by identifying global meaning with the ontological plane in the third movement of existence, as reported above, the answer to this question has been already provided successfully. Proof was presented for both the global character and the certain absolute validity of the meaning of life and history. In the notion of the problematicity of global meaning the historicity of such a meaning was also grasped, as well as the necessity of human activity throughout history. Nevertheless, I think there is still a certain difficulty concerning the fundamental premise of the entire

concept, namely the *call itself* for the global or absolute character of the meaning sought. For if this global meaning were identified with the source of light that makes all things appear, were it identified with the “primordial truth, the condition of all the many truths and untruths, errors and illusions life is exposed to,”¹⁴¹ it seems to be neglected that just as this “original truth” is the initial source of truths, untruths, errors and delusions, it is also the source of meaning and meaninglessness.

This, of course, means both meaning and its absence in a relative way: related to human situation and action. Similarly as it was in the realm of Kant's moral theology, so also in a historical action based on the “unshakable gift to which nothing relative can be compared”¹⁴² the executor must decide using his own power of judgment, and this deciding will necessarily be hermeneutic in its character. Whereas in Kant's moral theology the categorical imperative had veto power and thus absolutely transcended the scope of the hermeneutic situation, in our present situation we do not have any such means at our disposal. For although that “initial truth,” the fact of *how*—and, most of all, *that*—this situation opens before us, is constitutive of our grasp of the situation, this does not mean that it would free us from the nonsensicality of the situation we may have gotten stuck in. Hence the explicitly declared problematicity of the “global meaning” in fact does not belong to the ontological plane. Problematicity is the absolutely necessary character of meaning as such: in order for meaning to be meaning at all, it must possess the capacity for being shaken, being lost; it must always be oriented, set up in reference to a certain form of meaninglessness.¹⁴³

It seems, however, that Patočka's “global meaning” is to be absolved from any such orientedness. In its non-existence, it is indestructible. It is explicitly set up in contrast to the awkward finitude of human existence. It is even said to manifest, to reveal itself, within that same fundamental existential state of anxiety in which we are confronted with the “final, ultimate, unsurpassable and irreplaceable possibility of absolute non-existence.”¹⁴⁴ As if the manifestation of the “global meaning” were to, right at the onset, remove or cover up the absurdity of death—which, to be sure, grants to a finite, mortal being all its sincerity. To put “global meaning” *above* the relative meaning and meaninglessness of a situation in the end means, in a way similar to metaphysical onto-theo-logy, the leveling off of the situated difference between (relative) meaning and meaninglessness. As if we were thus faced with the choice between the global, absolute (ontological, non-objective, unshakable) “meaning” on the one hand and relative, merely ontical and changing forms of meaning and meaninglessness on the other.

The question now needs to be posed whether this will not again cover up the precariousness of *possible* meaninglessness, i.e. the basic existential determination without which there could be no temporal structure of our being stretched between the past which cannot be undone and which gives our present its irrefutable meaning on the one hand, and the future on the other hand which, although uncertain, allows us to project a different meaning to which we could sacrifice our present meaning.

I take it that Patočka was well aware of these questions, and that the lack of any final conclusion to these problems was one of the main reasons why, after his *Heretical Essays*, he again takes up the matter of meaning in the *Two Studies on Masaryk*.

Notes

- 1 Jan Patočka, *Dvě studie o Masarykovi*, in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 12: *Češi I* (Prague: Oikumene, 2006), 341–422. An English translation of the second study, “Kolem

- Masarykovy filosofie náboženství,” appears for the first time in this volume as “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion” (95–135). An English translation of the first study, “Pokus o českou národní filosofii a jeho nezdar” [An Attempt at a Czech National Philosophy and its Failure], can be found in *T.G. Masaryk in Perspective*, ed. Milič Čapek and Karel Hrubý (New York: SVU, 1981).—Eds.
- 2 Jan Patočka (b. 1907) died March 13, 1977 as the spokesman of the citizen protest initiative *Charta 77* due to physical exhaustion following an all-day interrogation at secret police headquarters.
 - 3 Patočka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, trans. Erazim Kohák (Chicago: Open Court, 1996). [Czech: *Kacířské eseje o filosofii dějin*, in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 3: *Péče o duši III*, ed. Ivan Chvatík and Pavel Kouba (Prague: Oikumene, 2002).]
 - 4 T. G. Masaryk, *Der Selbstmord als sociale Massenerscheinung der modernen Civilisation* (Vienna: Konegen, 1881). [English translation: *Suicide and the Meaning of Civilization*, trans. W.B. Weist and R.G. Batson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).]
 - 5 Masaryk, *Der Selbstmord*, 146.
 - 6 Patočka, “Masaryk’s and Husserl’s Conception of the Spiritual Crisis of European Humanity,” in *Jan Patočka: Philosophy and Selected Writings*, trans. and ed. Erazim Kohák (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 145–156. [Czech: “Masarykovo a Husserlovo pojetí duševní krise evropského lidstva,” *Kvart* 3/2 (1936), 91–102.]
 - 7 *Cercle philosophique de Prague pour les recherches sur l’entendement humain* was founded in 1935 with the intention of intensifying the cooperation between philosophers in Prague of Czech and German backgrounds. That is why its official title was in French. Its collaborators included also philosophers from abroad, i.e. from Germany, France, Spain, and Russia.
 - 8 Edmund Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie*, *Husserliana* VI, ed. Walter Biemel (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962). [English translation: *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern, 1970).]
 - 9 Patočka, “Masaryk’s and Husserl’s Conception,” 149.
 - 10 Patočka, “Masaryk’s and Husserl’s Conception,” 151.
 - 11 Patočka, “Masaryk’s and Husserl’s Conception,” 152.
 - 12 Patočka, “Masaryk’s and Husserl’s Conception,” 153.
 - 13 Patočka, “Masaryk’s and Husserl’s Conception,” 155.
 - 14 Patočka, “Masaryk’s and Husserl’s Conception,” 155.
 - 15 This sentence is missing in the English translation.
 - 16 Patočka, “Masaryk’s and Husserl’s Conception,” 155.
 - 17 Patočka, “Výbor ze spisů T. G. Masaryka [Selected Readings from the T.G. Masaryk Papers] (Prague: J. Tvrđý, 1930)” (Review), in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 12: *Češi I*, (Prague: Oikumene, 2006), 452. The text has not been translated into English.
 - 18 Patočka, “Pokus o českou národní filosofii a jeho nezdar” [An Attempt at a Czech National Philosophy and its Failure], *Dvě studie o Masarykovi* [Two Studies on Masaryk] (1977, Reprint: Toronto: ‘68 Publishers, 1980); also in: Patočka, *Češi I*, 365.
 - 19 Patočka, “Josef L. Hromádka: *Masaryk* (1930)” (Review), *Češi I*, 453. The text has not been translated into English. Hereafter “Hromádka.”
 - 20 Patočka, “Hromádka,” 453.
 - 21 Patočka, “Hromádka,” 453.
 - 22 Patočka, “Hromádka,” 453.
 - 23 Patočka, “Hromádka,” 453.
 - 24 Patočka, “Titanism,” in Kohák, *Jan Patočka*, 139–144.
 - 25 Masaryk, *Moderní člověk a náboženství* [Modern Man and Religion] (1934), in *Spisy T. G. Masaryka*, vol. 8 (Prague: Ústav TG Masaryka, 2000), 134. Cf. also Patočka, “Titanism,” 139.
 - 26 Patočka, “Titanism,” 140.
 - 27 Patočka, “Titanism,” 141.
 - 28 Patočka, “Titanism,” 141.
 - 29 Patočka, “Titanism,” 142.
 - 30 Patočka, “Titanism,” 142.

- 31 Patočka, *Titanism*, 143.
- 32 Karl Jaspers, *Die geistige Situation der Zeit* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1931), 181. [English translation: *Man in the Modern Age*, trans. E. Paul and C. Paul (London: Routledge, 1933).]
- 33 Patočka, "Titanism," 143.
- 34 Patočka, "Před rokem zemřel . . . [A Year Ago He Died . . .] (1938)," in *Češi I*, 542. The text has not been translated into English.
- 35 Patočka, "Před rokem zemřel . . .," 542.
- 36 Patočka, "Před rokem zemřel . . .," 544.
- 37 Patočka, "Masaryk a naše dnešní otázky [Masaryk and Our Present Questions] (1946)," in *Češi I*, 87. Cf. the French edition: "Masaryk et nos questions actuelles," in *La crise du sens*, vol. 1, trans. Erika Abrams (Bruxelles: Vrin, 1985), 38–45; and in German: "Masaryk und unsere heutigen Fragen," trans. Susanna Roth, in *Schriften zur tschechischen Kultur und Geschichte. Ausgewählte Schriften V*, ed. Klaus Nellen, Petr Pithart und Miroslav Pojar (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1992), 239–244. The text has not been translated into English.
- 38 Patočka, "Masaryk a naše dnešní otázky," 88.
- 39 Patočka, "Masaryk a naše dnešní otázky," 89.
- 40 See note 3.
- 41 Patočka, "Masaryk a naše dnešní otázky," 90.
- 42 Patočka, "Masaryk a naše dnešní otázky," 89.
- 43 Patočka, "Masaryk a naše dnešní otázky," 91.
- 44 Patočka, "Masaryk včera a dnes (1946)," in *Češi I*, 92–102. Cf. The French translation: "Masaryk hier et aujourd'hui," in *La crise du sens*, 46–62; and in German: "Masaryk gestern und heute," trans. Ambros, in *Schriften zur tschechischen Kultur und Geschichte*, 245–257. The text has not been translated into English.
- 45 In English: Masaryk, *The Making of a State. Memoirs and Observations 1914–1918*, trans. H.W. Steed (New York: Howard Fertig, 1969).
- 46 Patočka, "Masaryk včera a dnes," 93.
- 47 Patočka, "Masaryk včera a dnes," 93.
- 48 Patočka, "Masaryk včera a dnes," 95.
- 49 Patočka, "Masaryk včera a dnes," 95.
- 50 Patočka, "Masaryk včera a dnes," 95.
- 51 Julian Benda: *La France byzantine, ou le triomphe de la littérature pure* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945).
- 52 Patočka, "Masaryk včera a dnes," 96.
- 53 Patočka, "Masaryk včera a dnes," 97.
- 54 Patočka, "Masaryk včera a dnes," 98.
- 55 Patočka, "Masaryk včera a dnes," 99.
- 56 Patočka, "Masaryk včera a dnes," 100.
- 57 Patočka, "Masaryk včera a dnes," 101.
- 58 Patočka, "Masaryk včera a dnes," 101.
- 59 Patočka, "Masaryk včera a dnes," 102.
- 60 Patočka, "Masaryk včera a dnes," 102.
- 61 Emanuel Rádl, *Útěcha z filosofie* (Prague: Čin, 1946). Emanuel Rádl (1873–1942) was Masaryk's pupil who, besides Masaryk himself, represented another major role model for Patočka, although Patočka did not fully agree with his philosophical views either. Rádl actively participated in social life and sought to apply the philosophical standpoint to everyday issues, to religion, to the problematic of social minorities, to the crisis in European culture, to education, and to social legislation. He was the chief protagonist of Masaryk's democratic, religious-metaphysical humanism. In the field of biology, he shared the neo-vitalist orientation, professed the ideas of H. Driesch, and wrote a very interesting book called *Dějiny biologických teorií* [The History of Biological Theories] (Prague: Mímo, 2006).
- 62 Patočka, "'Útěcha z filosofie' (Review of the book by E. Rádl) (1946)," in *Češi I*, 103. This text has not been translated into English.
- 63 Patočka, "Filosofie v Československu a její současná orientace [Philosophy in Czechoslovakia and its Present Orientation] (1948)," in *Češi I*, 712. This text has not been translated into English.

- 64 Patočka, “Český humanismus a jeho poslední slovo v Rádlovi (1948),” in *Češi I*, 115–121. The text has not been translated into English.
- 65 Patočka, “Český humanismus,” 120.
- 66 Patočka, *Věčnost a dějinnost* (1950), in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 1: *Péče o duši I* [The Care for the Soul I], 139–242. The text has not been translated into English.
- 67 Patočka, *Věčnost a dějinnost*, 145.
- 68 Patočka, *Věčnost a dějinnost*, 145.
- 69 Patočka, *Věčnost a dějinnost*, 145.
- 70 Patočka, *Věčnost a dějinnost*, 145.
- 71 Patočka, *Věčnost a dějinnost*, 146.
- 72 Patočka, *Věčnost a dějinnost*, 146–147.
- 73 Patočka, *Věčnost a dějinnost*, 153.
- 74 Patočka, *Věčnost a dějinnost*, 153.
- 75 Patočka, *Věčnost a dějinnost*, 157.
- 76 Patočka, “J. L. Hromádka a filosofie [J. L. Hromádka and Philosophy] (1949),” in *Češi I*, 127–135. The text has not been translated into English.
- 77 J. L. Hromádka, *Masaryk* (Prague: YMCA, 1930), 214.
- 78 Hromádka, *Masaryk*, 214.
- 79 Patočka, “J. L. Hromádka a filosofie,” 128.
- 80 Patočka, “J. L. Hromádka a filosofie,” 130.
- 81 Patočka, “J. L. Hromádka a filosofie,” 130.
- 82 Patočka, “J. L. Hromádka a filosofie,” 131.
- 83 Patočka, “J. L. Hromádka a filosofie,” 132.
- 84 Patočka, “J. L. Hromádka a filosofie,” 132.
- 85 Patočka, “J. L. Hromádka a filosofie,” 133.
- 86 Patočka, “J. L. Hromádka a filosofie,” 134.
- 87 Patočka, “J. L. Hromádka a filosofie,” 134.
- 88 Patočka, “J. L. Hromádka a filosofie,” 135.
- 89 Patočka, “Negative Platonism: Reflections Concerning the Rise, the Scope, and the Demise of Metaphysics—and Whether Philosophy Can Survive It,” in Kohák, *Jan Patočka*, 175–206. [Czech: Patočka, “Negativní platonismus,” in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 1: *Péče o duši I*, ed. Ivan Chvatík and Pavel Kouba (Prague: Oikumene, 1996), 303–336.] The study was originally intended by the author as a contribution to the almanac commemorating the 70th birthday of F. Novotný in 1951. As the “work expanded” and the author did not manage to finish the text in time, the study ended up circulating as independent typescript copy and was later used as Patočka’s contribution to the samizdat compilation on the occasion of the fiftieth birthday of Božena Komárková in 1953.
- 90 Patočka, “Negative Platonism,” 176.
- 91 Patočka, “Negative Platonism,” 176.
- 92 Patočka, “Negative Platonism,” 176.
- 93 Martin Heidegger: “Letter on Humanism,” in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (London: Harper Collins, 1993). [German: “Brief über den Humanismus,” in *Wegmarken* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1967).]
- 94 Patočka, “Humanismus,” in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 3: *Péče o duši III*, 710–713; also in the same volume: “Humanismus, pozitivismus, nihilismus a jejich překonání [Humanism, Positivism, Nihilism and Getting Over Them],” 714–731. These texts have not been translated into English.
- 95 Patočka, “Negative Platonism,” 180.
- 96 Patočka, “Negative Platonism,” 181.
- 97 Patočka, “Negative Platonism,” 180.
- 98 Patočka, “Negative Platonism,” 180.
- 99 Patočka, “Negative Platonism,” 195.
- 100 Patočka, “Negative Platonism,” 188.
- 101 Patočka, “Negative Platonism,” 200.
- 102 Patočka, “Negative Platonism,” 200f.
- 103 Patočka, “Negative Platonism,” 199.
- 104 Patočka, “Negative Platonism,” 202 f.

- 105 Patočka, "Negative Platonism," 205.
- 106 Patočka, "Negative Platonism," 206.
- 107 Patočka, "Negative Platonism," 188.
- 108 Patočka, "Negative Platonism," 187f.
- 109 Patočka, *Úvod do Husserlovy fenomenologie*, in *Filosofický časopis* 13 (1965), 5:693–701; 6:821–849; *Filosofický časopis* 14 (1966), 1:1–21; 3:289–305; 5:569–589. [English translation: *An Introduction to Husserl's Phenomenology*, trans. Erazim Kohák, ed. James Dodd (Chicago, Open Court, 1996).]
- 110 Patočka, *Přirozený svět jako filosofický problém* (1936), in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 6: *Fenomenologické spisy I* (Prague: Oikumene, 2008), 127–261. [English translation: Patočka, *The Natural World as a Philosophical Problem*, trans. Erika Abrams (Forthcoming: Evanston: Northwestern University Press).]
- 111 Patočka, "Postface," in *Le Monde naturel comme problème philosophique*, trans. Jaromir Daněk and Henri Declève (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1976), 168. [English translation: "Afterword to the French Edition," in Patočka, *The Natural World*.]
- 112 Patočka, "Přirozený svět v meditaci svého autora po třiatřiceti letech" (1969), in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 7: *Fenomenologické spisy II* (Prague: Oikumene, 2008), 265–334. [English translation: "The Natural World' Reconsidered Thirty-Three Years Later," in Patočka, *The Natural World*.]
- 113 Patočka, "Přirozený svět v meditaci svého autora po třiatřiceti letech," 277.
- 114 Patočka, "Co je existence?" [What Is Existence?] (1969), in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 7: *Fenomenologické spisy II*, 353. The text has not been translated into English.
- 115 Patočka, "Přirozený svět v meditaci svého autora po třiatřiceti letech," 319–325.
- 116 Patočka, "Přirozený svět v meditaci svého autora po třiatřiceti letech," 325–329.
- 117 Patočka, "Přirozený svět v meditaci svého autora po třiatřiceti letech," 329.
- 118 Patočka, "Co je existence?" 354.
- 119 Patočka, "Co je existence?" 354.
- 120 Patočka, "Přirozený svět v meditaci svého autora po třiatřiceti letech," 329.
- 121 Patočka, "Přirozený svět v meditaci svého autora po třiatřiceti letech," 330.
- 122 Patočka, "Přirozený svět v meditaci svého autora po třiatřiceti letech," 331.
- 123 Patočka, "Přirozený svět v meditaci svého autora po třiatřiceti letech," 333.
- 124 Walter Bröcker, "Der Mythos vom Baum der Erkenntnis," in *Anteile. Martin Heidegger zum 60. Geburtstag*. (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1950), 29–50.
- 125 Patočka, "Přirozený svět v meditaci svého autora po třiatřiceti letech," 333.
- 126 Patočka, "Přirozený svět v meditaci svého autora po třiatřiceti letech," 333.
- 127 Patočka, "Přirozený svět v meditaci svého autora po třiatřiceti letech," 332.
- 128 Patočka, "Přirozený svět v meditaci svého autora po třiatřiceti letech," 333.
- 129 Patočka, "Přirozený svět v meditaci svého autora po třiatřiceti letech," 333.
- 130 Patočka, "Přirozený svět v meditaci svého autora po třiatřiceti letech," 334.
- 131 Patočka, "Přirozený svět v meditaci svého autora po třiatřiceti letech," 334.
- 132 Patočka, *Plato and Europe*, trans. Petr Lom (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 85. [Czech: *Platón a Evropa*, in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 2: *Péče o duši II*, ed. Ivan Chvatík and Pavel Kouba (Prague: Oikumene, 2002).]
- 133 Patočka, *Čtyři semináře k problému Evropy. 3. seminář* [Four Seminars on the Problem of Europe: Seminar Three] (1973), in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 2: *Péče o duši III* (Prague: Oikumene, 2002), 413. The text has not been translated into English.
- 134 Patočka, *Plato and Europe*, 88.
- 135 Patočka, *Plato and Europe*, 88. Translation modified.
- 136 Patočka, *Plato and Europe*, 88. Translation modified.
- 137 Patočka, *Plato and Europe*, 90. Translation modified.
- 138 Patočka, *Plato and Europe*, 90. Translation modified.
- 139 Wolfgang Weischedel, *Der Gott der Philosophen*, vol. 2 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1971), 165–182.
- 140 Jan Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 58.
- 141 Patočka, "Kolem Masarykovy filosofie náboženství (1977)," in *Češi I*, 416. [English translation: "On Masaryk's Philosophy of Religion," 127 in the present volume.]

- 142 Patočka, “Kolem Masarykovy filosofie náboženství,” 421. [English: “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 130 in the present volume.]
- 143 Cf. Pavel Kouba, *Die Welt nach Nietzsche* (München: Fink, 2001), 141.
- 144 Patočka, “Kolem Masarykovy filosofie náboženství,” 417. [English: “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 127 in the present volume.] See also Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), § 50. [German: *Sein und Zeit* (1927) (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1953).]

9 The Gift of Eternity

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In the *Heretical Essays*, the sparse treatment of religion belies the complexity of Patočka's thought on the question of Christianity, as if the entire question was marked by an unspoken attitude of discretion. This essay proposes to understand his cryptic reflections on Christianity in the *Heretical Essays*, with an emphasis on his quiet invocation of Dostoevsky, in light of Patočka's essay "On Masaryk's Philosophy of Religion." Through an analysis of his reading of Dostoevsky, my aim is to understand whether for Patočka philosophy pronounces the truth of religion (Christianity) or whether religion (Christianity) guards the secret of truth against philosophy.

Keywords: Christianity; religion; Patočka; Dostoevsky; truth

We're always thinking of eternity as an idea that cannot be understood, something immense. But why must it be?

—Dostoevsky

I.

Quiet thoughts gather attention in ways other more loudly proclaimed thoughts do not. On one such occasion, tucked away within the *Heretical Essays*, Jan Patočka writes: "Christianity remains thus far the greatest, unsurpassed but also unthought human élan that enabled humans to struggle against decadence."¹ It is unquestionably a remarkable claim, as bold as it is suggestive, especially for a thinker whose philosophical thinking was never explicitly oriented towards Christianity, and whose own philosophical life was profoundly marked by discretion, the metaphysical sense of which exceeded the political circumstances of his internal exile. Rather than speak conclusively of an event called Christianity, however we might choose to understand its past historical significance, we are invited instead to consider the advent of a Christianity at once unsurpassable as a legacy and unthought as a possibility that still awaits us. Christianity would thus be yet unsurpassed as a past, and yet unthought as a future.

Patočka's claim becomes even more resonant in meaning when one considers its place within a philosophy of history that culminates with the catastrophe of Europe's project of the "care of the soul" in the twentieth century. Within this narrative, the idea of Christianity as thus far "unthought" oscillates between two possible meanings. One meaning would emphasize the "unthought" of Christianity as its proper philosophical suspense, for on this account, Christianity still awaits its true

clarification as the singular task that befalls the genuine ontological experience of philosophy. As Patočka writes:

In the question of being human, religious conversions (and all that goes with them, for instance artistic experience) do not have the fundamental importance of the *ontological* experience of philosophy. Perhaps for that reason, too, it may turn out that religion is subject to temporary obscurity until its problems have been resolved philosophically.²

The “unthought” of Christianity is essentially temporary, on hold, as it were, until an unfolding of insight would effectively announce the surpassing of Christianity through a philosophical thinking itself yet to come.

A second meaning of “unthought” would stress the opposite; Christianity must essentially remain *non-thought*, despite any possible clarification afforded by philosophical insight. Christianity stands as a reserve of meaning in its insistence on a self-defining ontological revelation beyond the ken of philosophy. Christianity would thus have the singular mission of guarding the secret of an absolute responsibility vested not in a “humanly comprehensible essence of goodness and unity but, rather, in an inscrutable relation to the absolute highest being in whose hands we are not externally, but internally.”³ This investment of Christianity in its own non-thought, or better: the investment of a non-thought in Christianity, centers on the interiorization of a transcendence towards an absolute without which genuine meaning and elevation above decadence would not be possible. This self-investment would mark an interiorization that could not be exteriorized, or thought, in philosophy proper, or else could only become exteriorized through the interiorization of philosophy itself, its surpassing, into a Christianity yet to be realized. Rather than consider the absolute in Christianity as yet unthought, we have yet to consider Christianity as the absolute non-thought.

II.

At the heart of Patočka’s quiet declaration stands the question of whether philosophy pronounces the truth of religion (Christianity) or whether religion (Christianity) guards the secret of truth against philosophy. In the *Heretical Essays*, the relatively sparse treatment of religion belies the complexity of Patočka’s thought, as if the entire question of religion was marked by an unspoken attitude of discretion. At first glance, Patočka would seem to distinguish straightforwardly between philosophy and religion, where religion is understood by Patočka exclusively in terms of Christianity, the only genuine religion. Setting aside the evident difficulties with this exclusion of Judaism (and Islam), the distinction between philosophy and religion is woven into a three-fold distinction between the sacred, philosophy, and religion. Religion, or Christianity, is the mastery of responsibility over the “orgiastic sacred.” This subordination of the “mystery of the sacred” (paganism) to the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* of God’s revelation (Christianity) passes through the historically prior emergence of Greek philosophical thought in Plato.

Following Eugen Fink, Patočka reads Plato’s allegory of the cave as symbolizing the incorporation of orgiastic mystery and the sacred into the aspiration of philosophy. Fink considers Plato’s iconic cave as an image of the “subterranean gathering place of

the mysteries,” such that the escape of the philosopher towards light, as the “path of the soul” leading “to eternity and the source of all eternity, the sun of the ‘Good,’” represents a surpassing of pagan mystery through a philosophical form of life and orientation towards truth. This incorporation of mystery occurs through a complex movement (the third movement in Patočka’s schema of three movements) of internalization, conversion, and transcendence. As Patočka writes: “The Platonic ‘conversion’ makes a vision of the Good itself possible. This view is as unchanging and eternal as the Good itself. The journey after the Good, which is the new mystery of the soul, takes the form of the soul’s internal dialogue. Immortality, inseparably linked with this dialogue, is thus different from the immortality of the mysteries. For the first time in history it is individual immortality, individual because inner, inseparably bound up with its own achievement. Plato’s doctrine of the immortality of the soul is the result of the confrontation of the orgiastic with responsibility.”⁴ This emphasis on individual immortality for the constitution of responsibility is critical for Patočka’s thinking and conception of philosophy as a transformative ontological experience. Platonism embodies a “new mystery of the soul” with its doctrine of immortality and commitment to a life in truth and responsibility. The origin of philosophical thought in Plato comprises the dual introduction of a genuine form of historical existence (human beings exist “for the first time” in a genuinely historical manner) and orientation towards the transcendence of eternity (the Good) through which the self binds itself to itself as a life of truth and responsibility. Where there is no orientation towards immortality—an eternity *achieved* by the soul—there is no genuine realization of life.

The relationship between the sacred (paganism), philosophy (Platonism), and religion (Christianity) forms a series of mysteries punctuating and propelling the course of Western history since its archaic Near-Eastern beginnings, yet only with Athens and Rome does Europe as a history of responsibility and care for the soul have its genuine origins. The truth of Christianity as an “abysmal deepening of the soul” transforms in its own manner the original experience of Greek thought in Plato. Centered on the care of the soul in relation to the Good beyond being, Plato anticipates Christianity: the anonymity of the Platonic Good becomes surpassed and integrated into the Absolute of God as Person—to reduce this complex transformation to one essential statement. Life in truth, as an historical life of responsibility, becomes defined in Christianity through an orientation towards the transcendence of God, whose gaze and word commands the self (back) to itself. As Patočka writes:

Responsible life was itself presented as a gift from something which ultimately, though it has the character of the Good, has also the traits of the inaccessible and forever superior to humans—the traits of the *mysterium* that always has the final word.⁵

Rome in this respect surpasses Athens, albeit incompletely, for even if Christianity represents a radicalization of the Platonic discovery of the “care of the soul,” the third movement of truth, and the “shaking” of the uncritical acceptance of pre-given meaning, its founding insight still remains insufficiently fathomed. As Patočka argues: “What a Person is, that really is not adequately thematized in the Christian perspective”—even as Christianity reveals the concept, or better: the problem of the person, its abyssal deepening, in an unprecedented manner.⁶ The reasons for this

limitation to Christianity's self-understanding are less than transparent in the *Heretical Essays*. A clue is nevertheless provided with Patočka's remark that "the Christian perspective" "powerfully presented" its insight through "images and 'revelations,'" or, in other words, through a thinking beholden to images and myths. Christianity might thus be viewed as a constellation of ontological metaphors awaiting a genuine experience of a thinking yet to come.

Patočka himself in the *Heretical Essays* provides only a sketch of this unfulfilled promise of Christianity. The founding insight of Christianity, its "abysmal deepening of the soul," is principally understood by Patočka through the concept of the person (i.e., care of the soul) as an immanent self-responsibility through a transcendence towards God. As Patočka explains: "The responsible human as such is *I*; it is an individual that is not identical with any role it could possibly assume." The non-identity of the self with its objectified roles and functions in the world establishes the locus for its constitution as self-responsibility in view of eternity. The responsible self shoulders its own existence in opening itself to a transcendence beyond the world of pre-given meanings and towards a God who sees without being seen, hidden, as it were, beyond being. This inscrutable transcendence, or mystery, manifests itself, or "breaks through," with the experience of death as an ontological revelation. As Patočka writes: "in the confrontation with death and in coming to terms with nothingness it [*the person*] takes upon itself what we all must carry out in ourselves, where no one can take our place."⁷

This emphasis on the ontological experience of death pervades the *Heretical Essays*. In the Fifth Heretical Essay, where Patočka invokes the spectral figure of Christianity, this ontological configuration of death is bound together through a compounding of Plato and Heidegger. Plato's presence is rendered explicit with Patočka's reference to the Myth of Er: the issue of absolute responsibility is "expressed in the myth of the drawing of life's lot." As Jacques Derrida notes, however, Patočka also refers obliquely to "the famous passage of the *Phaedo* (80e)" where Plato speaks of the soul as returning to itself, recalling itself, in the care for its own death (*melete thanatou*). In Derrida's gloss: "the soul only distinguishes itself, separates itself, and assembles within itself in the experience of this *melete tou thanatou*."⁸ If Plato's *Phaedo* provides the under-tone for Patočka's conception of death, its over-tone is audibly Heidegger's conception of "being-towards-death" and "the possibility of impossibility" that "possibilizes" *Dasein's* authentic being for itself. This Heideggerian "possibility of an impossibility" is appropriated by Patočka into his notion of the "solidarity of the shaken," the third movement of truth, and the elevation to genuine historical existence. As Patočka explains, the revelation of death allows for a:

Rising above decadence, as the realization that life hitherto had been a life in decadence and there is or that there are possibilities of living differently than by toiling for a full stomach in misery and need, ingeniously tamed by human technologies—or, on the other hand, by striving for private and public orgiastic moments, sexuality and cult.⁹

Genuine being towards death promises an elevation of human existence above the decadence of the world through the revelation of an "ontological difference" between being and beings in terms of which life can be regenerated as an existence otherwise than bound to its moribund pre-given meanings.

If this compounding of Plato and Heidegger characterizes Patočka's robust identification with philosophical thought, thus further reinforcing his declaration that Christianity awaits a genuine clarification of its truth through an ontological experience of philosophy, the progression of Patočka's reflection takes however an unexpected turn; for as Patočka continues: "Now, however, individuality is vested in a relation to an infinite love and humans are individuals because they are guilty, and *always* guilty, with respect to it."¹⁰ One cannot fail to recognize here a specific and silent allusion to Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov* and its celebrated statement: "we are all guilty of all and for all men before all."¹¹ Looking back over Patočka's genealogy of the care of the self, as delineated across its historical anchoring-points in Plato, Christianity, and Heidegger, what emerges distinctly is a "constellation-concept," or series of conceptual linkages, culminating with this revealing statement regarding the singularizing instance of subjectivity through an immemorial guilt and infinite love. This linkage brings together into a constellation-concept the notions of "the gift of death," "mystery," "responsibility," "caring for one's death," "inaccessible and superior transcendence," and "guilt." The individuality of the subject (the subject as self) is constituted not merely in standing before and shouldering its own possibility of death in the care for its own death. More pointedly, the self genuinely emerges through an *investment* in a relation to "infinite love," and this investment is sealed, as it were, by an original guilt. If, as Derrida once maintained, "Patočka deliberately takes an opposite tack to Heidegger" in the *Heretical Essays* by "reontologizing the historic themes of Christianity and attributing to revelation or to the *mysterium tremendum* the ontological content that Heidegger attempts to remove from it," this opposite tack, as revealed in this passage, strikes out quietly along a path towards Dostoevsky and the gift, not of death, but of an infinite, eternal love.¹²

III.

Judging by how the *Heretical Essays* ends, with neither positive program, shrill declamation or visionary prophecy, but with an evocation of the front-line experience of those shaken ("quiet, without fanfare or sensation") and the cautionary conscience of Socrates' δαίμων, Patočka would appear to align his thinking in the Sixth Essay, despite the gesture towards Dostoevsky beyond Heidegger in the Fifth Essay, with an unambiguous affinity to Heidegger's thinking. In his cryptic reflections on the First World War, Patočka recognizes the ontological experience of death, central to the Platonic experience of philosophy (Socrates) as well as the Christian experience of religion (Christ), as the "profound discovery"—or more accurately: *re-discovery*—of the transformative wisdom of front-line experience. As Patočka remarks:

The most profound discovery of the front line is that life leans out into the night, into struggle and death, that it cannot do without this component of life which, from the point of view of the day, appears as a mere non-existence; the transformation of the meaning of life which here trips on *nothingness*, on a boundary over which it cannot step, along which everything is transformed.¹³

Such "grandiose experience" alone is "capable of leading humankind out of war into true peace."

This ending of the *Heretical Essays* seems to leave everything in suspense, especially the question of Christianity. Whether Christianity equally comes to an end with Europe; whether Christianity still remains unsurpassed after the demise of Europe; or whether a Europe after Europe would require a Christianity after Christianity—Christianity’s spectral promise remains ambiguous, indeed, passed over in silence. In light of this suspense, what would come to be Patočka’s final essay, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” takes on a revealing significance. “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion” represents one of the more extended reflections on Christianity for Patočka’s otherwise discrete philosophical attitude towards religion.¹⁴ Unlike the *Heretical Essays*, where the question of Christianity figures briefly in Patočka’s confrontation with the development of modern nihilism, the question of Christianity emphatically frames the problem of nihilism in “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion.” As Patočka argues in this essay, with Kant, *der Alleszermalmer*, metaphysics collapses into philosophical anthropology; the absolute transcendence of God folds into the humanizing immanence of moral theology; and Europe succumbs to modern nihilism. As Patočka understands:

At the moment when metaphysics as the science of the highest being in regard to its essence, its inner determination, reaches its end, it is replaced by a new science of God conceived from the point of view of the meaning of human life in the context of the overall meaning of universe.¹⁵

Kant’s destruction of rational theology and onto-theological metaphysics crowns the historical transformation of Christianity from original ontological revelation to fallen ontic decadence, the beginnings of which Patočka in the *Heretical Essays* identifies with the fall of the Holy Roman Empire. This demise of Christianity’s *élan vital*, or struggle for genuine human existence against decadence, can be plotted along a conceptual axis of an increasing rationalization of God’s revelation, culminating with the onto-theology of the philosopher’s God in modern thought (Descartes, Leibniz, etc.), against which Kant set into motion his modern revolution.

Even as the historical transition to modern decadence becomes essentially expressed in Kant’s substitution of rational theology with moral theology, Kant nonetheless poses “for the first time” the problem of meaning, albeit obscurely. With this obscure orientation towards the problem of meaning, Kant touches upon (and with matching obscurity) the “ontological difference between being and beings,” but only in so far as Kant discovers the philosophical significance of the “finitude of being-in-the-world.”¹⁶ And yet, since the ontological difference in its veritable significance can only become revealed in an experience of the shaking of meaning through an existential confrontation with “being towards death,” Kant’s own attempt to surpass his avowal of finitude with his moral theology effectively inaugurates a nihilism unbeknownst to itself. Kant’s substitution of rational theology—the “foremost metaphysical discipline”—with a “new metaphysics” of moral theology prefigures the modern nihilism of Nietzsche’s “last man,” who represents, for Patočka, the apotheosis of the “evident conviction that only relative meaning exists, that is, relative to human life.”¹⁷ From Kant to Nietzsche, the ascent of Nihilism is continuous.

Nihilism, for Patočka, is defined by two essential traits: the collapse of the meaningfulness of meaning into meanings entirely relative to human artifice and an orientation towards the meaningfulness of being that reduces the totality of beings to

human manipulation and control. To struggle philosophically against nihilism would thus require an ontological catastrophe that would allow for a profound disruption of its totalizing logic of immanence and vital regeneration of human existence through a genuine experience of transcendence. Within the present age of nihilism, Patočka claims that:

A great thinker who for a long time dominated contemporary philosophy has shown in one of his masterful essays how the collapse of significance is made possible by a “step back” from the entirety of beings and the emergence of the distinction between being and Beings, which here is initially encountered as difference through “nihilation,” through the presence of *nothing* in the *non-interpellation* of things, in the fundamental disposition of anxiety.¹⁸

With this tacit reference to the essay “What is Metaphysics?,” Patočka appears once again to take his cue for his own response to nihilism from Heidegger. As Patočka continues:

In short, our life acquires meaning through the understanding of that on which it is founded, the comprehension of that which, in a hidden, privative and negative form is always there, but the inexhaustible richness of which reveals itself in the misery of our final abandonment to relative significance by virtue of which we have arranged for our provisional residence among things and established our domination over them.¹⁹

With this appropriation of Heidegger’s ontological difference of the “nothingness” between being and beings, Patočka’s thinking could be seen as operating within an opening breached between the essays “What is Metaphysics?” and “On the Essence of Ground.” But just as Patočka repeats this Heideggerian leitmotif, familiar from other writings and his conception of “Negative Platonism,” he begins however to gesture *beyond* Heidegger. In a surprising turn, and sounding a distinctly more critical tone than in the *Heretical Essays*, Patočka contends that Heidegger’s thinking remains beholden to “anthropomorphic metaphors.” An example is Heidegger’s term “sending” (*Geschick*), which Patočka unconventionally suspects as harboring a hidden teleological determination of “human intentionality.” In an equally striking contention, Patočka argues that “Heidegger himself never explicitly posed the question of meaning, the question of its possible forms and modifications, such as truth, purpose, value or property to its fullest extent (except regarding the concept of truth).”²⁰

The tenability of Patočka’s critique of Heidegger shall not be here of primary concern, whether Heidegger indeed fails to pose explicitly the problem of meaning. What catches the eye instead is how Patočka *recasts* an argument first deployed against Kant’s failure to pose explicitly the problem of meaning as stemming from Kant’s determination of meaning through the idea of purpose, or teleology. In a comparable manner, Heidegger espouses a teleological determination of meaning, to be sure, not in the form of the postulates of practical reason, but in the form of “anthropological metaphors,” such as *Geschick*. Patočka gleans the last remnants of a teleological idea within Heidegger’s eschatology of being. Kant and Heidegger, the former by way of concepts, the latter by way of metaphors, are each caught within an anthropological (“subjective”) orientation towards the meaningfulness of meaning; it is an orientation

that precludes an explicit confrontation with the problem of meaning as such. In the case of Heidegger, as Patočka readily acknowledges, one finds “indeed a truly philosophical understanding of the origin” of meaning, by which Patočka understands Heidegger’s conception of truth and the interpellation of “nothingness” in the revelation of the ontological difference. Nevertheless, despite this caveat, “we find hardly any indication of a possible future positivity of meaning.”²¹

Within this critical assessment, the expression “future positivity” is crucial: it marks the full weight carried by the problem of eternity in Patočka’s struggle against nihilism and his critique of Kant and Heidegger. In this particular context, “future” does not designate the Heideggerian horizon of “being towards death,” but indicates instead another future beyond death, leveraged, as it were, through a genuine encounter with death, or care for one’s death. This “beyond,” however, cannot be thought “metaphysically” (pre-Kantian) nor “morally” (Kantian), but must be grasped as a “practical” force within life, or, in other words, as a genuine ontological movement shaping human existence. For both Kant and Heidegger, eternity is philosophically incomprehensible because it is philosophically undemanding. In the case of Kant as well as Heidegger, the determination of the concept of meaning through the concept of purpose, or teleology, prevents any envisioning of a genuine “future positivity of meaning.” As Patočka argues, the full significance of Kant’s destruction of rational theology and institution of moral theology abbreviates eternity to a regulative idea of reason, or postulate of practical reason, namely, the regulative idea of immortality. In Heidegger’s case, the oblivion of eternity manifests itself more subtly. The lack of any “indication of a possible future positivity of meaning,” and specifically, with the conception of truth as *aletheia*, suggests that Heidegger’s thinking is caught within a philosophical impasse, perhaps within the impasse of philosophy itself: it stands before the nothingness, or shaking, of meaning, yet remains unable to convert this original ontological experience into an ontological movement of “positive meaning.” The truth in Heidegger’s momentous “stepping back” remains bereft of the living force of *eternity*, i.e., its *élan*.

In light of this critique, it is remarkable that Patočka turns towards Dostoevsky in noting that “in this regard, the elder Zosima and his pupil Alyosha, with their simple depictions of a turn toward Being, toward the neighbor, toward things, toward ‘service,’ can still be of practical use today.”²² The Elder Zosima’s teaching, as communicated to his pupil Alyosha in the *Brothers Karamazov*, promises an over-coming of nihilism, the modern oblivion of eternity, and the impasse of philosophical thought, as exemplified in Heidegger. By “following a path analogous to that of Dostoevsky,” Patočka envisions the possibility of a “future positivity of meaning” through a “phenomenology of active love.” With this declaration, Patočka effectively repeats in “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion” the same conjunction of Heidegger and Dostoevsky stated in the Fifth Heretical Essay. Yet, whereas in the *Heretical Essays*, this surpassing of Heidegger through Dostoevsky remained implicit, it is here explicitly stated and endorsed. As Patočka announces, Dostoevsky discovers “a new continent of hitherto unknown meaning” for philosophical thought.

IV.

It is not known whether Dostoevsky ever received the copy of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* he so eagerly requested from his brother Mikhail after his release from Siberia

in 1854, writing in a letter that “my entire future is tied up with that,” but whether he did or not, it is clear that his future literary works can (in part) be read as a complex response to Kant’s thinking.²³ Kant’s ethical thought was most likely known to Dostoevsky through Nikolai Karamazin’s *Letters of a Russian Traveler* (Karamazin visited Kant in 1789), which circulated widely among Russian literary and cultural milieus. Indeed, Kant’s thinking as a whole left an indelible mark on a vibrant intellectual landscape where philosophical and theological questions were inseparable.²⁴ Although Dostoevsky’s philosophically directed writings were aimed against Russian intellectuals of the generation of the 1840s, as, for example, with the parody of Chernyshevsky’s *What is to Be Done?* in *Notes from the Underground*, Dostoevsky’s counter-revolution equally mounts a sophisticated critique against a philosophical modernity pervasively associated with and symbolized by Kant’s Copernican Revolution.

In “Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” Patočka’s stages a confrontation between Kant and Dostoevsky, and takes his cue from the Russian philosopher Jacob Golosovker’s image of Ivan Karamazov as a literary representation of Kant’s thinking and incarnation of the self-destructive conflict of reason with itself.²⁵ In his study *Dostoevsky and Kant*, Golosovker pointed to the chapter “The Controversy,” the frequent appearance of the term “critique,” as well as other embedded linguistic references to Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* within *Brothers Karamazov*, as evidence for the complex ways in which Dostoevsky crafted his novel as a critical engagement with Kant. Patočka’s own development of Golosovker’s reading intuitively supports Jeff Gatrall’s observation that Golosovker’s study “gains its best insights on Kant’s influence precisely by ignoring the problem of influence per se.”²⁶ In “Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” Patočka’s approach to Kant and Dostoevsky eschews any claim of influence and stages instead a *gigantomachia* between Kant’s “deontology of reason” and Dostoevsky’s “deontology of the heart.”²⁷ Kant’s destruction of rational theology and establishment of moral theology heralds the age of modern nihilism; yet, it was “the poets [*who*] first grasped and expressed the metaphysics and the theology of meaning before the philosophers were successful in mastering them with their own means.” First among these is Dostoevsky, whose “originality is in this respect incontestable.”²⁸

In Patočka’s view, Kant’s thinking fundamentally transformed religious thought with his inauguration of a “new style of metaphysics of eternity oriented toward meaning” and substitution of rational theology with a moral theology of reason.²⁹ Kant’s new metaphysics of eternity is based on a conception of meaning determined by the idea of purpose and the postulates of practical reason. This relation between eternity and meaning characterizes the legacy of Kant’s destruction of rational theology, the philosophical eclipse of Christianity, and the modern age of nihilism. As Patočka argues, the “enormous significance of the collapse of rational theology accomplished by Kant” consists in establishing the primacy of practical reason and the question of purpose as “oriented toward the *meaning* of the world and of life.”³⁰ Kant’s tacit discovery of the centrality of the problem of meaning, obscured by an emphasis on the moral purpose of the world and human existence, follows from his thorough destruction of an onto-theological conception of God. In this assessment, Patočka shadows Dieter Henrich’s understanding of the historical significance of Kant’s critique of rational theology and onto-theology. As Henrich remarks: “Das ontologische Argument in seiner metaphysischen Form ist seither [*since Kant*] nicht wieder erneuert

worden. Noch heute wird es fact ausnahmslos auch unter Berufung auf Kant verworfen.”³¹ As Henrich demonstrates, Kant’s innovation does not reside with a novel critique against the two established types of ontological argument for the existence of God—the ontological argument of God as a perfect being and the ontological argument of God as a necessary being. Kant’s originality resides instead with his recognition of the conceptual *unity* between these two types of ontological argument. In objecting to the ontological argument of God as a necessary being, Kant appeals to the subjective-bound, i.e., critical, application of the concept of absolute necessity and rejection of any objective predication of necessity to God’s existence. The logical contradiction exposed within the ontological argument of God as perfect being (whose essence is said to entail existence) implies a gulf between concept and existence (“existence is not a predicate”). With this two-pronged attack, Kant establishes that the concept of necessity is a limit-concept of knowledge, not a concept that could determine its object (God). A critique of the limits of reason exposes God as an idea without a possible object of experience.

If Kant thus arrives in the *Critique of Pure Reason* at a negative conception of God (as not an object of possible knowledge), it is in his practical philosophy that Kant re-establishes a positive conception of God as a necessary idea of reason, given that reason has both theoretical and practical applications. As Kant argues in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, without the rational postulate of the idea of God as the moral author of the world, rational moral subjects would not be able to hope that the aim of their moral strivings could at all be attainable in the world. The achievement of the highest good—the congruence of happiness and virtue (moral law)—is however an aim of practical reason. The aspiration to happiness cannot be in conflict with moral striving, and yet the distance between what we can achieve and what is demanded of us as ethical subjects can only be bridged through a rationally justified faith in God as moral author of the world who completes what cannot be attained by human striving alone. God is neither a “necessary” nor “perfect” being. God instead comes to the idea, or better: the idea comes to God, as a necessary postulate of practical reason. The idea of God is justified on the basis of a *Vernunftglaube* that does not deliver a theoretical knowledge of God, but founds a practical orientation towards the world without which the meaningfulness of a (rational) moral life would be untenable. God is a necessary idea of Reason, one of the three postulates of practical reason (in addition to freedom and immortality). Critically, as Kant argues, the idea of immortality conditions the meaningfulness of moral life for it is only if we are justified in believing that death does not interrupt moral striving that moral existence can be saved from futility and meaninglessness.

Kant in this manner argues that morality necessarily leads to a form of religion based on reason. Among the various ways in which Kant understands religion, the definition of religion as “justified hope” illuminates this passage from morality to religion most clearly. On the one hand, “justified hope” can follow neither from theoretical nor moral necessity: the former because we have no positive knowledge of God, the latter because the idea of God is not a condition for the moral law. On the other hand, *justified* hope cannot have a basis in religious experience (mystical or otherwise) or biblical revelation. A rational justification for hope is only conceivable if happiness and virtue can be harmonized through the idea of a God as author of the moral world. Kant’s new metaphysics thus displaces Christian revelation as well as onto-theological speculation, theology and classical metaphysics, with a novel form of

metaphysics exclusively based on practical reason. The rational belief in God and immortality (but also in freedom, as the practical attitude towards ourselves that we necessarily must adopt) is inscribed within a *finite* moral subject. With this orientation towards the world provided by reason, a moral subject is able to over-come its own limitations through a justified hope in the meaningfulness of the moral world.

In his own discussion, Patočka underlines the centrality of the idea of immortality in Kant's moral theology and the harmony obtaining among the postulates of practical reason. Of the three postulates of practical reason (God, freedom, and immortality), the third allows for "postulating" a "spiritual life beyond the bounds of terrestrial life."³² Eternity becomes in this fashion substituted by the idea of immortality as a postulate of practical reason. The proper practical end of reason is the realization of human happiness in conformity with the moral law, for which the Idea of a moral God is required as guarantee; God thus becomes understood primarily in relation to human existence, and more specifically, in view of the meaning of human existence conceived in terms of rational and moral purpose. As Patočka argues, the transcendent concepts of God, Providence, and Immortality become transformed into ideas of reason, and thus, into "objects of the experiences of moral freedom and justified faith. Without these *realities*, without the objective ends anchored in these concepts, human life has no support and its meaning falters."³³ Kant's postulates of practical reason are, moreover, embedded within a philosophical world-view determined by an autonomous (rational, in the case of Kant) subject that devolves into Titanism and the Nietzschean "Over-Man"; the establishment of calculative rationality; and the image of mechanical nature as matter in motion. With Kant's substitution of eternity with the idea of immortality, the true significance of Kant's revolution becomes apparent: the immortality of the soul is no longer thought metaphysically (as connected to a metaphysics of substance), but becomes degraded into a postulate of practical reason, and hence, transformed into a "future positivity" marking the horizon of human progress within time, as defined by the ideal convergence of virtue and happiness, and underwritten by a moral idea of God whose meaning resides entirely in a relation to human existence.

The foundation for human meaning is the moral law, yet Kant fails, for Patočka, to examine critically the concept of meaning by attending instead to the concept of purpose through the postulates of practical reason. Kant's substitution of rational theology with moral theology finds "absolute meaning" in the practical postulates of reason. Reason establishes (for itself) the "overall purpose of creation." Even though "the explicit problem of meaning is alien" to Kant's thinking, it is implicitly recognized yet uncritically formulated in terms of the notion of purposiveness. In Kant's thought, the metaphysics of value remains anchored in a certain notion of eternity, yet since eternity is determined through the idea of immortality, as a postulate of practical reason, and hence related to a determinate goal, Patočka contends that "purpose is always viewed as reality; as the object of an action."³⁴ Purposiveness, however, is not genuine meaning since it reduces the mysteriousness of meaning, its source, into a definite and manipulative object.³⁵ On Patočka's view, any identification of the *meaningfulness* of meaning with objective purpose or realizable end inscribes meaning into an ontic and relative framework of human projects. The meaningfulness of meaning is decapitated from its source in a genuine transcendence towards eternity and the sense of an absolute beyond worldliness and pre-given meanings. Nihilism is fundamentally the oblivion of eternity, which has become an "empty phrase" that no longer "functions as an active impulse." Rather than "protect" human existence

through an orientation towards eternity, the silencing of eternity in the modern age threatens human existence, thus propelling human existence either to seek refuge in the objectifications and distractions of the everyday or to take flight towards the demonic and orgiastic.³⁶ In the first instance, modern humanity wallows in disenchantment; in the second instance, modern humanity abandons itself to fanaticism.

More generally, nihilism is “the evident conviction that only relative meaning exists, that is, relative to human life.” Despite this transcendental illusion, meaning as such “will always be shakable,”³⁷ but in order for meaning to become regenerated, a “shaking” of meaning must be accomplished in a truly ontological manner. As Patočka explains: “*meaning* is essentially ontological, that is to say, non-existent,” such that all values and meanings are posited on the ground of an understanding of “is” and “is given” that itself remains without content (and in this sense is “meaningless”), and yet is nonetheless positive (and in this sense is “meaningful”). The mystery at the heart of Patočka’s thinking can thus be formulated in terms of a double-bind that essentially characterizes the regeneration, or re-enchantment, of meaning that determines his central philosophical concern. If “it is clear that no human action is possible without meaning,” it is equally “true that without an absolute and total meaning all making of sense collapses.” “Absolute meaning,” without which any meaning remains without foundation, cannot itself be parsed into objectified meaning such as value, purpose, or any other meaning relative to the needs and interests of human existence.³⁸ Meanings collapse in an experience of the nothingness of absolute meaning through which becomes revealed an original difference between being and beings as the “condition of possibility of any truth.”³⁹ Only with such an ontological catastrophe of meaning is meaning paradoxically renewed and regenerated. Modern nihilism, however, is unthinkingly based on the self-convinced illusion of having definitively triumphed over this double-bind of meaning. Any rebellion against nihilism would entail a three-fold rebellion: against a moral vision of the world (the equation of meaning with purpose as with Kant’s moral theology), against reason, and against the sovereignty of human existence, or “Titanism.”

This philosophical critique of Kant’s thinking and modern nihilism is dramatically enacted in Dostoevsky’s final masterpiece. Following Golosovker, Patočka identifies the confrontation between Ivan and Alyosha in Book V, “The Rebellion,” as the centerpiece of Dostoevsky’s rejection of a moral world order based on a Kantian deontology of reason. Against Masaryk’s interpretation, who considers the conflict between Ivan and Alyosha a “matter of teleological argument and theodicy,” Patočka understands Ivan as the self-destructive incarnation of Kant’s thinking. As Patočka observes, Ivan ventriloquizes a Kantian argument against rational theology in rejecting an ontological argument for God’s existence as a necessary being; however, this Kantian critique becomes re-directed by Ivan against Kant’s own moral theology and its argument for the necessity of a moral purpose to the world. As Patočka stresses, Ivan “renounces future harmony and the God of morality, *not the God of theology*; it is a rebellion against a God of moral theology.”⁴⁰ Indeed, Ivan confesses his belief in God and a final purpose for the world, albeit not in any rational sense as understood by Kant. Whereas Kant argued that the postulates of practical reason are “absolutely necessary,” Ivan calls into question their presumptive rational foundation with his pointed question: “is it necessary for the world to have a moral meaning?”⁴¹ Ivan’s notorious appeal to the gratuitous suffering of children is meant to expose the absurdity of Kant’s moral theology since, on Ivan’s reasoning, the conflict between the justified

hope in a *future* convergence of happiness and virtue and the unjustified suffering of children in the *present* reveals the “diabolical” nature of reason. As Ivan asks his brother:

Imagine that you are creating a fabric of human destiny with the object of making men happy in the end [. . .] but that it was essential and inevitable to torture to death only one tiny creature [. . .] And to found that edifice on its unavenged tears: would you consent to be the architect on those conditions? Tell me, and tell me the truth!⁴²

As Patočka remarks: “Dostoevsky takes the antinomy of reason more seriously even than Kant, if that is possible, because he does not see in it the conflict between an illusionary world of the sense and the world of true reality, but rather as the conflict between two realities, two worlds.”⁴³

In the figure of Ivan Karamazov, Patočka perceives the destructive force and self-destruction of Reason: outwardly, reason’s destruction of any basis for rational theology and inwardly, reason’s “diabolic” acceptance of gratuitous suffering for the sake of harmony in the long run. In Ivan’s celebrated statement: “Besides, too high a price is asked for harmony; it’s beyond our means to pay so much to enter on it. And so I hasten to give back my entrance ticket, and if I am an honest man I am bound to give it back as soon as possible.” Ivan’s sickness unto death displays the modern tragedy of atheism or suicide. Bereft of any positive alternative, Ivan succumbs to an unbearable tension between the rejection of any higher transcendent world of meaning and the rejection of meaning as man-made and relative. What is needed is nothing less than “a new meaning to the word ‘divine’”⁴⁴ as bespoken in the “new continent of hitherto unknown meaning” mapped in Dostoevsky’s writings.

Patočka acknowledges, however, that in Dostoevsky “we find no conceptual, philosophical elucidation in the proper sense” and, moreover, that he himself cannot develop fully in his essay the problem of meaning through an “exhaustive explication of Dostoevsky.” Instead, Patočka sketches a set of reflections across “certain literary episodes” in Dostoevsky’s writings. Yet, if Dostoevsky’s promise does not reside with any philosophical development of concepts, what guides Patočka’s attention to Dostoevsky? Patočka does not approach Dostoevsky’s writings as a poetics, as a plurality of voices and polyphonic composition. Dostoevsky’s narratives are approached as presenting a distinctive form of “psychology,” not to be understood, however, as an introspective psychology or psychologism, but as the dramatization of a consciousness shattered and shaken by a genuine metaphysical experience of the “meaning of life.” In a self-declared unproblematic way, Patočka proposes that the defining themes in Dostoevsky’s writings “are explicable in a relatively natural way from the analytic of human being-in-the-world that developed later”—an unmistakable reference to Heidegger.

This methodological decision is, however, fraught with complications. For if, on the one hand, a phenomenology of active love in Dostoevsky moves beyond Heidegger, on the other hand, Dostoevsky’s implicit thought is to be illuminated from the perspective of Heidegger’s thought. Patočka’s suggests that Dostoevsky’s wisdom resides with the “paradox of culpability without guilt (the culpability of all for all) and the turn toward the positive, toward universal love.”⁴⁵ Moreover, “this concept [*love*], which he [*Dostoevsky*] believes capable of serving as a support for the Christian solution represented by Zosima and Alyosha, depends on a unique kind of phenomenology of

the meaning of life which, it appears to me, is neither Kantian, nor Christian in the traditional sense.” Yet, as Patočka further clarifies, the “key to all meaning,” as manifest in the experience of Markel, Zosima, and Alyosha, but especially, “by the ‘ridiculous man’ after his suicide in the dream,”⁴⁶ consists in an experience of the “difference between being and Beings.” Stated more directly: “In all of these experiences one sees manifest what a great contemporary thinker had elucidated in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*—the revelation of the ‘nothing’ as a guise in which being presents in its difference from existents, from the content of the world.”⁴⁷

The question thus stands: does Dostoevsky think the “non-thought” of Heidegger or does Heidegger think the “unthought” of Dostoevsky? These two alternatives would appear to be in tension: either to follow in the path of Heidegger through Dostoevsky, so as to think Dostoevsky’s unthought in the form of an implicit phenomenology of active love, or to follow in the path of Dostoevsky through Heidegger, so as to think Heidegger’s “non-thought,” its condition of impossibility, that is, what is impossible to think *in* Heidegger, namely, a phenomenology of active love.

V.

Lev Shestov once proposed that *Notes from Underground* registers the primordial experience of nihilism that would haunt and motivate Dostoevsky’s later novels. As Shestov remarks, “Dostoevsky himself was not certain even up until the end of his life to have truly seen what he describes as the Man from Underground.”⁴⁸ In his own manner, Patočka would seem to hold a similar view when he notes that Ivan Karamazov “represents a specific variety of the underground man,”⁴⁹ thereby implicitly understanding the problem of nihilism as pervading Dostoevsky’s entire *oeuvre*. What commands Patočka’s interest in the Underground Man is the portrait of a life essentially defined by “anonymous otherness.” The Underground Man’s violent outbursts of shame and pride, his suffering for and from recognition, and his erratic aggressive and humble attitudes towards others, whom he at once despises and needs, reflects a life determined by “das Man,” by everyone and no-one. As the Underground Man avows, he suffers from his own “heightened consciousness,” since he knows himself to exist at the mercy of others, yet this self-awareness remains in a state of paralysis. As Patočka comments: “The underground man is alienated and he knows it but this knowledge is sterile, morbid, simply a way to lacerate oneself, forced to feed on itself [. . .].”⁵⁰ Rather than understand “heightened consciousness” as a purely or especially intense psychological condition, Patočka considers the Underground Man’s consciousness as stricken with his own existence stripped of its attachments to meaning. The Underground Man is a “man without qualities” who suffers from his own nothingness, dramatically exposed, albeit tragically, since his own “nothingness” provides the source for the Underground Man’s self-loving pride and pleasure in his own predicament—a perversity of aesthetic self-enjoyment that prevents any genuine conversion or renewal of life.

This profound disruption of meaning is apocalyptic in its destruction of time. As Patočka writes, for the Underground Man, “nothing appears to him more naive than the desire to define any stable and precise human ‘interests’ from which it would be possible to unite and harmonize *pro futuro* human character, aspirations, and future.”⁵¹ “Nothingness is the substance of his existence,” and this experience of nothingness

exposes the “lack of ground” for what, from the perspective of the day, is self-evidently taken as solid and stable. The Underground Man knows that the projects of meaning are merely human, but that human existence cannot provide an absolute foundation for meaning. The Underground Man is damned to an experience of freedom that paradoxically does not emancipate, but further imprisons, his existence. The experience of nothingness that reverberates across the narrative, literally articulating its own disarticulation, evinces the crack-up of a consciousness afflicted by the shadow of a mounting nothingness that has yet to dawn into a movement of positive meaning. The *Notes from Underground* are written, spoken, stuttered from a strange kind of purgatory, from a space between the perspective of the day (and its pre-given meanings, faith in Reason, etc.) and an unrealized possibility of breaking open into the perspective of the night.

The narrative of the Underground Man chronicles an ontological experience of being-towards-death that remains on the verge of a genuine, transformative experience of freedom and responsibility.⁵² In contrast, Patočka argues that Dostoevsky provides a “concise description of such an overcoming” in *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man*, which Patočka understands as the “key to Dostoevsky’s concept of a ‘conversion of life’.”⁵³ Indeed, as noted above, Patočka singles out the narrative of the Ridiculous Man as exemplifying the disruption of everyday existence and the possibility of genuine conversion, read: redemption, of the self in Dostoevsky’s poetics.⁵⁴ While the Underground Man remains paralyzed within the amber of his inert experience of nothingness, the alienation suffered by the Ridiculous Man is more profound as well as transformed. There is a certain composure to the narrative of the Ridiculous Man entirely absent from the Underground Man’s narrative style and voice, who often pauses to catch his breath, suffocating, as it were, from his own testimony. The Underground Man is “wicked” in a self-professed manner, while the Ridiculous Man declares himself “ridiculous.” What makes the Ridiculous Man “ridiculous,” but not wicked, is the radicalization of his alienation to the degree that shame and pride have been outstripped, shorn of any stubborn self-consciousness and self-attachment. He no longer possesses any pride that could be offended or a sense of self for others, for which he could stand ashamed before himself in the eyes of others. Indeed, as he begins his narrative, the Ridiculous Man confesses that he is no longer angry and even finds “especially dear” those who would laugh at him.

What prevails over the anguish and irascibility of the Underground Man is the condition of absolute indifference and impassibility that has befallen the Ridiculous Man. This condition of indifference, as he recounts, came upon him “suddenly,” without identifiable cause or reason. As the Ridiculous Man recalls: “I began to feel and know with my whole being that *with me there was nothing*” and “that everywhere in the world it *made no difference*.” Patočka interprets this absolute indifference through the prism of Heidegger’s description of profound boredom in which “being as a whole” is disclosed. Heidegger distinguishes between three forms of boredom: boredom with things; boredom with ourselves; and profound boredom. In this latter form, boredom achieves the significance of ontological disclosure. In the expression “it is boring for one,” Heidegger discerns the breaching of an indifference in which all differentiation and meaning disappears. It is not that something is found boring, be it oneself or something in particular. On the contrary, nothing in particular anchors this profound indifference. As Heidegger elaborates, profound boredom “drifts hither and thither in the abysses of existence like a mute fog, draws all things, all men and oneself

along with them, together into a queer kind of indifference. This boredom reveals what-is in totality.” Plunged into indifference, boredom “envelops beings as a whole,” yet with such envelopment, there occurs elevation and transcendence; boredom also speaks in an indeterminate manner, or better: whispers a secret; as Heidegger remarks, “this boredom wishes to tell us something.”⁵⁵ Absolute boredom *is* this whispering of a secret that does not leave the self unaffected. The revelation of nothingness in absolute boredom surpasses the totality of being while simultaneously transforming the self who finds herself so embraced and touched by nothingness. Heidegger thus speaks of this revelation of nothingness as a foundational event (*Grundgeschehens*), or “shaking,” of *Dasein*’s existence that renders beings as a whole—the world—out of joint (*das Seiende im Ganzen zum Entgleiten bringt*): the world is neither denied nor negated but disjointed from itself in an upsurge of nothingness.

The Ridiculous Man succumbs to absolute indifference, yet through a transformative encounter, occasioned by a chance visitation, his impassable consciousness becomes not just dispossessed of itself, but mysteriously re-possessed, given new life. His renewed self thus becomes, as he announces, his “secret,” and the mystery of this “conversion of life” forms the plot of a narrative centering on the illumination of “the truth” one fateful November day. Returning home that evening, the Ridiculous Man looks up at the darkened sky and spots a little star that suggests to him to fulfill his earlier resolution to commit suicide. Not knowing why, but also not questioning why, the Ridiculous Man reasons to kill himself that very night—just as a little girl clutches him by the elbow. Although he recognizes the girl’s evident distress and pleadings, he ignores her and chases her away, stamping his feet and shouting. The little girl runs to another passerby and leaves the Ridiculous Man alone, who returns home and, sitting at his desk with revolver in front of him, resolves to shoot himself. This encounter with the little girl has imperceptively touched him profoundly. As Patočka’s comments: “One only feels as if somehow this nothingness, this lack of all meaning able to speak to us and thereby give us life, has *shifted*.”⁵⁶ What has shifted within the Ridiculous Man’s condition of absolute indifference is an unexpected sense of pity for the girl, despite his callous attitude towards her despair. Unable to understand this disruption of his absolute indifference in this inexplicable feeling of pity (“But if I was going to kill myself in two hours, for instance, then what was the girl to me and what did I care then about shame or anything in the world?”), he abruptly falls asleep without noticing, and begins to dream.

In his dream, he picks up his revolver and shoots himself through the heart. He feels himself being placed in a coffin and buried; he feels the damp coldness of his own death. Then suddenly a drop of water seeps into his coffin and falls upon his closed eye; and then another, and then another. Seized with indignation in his heart, he calls out, but not, as he recounts, “in a voice, for I was motionless, but with my whole being, to the master of all that was coming to pass with me.” His grave opens up and he is taken by “some dark” and “unknown being” into space. He senses that he has embarked on a “journey” with an “unknown and mysterious purpose that concerned me alone,” and although he was struck with fear, he nonetheless sensed that “something was being communicated to me, mutely but tormentingly, from my silent companion.” The Ridiculous Man is deposited by this unknown being back on earth, but an earth unlike anything ever experienced, a land of paradise populated by “children of the sun.” He encounters people whose faces “radiated reason and a sort of consciousness fulfilled to the point of serenity” and wanders within the lushness and splendor of

nature unspoiled. Enlightenment dawns upon him: “this was the earth undefiled by the fall, the people who lived on it had not sinned.” He is exposed and duly transformed by love and peace; the truth has been revealed. And yet, the Ridiculous Man harbors a secret, which he now confesses: even though he embraced and was embraced by a universal love for these children of the sun and an unspoiled earth, he confides that he in fact “infected that whole happy and previously sinless earth with myself.” He teaches these sinless ones to lie and brings suffering, shame, and strife to their world. As he recalls the final scene of his dream: “I walked among them, wringing my hands, and wept over them, but I loved them perhaps still more than before, when there was as yet no suffering on their faces and they were innocent and so beautiful. I loved their defiled earth still more than when it had been a paradise.” With the break of morning, he awakes from his dream revelation to find himself transformed: “rapture, boundless rapture, elevated my whole being.”

In his brief discussion of this essential story, Patočka emphasizes the aspect of *flying* after the ridiculous man has committed suicide: “Flight means that the heart, existence itself, being-in-the-world as such, has been *detached*.”⁵⁷ With this emphasis on, here borrowing a term from Levinas, “trans-ascendence,” Patočka understands the dream as indicating a “profound conversion away from existing things and their unveiling toward the illuminating truth of Being that reveals the difference between beings and Beings.”⁵⁸ This revelation of truth is transformative as a “dying to oneself and the world” for the sake of achieving a genuine form of existence marked by an infinite love, or *agape*. The dreamed “death” of the Ridiculous Man is a spiritual death as understood within the Patristic tradition from which Dostoevsky self-consciously draws. In the words of the fourth century ascetic monk Evagrius:

Our intelligent nature, deadened by sin, Christ awakes (to repentance) by the contemplation of all ages (what was, what is and what will be); and his Father resurrects through knowledge of God this soul, which then dies by the death of Christ, death to sin. This is the meaning of the words of Apostle: “For if we are dead with him, we shall also live with him”.⁵⁹

For Patočka, the journey of the soul, in its complex form of conversion and transcendence, marks the divergence between two fundamental possibilities of human existence: the alienation of human existence through instrumental rationality, objectification, and the relativity of meaning to human existence; and the emancipation and regeneration of human existence through the revelation of truth. In the context of Dostoevsky’s story, these two opposite trajectories are symbolized through the “little star” above and the “little girl” below; whereas the star represents the “higher” aspiration of reason and its false light (one thinks immediately of Kant’s celebrated remarks on the starry heavens above and the moral law within), the latter represents the “lower”—humbling—inspiration of charity without which human existence cannot genuinely *breathe*. In Patočka’s thinking, this experience of freedom from pre-given meanings, or the world, reveals that “man is not the creator of Truth, but someone who is abandoned to it or immersed in it [. . .] there where he is capable of renouncing all he clings to as his own.”⁶⁰ Being is *initially* revealed as the shaking of nothingness in *apatheia*, or boredom and anxiety; yet this revelation of nothingness becomes shifted from within, as it were, into the splendor of an embrace, or *love*. As Patočka writes: “Being is neither thing nor entity but what opens things and entities, binding everything to

itself with the invincible power of love” and in this regard: “Being is not what we love, but that *through which we love*, what *gives* us to love.”⁶¹ The revelation of truth, as documented in the *Dream of a Ridiculous Man*, is not the gift of death, but the gift of *agape* that is timeless or eternal. As Patočka explicitly states, immortality, in the content of this phenomenology of active love, must not be understood as the substance of the “soul” but as the soul’s *resurrection and gift of life*.⁶² Where there is no gift of eternity, there is no life that inspires being.

The encounter with the little girl, this visitation by an angel of death who *passes over* the soul, touching and transforming it to renewed life, exposes the Ridiculous Man to another kind of impossibility, other than the Heideggerian absolute impossibility of death that renders being *there* in the world possible. For it is not the care for his own death, understood as the gift of death, that transforms his existence. It is instead the absolute possibilization of an impossibility that regenerates his existence, namely, the possibilization of the impossibility of *love*, as rendered in his indifference to the little girl—impossible because the Ridiculous Man had reached a point of no return within absolute indifference; he is already dead, a “nothingness.” *Agape* demands the *impossible* and its force, or *élan*, is to make possible the impossible; hence the Ridiculous Man’s own incredulity regarding the veracity of his own dream. As Shestov insightfully observes, the dream narrative in Dostoevsky’s story represents “profound and powerful pages where the writer proclaims in a voice not his own what has been seen by eyes that do not belong to him.”⁶³

If we recall the passage from the *Heretical Essays* discussed earlier, we find the passage from Heidegger’s being-towards-death to Dostoevsky’s phenomenology of love elaborated *within* Patočka’s reading of the dream of the Ridiculous Man. In the dream’s spiritual journey from *apatheia*, or Heideggerian boredom and anxiety, to *agape*, or active love, Patočka understands the prelapsarian depiction of earth as philosophical allegory for an openness to beings through love—for others, for nature, and for animals—verging on a pantheism that one might detect in the teachings of the Elder Zosima. The Ridiculous Man, however, confesses to his secret of having corrupted the Garden of Eden; he is responsible for the Fall of Man and thus finds himself originally guilty. But it is precisely this original guilt and suffering for the suffering of others, the crucifixion that the Ridiculous Man takes upon himself in “longing to shed my blood to the last drop in this suffering,” that makes him “some sort of holy fool,” and hence the living image of an absolute impossibility and “non-thought” from the perspective of the day. As Patočka writes: “Nobody is exempted from the possibility of contamination for which the responsibility never ends. This and nothing else is the meaning of the famous doctrine, *impossible in the eyes of the moralist*, that everybody is accountable for everybody else.”⁶⁴

Notes

- 1 Jan Patočka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, trans. Erazim Kohák, ed. James Dodd (Chicago: Open Court, 1996), p. 108 (translation modified). [Czech: *Kacířské eseje o filosofii dějin*, in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 3: *Péče o duši III*, ed. Ivan Chvatík and Pavel Kouba (Prague: Oikumene, 2002).]
- 2 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 101–102.
- 3 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 106.
- 4 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 105.
- 5 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 106.

- 6 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 107.
- 7 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 107.
- 8 Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 16. [French: *Donner la mort* (Paris: Galilée, 1999).]
- 9 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 103.
- 10 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 107.
- 11 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. and annotated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (London: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2004).
- 12 Derrida, *Gift of Death*, 25.
- 13 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 131.
- 14 Other than in the *Heretical Essays*, Patočka deals occasionally with Christianity, for example, in the essay “Křesťanství a přirozený svět” [Christianity and Natural World—published in *Přirozený svět a pohyb lidské existence*, ed. Ivan Chvatík (Prague: Archivní soubor, 1980)], originally a conference in Prague (1972) at an evangelical church. For an Italian translation, see Patočka, *Cristianesimo e mondo naturale e altri saggi*, trans. R. Paparusso (Rome: Lithos Editrice, 2011). Beginning in the 1940s, Patočka contributed a number of articles to the journal *Křesťanská Revue*. See in particular, “Masaryk a naše dnešní otázky,” in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 6: *Češi I* (Prague: Oikumene, 2006), 87–91. [French translation: “Masaryk et nos questions actuelles,” in *La crise du sens*, vol. 1, trans. Erika Abrams (Bruxelles: Ousia, 1985), 38–45], as well as “Čas, mythus, víra,” which appears above in this volume in English translation as “Time, Myth, Faith,” 3–12. My thanks to Francesco Tava for these references.
- 15 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 95 (in this volume).
- 16 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 127.
- 17 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 125.
- 18 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 127.
- 19 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 129.
- 20 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 129.
- 21 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 129.
- 22 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 129.
- 23 The letter reads: “Send me the Carus, Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, and if you are able to send things clandestinely, slip Hegel in without fail, especially Hegel’s *History of Philosophy*. My entire future is tied up with that.” Quoted in Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: A Writer in His Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 224.
- 24 See Natalya A. Kutsenko, “From the History of Russian Kant Studies in the 19th Century,” in *The Receptions of Kant’s Philosophy* (2013), 60–66. For Karamazin’s cultural influence, see Vladimir Bilenkin, “The Sublime Moment: Velichestvennoe in N. M. Karamzin’s Letters of a Russian Traveler,” in *The Slavic and East European Journal* 42/4 (Winter, 1998), 605–620.
- 25 Yakov Golosovker, *Dostoevskii i Kant* (Moscow: Akademia Nauk SSSR, 1963).
- 26 See the presentation of Golosovker’s study in Jeff Gatrall, *Word and Image in Dostoevsky’s The Brothers Karamazov: From an Analysis of the Dialectic in the Novel to an Interpretation of Dostoevsky’s Confrontation with Hans Holbein the Younger’s The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb*, MA Thesis, Faculty of Graduate Studies, University of Western Ontario (1997), 3–4.
- 27 For a similar confrontation between Kant and Dostoevsky, albeit without any reference to Patočka, see Evgenia Cherkasova, *Dostoevsky and Kant: Dialogue in Ethics* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009).
- 28 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 100.
- 29 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 100.
- 30 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 100.
- 31 Dieter Henrich, *Der ontologische Gottesbeweis* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1967), 136.
- 32 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 98.
- 33 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 100.
- 34 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 126.
- 35 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 126.
- 36 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 126.

- 37 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 125.
- 38 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 125.
- 39 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 127.
- 40 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 103.
- 41 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 101.
- 42 *The Brothers Karamazov*, 244–245.
- 43 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 112.
- 44 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 113.
- 45 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 133.
- 46 See Dostoevsky, “The Dream of a Ridiculous Man: A Fantastic Story (April 1877),” in *A Writer’s Diary*, vol. 2, 942–964.
- 47 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 126. Benjamin Fondane proposed similar convergence, with reference to Heidegger’s “Was ist Metaphysik?” and under the influence of Lev Shestov, in this essay “Sur la route de Dostoïevski: Martin Heidegger,” in *Cahiers du Sud*, 141/VII (1932), 378–398. He would later recant this interpretation in reaction to Rachel Bepaloff’s “Sur Heidegger: Lettre à Daniel Halévy.” Might Patočka have known Fondane’s essay?
- 48 Leon Chestov, “La lutte contre les evidences,” in *Sur la balance de Job* (Paris: Flammarion, 1971), 29–97, here 34. See Dostoevsky, *Notes from the Underground* (1864), trans. Richard Pevar and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Vintage, 1994).
- 49 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 103.
- 50 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 104.
- 51 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 104.
- 52 In his brief remarks, Patočka does not pay any attention to the [second part](#) of the narrative and the Underground Man’s encounter with Liza.
- 53 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 104.
- 54 “We have seen in Dostoevsky how this flight into anonymity is disrupted by the very tendency that carries it, by this ‘distance’ which leads to the fragile negativity of the ‘underground man’ who sees intellectually through anonymity, but remains unable really to break free from its clutches. The next level, the ‘ridiculous man,’ already knows ‘profound boredom’ and anxiety. Then comes the turning point, illustrated by Zosima’s dying brother Markel, by Zosima himself on the day of his duel, or by the ‘mysterious visitor’ before his death, *but above all* by the ‘ridiculous man’ after his suicide in the dream.” Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 125, my emphasis.
- 55 Martin Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, trans. W. McNeill and N. Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 135. [German: *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik. Welt—Endlichkeit—Einsamkeit* (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1992).]
- 56 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 108, my emphasis.
- 57 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 107.
- 58 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 107.
- 59 Quoted in Denis Crnković, “Christian Apatheia in Dostoevsky’s ‘Dream of a Ridiculous Man,’” in *Slovo. Journal of Slavic Languages and Literatures*, 53 (2012), 45–57, here 53.
- 60 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 108.
- 61 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 109.
- 62 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 109.
- 63 Shestov, “Sur la route de Dostoïevski,” 73.
- 64 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 110, my emphasis.

10 Fatigue of Reason

Patočka's Reading of *The Brothers Karamazov*

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What gives meaning to life after the end of religious and metaphysical conceptions? This is the crucial quest of Jan Patočka's final study. His "phenomenology of meaning" advocates a relative, human meaning, yet one that transcends the egotistical enclosure in oneself. The most important source for Patočka in these regards is the literary writing of Dostoevsky, esp. his novel *Brothers Karamazov*. This article relates the quest for a "new" meaning to a critical reflection on reason and the nightmarish monsters it creates.

Keywords: Dostoevsky; *The Brothers Karamazov*; reason; nihilism; madness; onto-theology

What gives meaning to life after the end of religious and metaphysical conceptions? This is the crucial question of Jan Patočka's final study that is published in this volume for the first time in English translation.¹ It was written in late 1976, just before the philosopher's commitment to the civil rights movement Charter 77, which was to significantly change, and ultimately cost him his life. As the last major work that Patočka completed, and the first one to be circulated in *Samizdat* after his death, the study turned into something like Patočka's personal legacy. It is, beyond question, closely tied to the circumstances of that time—to the tragic death, to the evacuation of all documents from his flat (in order to secure them against seizure by the secret police) as well as to the subsequent formation of an archive of his writings.²

However, the study for sure is also one of Patočka's most remarkable philosophical pieces and it deserves to be read independently of these historical and biographical circumstances. The manuscript consisted of 58 double-sided pages, closely and orderly written.³ It is thereby one of the longest and most condensed pieces within all of his work, as Patočka, generally speaking, was more of an essayistic than a systematic writer. But most of all, it is the topic itself that makes these reflections stand out as his philosophical legacy: the quest for meaning in human life amidst the onslaught of either nihilism or dogmatism. Nihilism and dogmatism defiantly negate or affirm a meaning of life, thereby paving the way for all kinds of political or religious ideologies. Yet they both resemble each other precisely in their unwillingness to bear the openness of the question as such. And it is this openness, the confrontation with the abysmal depth entailed in the question that Patočka advocates in his final study.

A similar undertaking is already characteristic of Patočka's *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, which was published two years earlier (1975, also in *Samizdat*) and is arguably his most important—or at least best-known—book.⁴ Here everything is focused on the topic of history and the guiding question: Does history have a meaning? More precisely, the book is an inquiry into the philosophical foundations of modern civilization: Is the attempt to base history and politics on reason and insight, as was first formulated in classical Greek philosophy and taken for granted by most of the philosophical tradition, still a valid undertaking? Or is it perhaps all too evident that history is trapped in the dichotomy of dogmatism and nihilism? The first (dogmatism) is the hijacking of history by external ideologies (religious eschatology, political ideology of race, class, etc.), the second (nihilism)—not any less dogmatic—is the obstinate denial of any meaning. Patočka's answer to these questions is found in his somewhat grim hope that philosophical insight will prevail exactly in those moments when ideologies are unmasked, when at their deepest point they must finally show their real face as only cynical calculations of death—this is the leading conviction of his famous reference to the front fighters and their “solidarity of the shaken.”⁵

Patočka's final study then somewhat radicalizes the very same question. Meaning is no longer reflected through history and with the help of history as a medium. Instead, the problem is addressed directly: Does human life have a meaning? And if it is at all necessary for human life to have a meaning, then why? The answer to this is maybe even more reluctant and skeptical than the one in regards to the meaning of history. But the whole essay is a radical quest for this answer and concludes with what Patočka outlines as a new “phenomenology of meaning.”⁶ This phenomenology of meaning is a breaking-free from the metaphysical tradition and its quest for a “purpose of creation.” Or as Patočka states: “The problem of meaning as the purpose of creation, which presupposes a ‘true,’ higher, transcendent world, is wrongly formulated. Meaning as a purpose to which man ascribes the value of eternity, on the basis of the postulate of a ‘true world,’ is to be dismissed as a topic for serious philosophical discussion.”⁷ His own “phenomenology of meaning” is therefore the advocacy of a relative, human meaning, yet one that transcends the egotistical enclosure in oneself. The most important source for this phenomenology is the literary writing of Dostoevsky, especially his novel *Brothers Karamazov*. It is Dostoevsky's final novel, and it became the focal point of reference for an essay that also turned out to be Patočka's final piece. In the following, I will offer a closer look at this essay in interplay with Dostoevsky's novel. Before doing so, however, two further remarks should be made. The first refers to the title, the second to Dostoevsky's meaning for the late Patočka.

The title of the essay is “On Masaryk's Philosophy of Religion.” This is unfortunately quite misleading, since neither the discussion of Masaryk nor the philosophy of religion are really the essay's central topics. Indeed, Masaryk is one of the philosophical interlocutors concerning the question of meaning.⁸ But he is for sure not the most important one; next to Dostoevsky, philosophers Kant, Nietzsche, and Heidegger should also be mentioned.⁹ To put it a bit polemically, one could hold that the only purpose for mentioning Masaryk in this article is to create a dummy—the philosophical position of someone who, according to Patočka, misses the question of meaning in its full-fledged dimensions and all too easily escapes into the safe haven of Christian dogma. Also misleading is the reference to “philosophy of religion”: the article does

not at all deal with classical philosophy or phenomenology of religion, but only with the question of meaning, which was traditionally answered either by religion(-s) or by its philosophical-metaphysical surrogates.

Interestingly, the discussion of Dostoevsky in this last piece by Patočka is a variation, if not to say a revision, of his discussion of Dostoevsky in the *Heretical Essays*. The fourth of the *Heretical Essays* offers a short discussion of Nietzsche and Dostoevsky as the two main representatives for diverging, yet similarly dogmatic ideologies:

For Nietzsche, nihilism is rooted precisely where Dostoevsky would have us return: in the Christian devaluation of this world by a “true” world [. . .]. Dostoevsky proposes Byzantine Christianity, Nietzsche an eternal return of the same as the solution to the crisis.¹⁰

Whereas Nietzsche’s offensive is considered to be “itself nihilistic,”¹¹ Dostoevsky is here portrayed as propagator for a dogmatic return, that is, for the reinstallation of Christian dogma “by appealing to traditional Russia with its broken soul and with individuals who humble themselves before the great community which weighs them down and charges them with suffering for purification.”¹² In his last study, Patočka uses similar terminology when diagnosing that Dostoevsky was convinced “to have transcended the rationalism of European philosophy and to have found a way to the simple faith of the suffering and the humble.”¹³ Yet, this seemingly akin statement has an entirely different undertone in stressing Dostoevsky’s role as a critic of European rationalism: it is Dostoevsky who rightly diagnosed the fatigue of reason and who, as will be shown in the following, is the main inspiration for an overcoming of the fatal dichotomy of dogmatism and nihilism. Dostoevsky’s novels do not only articulate a valid critique of rationalism, but they open up the path to a “new continent of hitherto unknown meaning.”¹⁴

Conversation with a “Sort of Sponger”

“I feel fine now, only there’s a pain in my temple . . . and in the top of my head . . . only please don’t talk philosophy, as you did last time. Tell some pleasant lies, if you can’t clear out. Gossip, since you’re a sponger, go ahead and gossip. Why am I stuck with such a nightmare! But I’m not afraid of you. I will overcome you. They won’t take me to the madhouse!”

“*C’est charmant*—sponger! Yes, that is precisely my aspect. What am I on earth if not a sponger? Incidentally, I’m a little surprised listening to you: by God, it seems you’re gradually beginning to take me for something real, and not just your fantasy, as you insisted last time [. . .]”

“Not for a single moment do I take you for the real truth,” Ivan cried, somehow even furiously. “You are a lie, you are my illness, you are a ghost. Only I don’t know how to destroy you, and I see I’ll have to suffer through it for a while. You are my hallucination. You are the embodiment of myself, but of just one side of me . . . of my thoughts and feelings, but only the most loathsome and stupid of them. From that angle you could even be interesting to me, if I had time to bother with you [. . .].”¹⁵

This is a short impression of the conversation of Ivan Karamzov with a gentleman called the devil. It takes place toward the end of the monumental novel, in the eleventh of twelve books, when everything is forcefully set to disembody into the final trial—a trial about guilt and innocence that will not solve the problem, but, rather, further complicate the whole situation. It will only demonstrate that even the longest trials and the most forceful and eloquent evidence do not reach the truth, nor are they apt to finally judge about guilt and innocence. If, as one of the most famous sentences of this book holds, everybody is guilty of everything, if everybody were to be held responsible for everything, then it is clear from the very beginning that all investigations are in vain and that the only purpose they serve is to satisfy the vanity of persecutors, judges, defenders, suspects, witnesses—in short, to once again stage the *comedia humana* with all its paradoxes and ridiculous contortions.

Dmitri Karamazov is found guilty for a murder he has not committed. Yet he is not found guilty, he is not even really accused of a kind of murder that he has committed—namely the outrageous humiliation of the father of little Illyusha, a humiliation that is so deep and insurmountable that the little boy afterwards dies because of it. There is no causal nexus, no juridical evidence for this murderous deed, just a sensory nexus, moral evidence or evidence of the heart that the novel wants to advocate. Smerdyakov, the illegitimate son of Fyodor Karamazov and his actual murderer, is hiding behind the façade of the epileptic fool whom people do not want to accuse, precisely because of a desire for justice that keeps them from blaming the seemingly stupid and childish fool. Behind this façade, Smerdyakov is a cunning little monster: selfish, egotistical, and calculating. Is he guilty? Yes—if a judge had heard him confessing the murder to Ivan and if somebody had seen the money in his hands as further evidence, Smerdyakov would have been found guilty.

Yet at the same time, it is also clear that the novel conceives Smerdyakov as a mere tool in the hands of Ivan Karamazov, a tool that Ivan himself is not aware of for most of the time and that he only comes to recognize in the end with surprise and a lack of understanding. His impact on the creation of this cunning and murderous monster is crucial, but the imposition entailed in that story is so tremendous that Ivan cannot accept or fully understand it. It is Ivan's bewilderment that leads up precisely to his madness and the appearance of the devil.

Everybody is Guilty, but Some are More

Everybody is guilty of everything, yes, but some are guiltier and more responsible. Is Ivan guilty? Funnily enough, no court in the world could sentence him for what he has done. At the very least, they would not find him guilty for the murder. What makes the setup of Dostoevsky's novel so rich, is the multi-layered structure and the variety of perspectives that tell different truths. Yet one of the novel's messages, one layer of the story that is for sure not the least important, tells us that indeed Ivan Karamazov is the real devil, that he is the guiltiest character in this story. Being a writer and an inventive mind, he is the one who, at an early point of the book, tells the famous "Grand Inquisitor" parable, a parable that also prominently involves the devil. Most of all, however, Ivan is portrayed as the incarnation of philosophy, or more precisely, of Western philosophy.

Patočka's approach is insightful in interpreting Dostoevsky's novel not only as a deeply philosophical book but, more so, as an explicit confrontation with, and an

answer to Western philosophy. In his discussion of the novel, he dedicates a surprising amount of effort to the demonstration of how and why Dostoevsky conceived of his novel in this way. Patočka brings in direct evidence such as letters wherein Dostoevsky asks for the consignment of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and Hegel's *History of Philosophy* (and conditions his request with the words: "my entire future depends on it"), but he also looks for indirect clues by quoting dialogues from the *Brothers Karamazov* that reflect Kantian arguments or sometimes even fully resemble his formulations. These bits of evidence are important for Patočka's reading of Dostoevsky, because they demonstrate the author's will to explicitly build his arguments on and against Western philosophy. From here on, Patočka will then continue to show that Dostoevsky's attempt to go beyond the rationalism of European philosophy does not necessarily have to disembody into a re-affirmation of Byzantine Christianity; it may also open up the path to a new phenomenology of meaning by providing a philosophical impulse for the debate on the meaning of life after the onslaught of nihilism.

The whole setup of the novel and the development of the story is an apparent proof for the truth of this hypothesis: The eldest son Dmitri stands for everything that is bad about the Russian soul—he is passionate and intemperate, voluptuous, lazy, and wasteful. As such, he is a "truly Karamazovian character." Among the three brothers, he is the one who is always quarreling with his father, precisely because they are so similar. He and his father both desire money and both desire the same girl. Dmitri is also portrayed as a gambler and hazard-player, thereby representing a trait of Dostoevsky's own personality. The youngest brother Alyosha, on the other hand, is the main character and positive hero of the novel. He is the most loveable and likeable person who bewilders everybody by his gentle innocence and humbleness, representing everything that, for Dostoevsky, is good in the Russian soul, and that in the end very much serves as the future hope and almost salvific promise. Dmitri and Alyosha, oldest and youngest, stand for opposite sides of the Russian character, yet there is no doubt that precisely the "Russianness" is crucial for their personalities.

Ivan, in contrast, represents what is alien to the Russian soul: he is the outsider, the Westerner, the modernizer who, of the three, is the least emotional and has the least intimacy with the people around him, including his two brothers. Fyodor Pavlovich, father of the three, says in the beginning that he is most afraid of his son Ivan, not of the ill-tempered and hot-hearted Dmitri—and, as the end shows, he is right in his concerns.¹⁶ Ivan is the philosopher who, in the end, madly yells out: "Stop talking philosophy"; he is the atheist who accuses God for all the misery in the world; he is the propagator of human freedom and responsibility, depicting the church rules of the Grand Inquisitor as a tyranny of unfreedom, yet in the end he unwillingly and unknowingly creates his own little monster that rids himself of all responsibility. Ivan is the incarnation of Reason and Enlightenment, he explicitly wants to overcome superstition and obscurity, but out of all characters, he's the one who in the end is caught up in nightmarish dreams and ghostly appearances.

Fatigue and the Dream of Reason

El sueño de la razón produce monstruos, is the title of the best-known sketch from Goya's series of *Caprichos*. One could easily imagine Ivan Karamazov sitting there in the center of that sketch in the place of the sleeping painter himself. An extra ingredient of the Spanish sentence is the double meaning of *sueño*: it could mean "the fatigue of

reason, the sleep of reason creates monsters,” which would be the more enlightened version and probably the one that Goya himself had in mind. Yet *sueño* can also be understood as “dream,” which would then indicate that the dream, the ideal of reason itself produces its nasty monsters, the flattering owls and bats that inhabit Goya’s sketch with their blinking, devilish eyes. For the context of Ivan’s nightmarish encounter with the devil and the general portrayal of his personality, it is not necessary to make a choice between these two different variants. It seems that Dostoevsky’s novel oscillates between both meanings, exactly with the person of Ivan demonstrating their nexus: the enlightened vision and sunny dream of reason out of an inner necessity mutates into a frightening nightmare and general exhaustion.

When the novel approaches its end, the self-sustained propagator of reason is overcome by a fatigue that creeps into him and his whole environment, leading to madness and nightmarish visions. How does one mobilize and overcome the general fatigue? How is one still able to move when faced with a paralyzing immobility and motionlessness (moving-lessness) that Patočka nicely depicts as the outstanding characteristic in the situation of Dostoevsky’s Underground-Man? How to react when facing a gentleman like this?:

Some gentleman, or, rather a certain type of Russian gentleman, no longer young, *qui frisait la cinquantaine*, as the French say, with not too much gray in his dark, rather long, and still thick hair, and with a pointed beard. He was wearing a sort of brown jacket, evidently from the best of tailors, but already shabby, made approximately three years ago and already completely out of fashion [. . .]. His linen, his long, scarflike necktie, all was just what every stylish gentleman would wear, but, on closer inspection, the linen was a bit dirty and the wide scarf was quite threadbare.¹⁷

That is the devil, or rather it is Ivan’s devil—a tired person himself, his best years are over, but more than everything else, he is a very tiresome person. How to get rid of him? Meeting that type of gentleman, one might suspect that no courageous heroism will help to fight him off, no last and decisive battle for which one must mobilize. Ivan gets furious and yells at him, the sleazy guy just keeps on talking about good manners. All attempts at a once-and-for-all solution of the problem are obviously hopeless. Being confronted with that shabby existence is like fighting off moths that live off almost nothing, but permeate throughout everything. The paralyzing effect is profound. How is it possible to mobilize at all, or how to only move in that situation? At the end of the conversation, Ivan desperately throws a glass at the devil, but the sleazy guy is certainly not very impressed:

Ah, mais c’est bête enfin!, the latter exclaimed, jumping up from the sofa and shaking the spatters of tea off himself. “He remembered Luther’s inkstand! He considers me a dream and he throws glasses at a dream! Just like a woman!”¹⁸

Ivan’s final reaction fails as well. Yet the gesture itself is of utmost importance: it is an imitating gesture, once again an imitation of the West, recalling the one in history who stands most for the proclaimed enlightening of religion. But not only that—the reader also gets a clear response to that gesture, articulated by the shabby devil-guy himself who lets Ivan know in the aristocratic language of French: “Well, what you do, is just

stupid and childish.” It is certainly not an exaggeration to take this as an answer to “the West.” If Luther’s legendary resoluteness¹⁹ was really apt to fight off the devil, it must have been somebody else, not this tired and tiresome, greasy and run-down existence who indignantly complains about rheumatism and bad manners.

Luther took the devil for real, while Ivan, more enlightened than Luther, tries to convince himself all the time that this guy only consists of his own feelings and thoughts (the nastiest of them, as stated in the quote from their conversation). Nevertheless, the sleazy guy is damned real for him, more real maybe than Luther’s devil, who is so nice and reliable to simply disappear because of a flying inkstand. Ivan’s sleazy and tired devil is as real and as frightening as the nightmarish bewilderments that overcome a person in a suicidal mood.²⁰ There might be no objective proof for the inescapability and the hopelessness of the situation that the suicidal person him-/herself feels, but the inescapability is his/her only and overwhelming reality: *El sueño de la razón produce monstruos*. The monsters of sleep/dream are reality, in the same way as sleep and dream themselves are reality. An all overwhelming fatigue and exhaustion produces its own reality. Reason might want to explain it away, but what might work for the alert Martin Luther and his alert devil is a hopeless undertaking in the case of Ivan’s greasy, tired, and tiresome existence.

Dostoevsky as a writer is witty enough to maintain that ambiguous and undecided situation. The devil is Ivan’s reality, no doubt, and the further development proves the truth of his appearance. Yet at the same time, he certainly is a mere dream and appearance. Once the nightmarish events slowly, slowly come to an end—Alyosha has been banging at Ivan’s door for a long time—Ivan awakes and everything is as it was before: the glass is still on the table, in one piece and unmoved, the wet towel that Ivan had used to cover his head and fight off the nightmare is in the other corner of the room, unused and dry. Alyosha comes in, moved and almost shaking as he brings the news of Smerdyakov’s suicide. Ivan remains unmoved, motionless and emotionless: “I knew he had hanged himself,” is his only answer after a while. “Yes, he told me. He told me so just now.”²¹ Who is he? What is dream, what is reality? And who, above all, is dreamer and who is monster? Smerdyakov is Ivan’s little monster, a monster that he created, but it is also Smerdyakov’s deed that, when fully revealed, points to Ivan as the real monster. Smerdyakov’s second deed, his suicide, runs in parallel, simultaneously and like a mirror reflection, to Ivan’s meeting with the devil. Both of them, Ivan and Smerdyakov, are overcome by the same inescapability and motionlessness (in the double sense of not moving and not being moved), the suicidal mood. After this, Smerdyakov is dead, literally, and Ivan has also died, metaphorically.

The old Ivan who famously wanted to return his entrance ticket has died during the encounter with the devil. It is an outstanding literary depiction of what Patočka calls shaking, conversion or metanoia. It is an existential shaking, Ivan’s confrontation with himself in the guise of a shabby, run-down devil. The above quoted conversation of Ivan with the “sort of sponger” ends with his saying: “if only I had time to waste on you [. . .].”²² As a sentence spoken to himself, it is a great illustration of the will to get rid of oneself, of what Heidegger calls *Verfallenheit* (fallenness), that is, an ongoing escape from the responsibility for our own being. The Ivan after this shaking is a different person. Pathetically, one might call him a better person: he starts getting involved in actively working on the liberation of his brother in prison, Mitya, and for the first time he seems to build up real human relationships of love and care. The apparent change then culminates in his testimony at court where he accuses himself of being the

murderer. For a moment people even tend to believe him, but when he is asked about a witness for this, he can only refer to the devil—and is carried out of the building as a madman.

Morality, Love, and Fundamental Ontology

It is obvious that the depiction of moral catharsis is an essential element of Dostoevsky's intention with the character of Ivan. Ivan is meant to go through his crisis and come out of it as a renewed person, showing repentance and asking for forgiveness. The pattern becomes even clearer when drawing the obvious parallel to Raskolnikov, the main character of *Crime and Punishment*, who after long and convulsive reflections finally takes over responsibility for his immoral ("extra-moral") deed of murdering the old "louse." Yet Patočka insists on the fact that *Brothers Karamazov* should not only and not merely be read under this moral (or moralistic) point of view. It is his conviction that the novel obtains a "unique kind of phenomenology,"²³ the descriptive focus of which is not morality in the traditional sense (as proper behavior or doing the "right" and "good" thing), but the overcoming of alienation, a new positivity and fullness of life.

An insightful example of this is his interpretation of Dostoevsky's *Dream of a Ridiculous Man*. Patočka fully centers his reading around the crucial scene of the delayed suicide. Instead of shooting himself, the ridiculous man sits down in his chair, falls asleep, and starts dreaming—a dream of his own suicide continued by a flight, his detaching from earth, which finally leads to a change of his overall attitude. His dream also contains the famous parable of the innocent twin earth where people cannot lie—until a single lie ruins everything. The narrator then awakens, and it is as if he embodied the counterexample of the person who has ruined the twin earth with his lie. Speaking in a moral language, the ridiculous man awakens as a "good" person: he cares, cares for himself and the people around him. He wants to make the world a better place. Sleep and dream have brought about a fundamental change of the ridiculous man. Only in sleep and dream does the ridiculous man awaken to become a "better," "fuller," true human being. There is obviously a moral dimension involved in this happening, and in fact this moral reading was probably one of Dostoevsky's own leading intentions. Patočka, however, insists that the conversion should be seen in relation to a "deeper" change. What Dostoevsky's novels offer is for him indeed the literary-phenomenological discovery of a "new continent of hitherto unknown meaning":

It is now clear that this has nothing to do with some mystical fantasy, but with a profound conversion away from existent things and their unveiling toward the illuminating truth of Being that reveals the difference between beings and Being. This is the difference that forms the proper being of the human being, the fundamental possibility embedded in the structure of human life and realized on the ground of limit-experiences that provide access to the triple alienation from oneself, from others, and from Being.²⁴

As in the case of Ivan Karamazov, it is a dream that brings about the fundamental change. For Patočka, however, the dream is far from delivering any kind of divinatory or revelatory experience. It is the literary depiction of an existential experience, an uprooting within which all worldly and egotistic (in the sense of ego-related, not as a

value judgment) relations are transcended. Therefore, the overall happening of Ivan's existential breakthrough is not a moral one, but has an ontological meaning. The proclaimed "new meaning of life" is exactly this ontological opening. The language in which this is depicted, might come close to the spheres of morality and traditional Christianity. But the opening entailed in this movement is one that transcends these established doctrines:

While it undoubtedly deals with gaining life's meaning via an overcoming of the threefold alienation, thus with approaching and connecting to other people and things in the world, the traditional Christian concepts, such as transcendent divinity and immortality, seem to represent marginal ideals here rather than the foundation on which everything rests. Rather, this foundation is positivity, openness, and love.²⁵

This love then could be further qualified by saying that it is love primarily in the sense of that "through which we love, what gives us to love, and on the basis of which we let things be what they are."²⁶ For Patočka, who only mentions the whole devil episode once, in passing and against a fully different background, the main examples for this existential happening in the *Brothers Karamazov* are the characters of Staretz Zosima and his brother Markel. The crucial episode is Zosima's long recollection of his brother's death, an experience that not only changed the dying Markel himself but also had a life-long impact on Zosima.²⁷ The highlighting of these experiences of a "breakthrough" is plausible and convincing because they serve as outstanding examples for the conversion of life. The breakthrough's dramatic peak in the novel is probably the episode of Zosima's duel as a young man; after his rival shoots at him, Zosima renounces shooting back himself and throws his pistol into the trees. All this happens after a night of true conversion, where he remembers the meek words ("am I worthy of being served?") and the humble dying of this brother. It is as if "a sharp needle" went through his soul:

How did I deserve that another man, just like me, the image and likeness of God, should serve me? [. . .] Truly each of us is guilty before everyone and for everyone, only people do not know it, and if they knew it, the world would at once become paradise. [. . .] I was setting out to kill a kind, intelligent, noble man, who was not at fault before me in any way, thereby depriving his wife of happiness forever, tormenting and killing her.²⁸

It is true that this kind of experience leads to a new fullness, an openness to life that one might also characterize, with Patočka, as an openness to Being. After his throwing away of the pistol, the young Zosima is in an almost ecstatic mood, rejoicing at the whole world, crying and shouting:

Gentlemen, [. . .] look at the divine gifts around us: the clear sky, the fresh air, the tender grass, the birds, nature is beautiful and sinless, and we, we alone, are godless and foolish [. . .] we shall embrace each other and weep.²⁹

Zosima's ecstatic outcry breaks off and he continues his recollection with the words: "I wanted to go on but I could not, so much sweetness, so much youngness even took

my breath away, and in my heart there was such happiness as I had never felt before in all my life.”

This can certainly stand for an intimate description of an existential breakthrough, a shattering or shaking that is an essential reference in many of Patočka’s philosophical analyses. It is also clear that the conversion has a “deeper” dimension in the sense of offering more than a mere moral (or moralistic) point of view. Indeed, Zosima has become “a better person.” But it would be shortsighted to restrict his change to good conduct. After his nightly conversion, Zosima is a completely different person; he sees the world with different eyes, and deeply resembles the ridiculous man after his delayed suicide and the awakening through and in his sleep/dream. As his ecstatic appraisals show, the whole world has turned into a different place for him. Once again, there is a moral dimension involved here, but the morality in question is not one of merit, reward, and punishment: “Each of us is guilty before everyone and for everyone” is the insight of a morality that at the same time transcends morality. Its radicalized extension is entailed in the additional line: “Indeed, I am perhaps the most guilty of all.”³⁰ It is obvious that this claim entails an answer to, and a sweeping rejection of, Kant’s practical philosophy.

Yet, is it really convincing that Patočka wants to understand this turn independent of the Christian tradition? At any rate, the similarity of the conviction of “everybody guilty before everyone and for everyone” to the Christian dogma of primordial guilt cannot be missed. And when speaking about the “new continent of meaning,” it is at least an unfortunate choice to exclusively refer to Zosima who, with his whole life as a monk, stands explicitly for Christianity, and in his teaching refers to it at any instance. For Zosima, the question of meaning has been answered. To him, meaning is service to God, the carrying out of God’s will and the work for the realization of his kingdom.

This message is already entailed in the sentence that precedes the whole novel as a motto: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”³¹ Jesus says these words just before his death. They may be seen as his consent to the following ordeal. According to the Christian doctrine, Jesus thereby takes upon himself the primordial sin, he shoulders the most innocent acts as if he were “the most guilty of all.” It is not by chance that the novel has this motto and that Zosima acts like the incarnation of its inner truth.

Certainly, there might be a reading of the novel that tries to understand this sentence independent of the Christian context. This is what Patočka advocates in his study. It is an attempt at a philosophical interpretation of the novel that transcends its embeddedness in the Christian tradition or, alternatively, Dostoevsky’s alleged renewal and resuscitation of that Christian heritage. Yet, precisely such an attempt should then not be based too narrowly on one person (the monk Zosima), but rather pay more attention to the variety of characters and their different answers. This is where the discussion leads back to Ivan Karamazov. If Zosima is the embodiment of Christianity, then Ivan is the devilish incarnation of philosophy. He also experiences an “awakening,” but it is an awakening in nightmare that is caused by a general fatigue. The story of his conversion has different sources and it leads to a somewhat different result. It is Ivan’s character who might tell us the most about the proclaimed “new phenomenology of meaning.” But first of all, he has to go through his breakdown, a breakdown that also stands for the fatal and inevitable collapse of philosophy—or, at least, of a certain kind of philosophy.

The Collapse of Philosophy and/as Moral Theology

Long before Ivan has the phantasmagoric dream of the devil, he is presented as a dreamer in a different sense. It is not a fatigue of reason that speaks out of him, but quite the opposite: a very clear and distinct dream, a sober dream about a new world order where “everything is lawful,” a world without God where consequently everything is allowed. We come to know this position most famously in the chapter “Rebellion,” where Ivan speaks about his wish to return his entrance ticket, a chapter that he also starts with a kind of Nietzschean declaration of his “love for the farthest.” Love for the farthest, love for those at a distance is the new commandment to Ivan Karamazov. The Christian concept of love for those closest to one is, for Ivan, spoiled by the concreteness of the other person, her bad smell, her ugliness, and the impertinence of her bodily being-there.

In a telling phrase, Ivan adds: “If we’re to come to love a man, the man himself should stay hidden, because as soon as he shows his face—love vanishes.”³² There is almost no comment on this in the novel, and there probably can be no comment since the phrase is so self-revealing. The baby-like, innocent Alyosha comes up with a little reference to his Father Zosima, but he has nothing really to answer. As always, the eloquence of Ivan, the philosopher, wins the upper hand. Yet, after having said this sentence, the indicators of a breakdown of all this eloquence are evident—up to the ultimate point where Ivan will beg for pardon and yell out to the devil: “Just don’t talk philosophy”! Philosophy, at least the kind of philosophy that Ivan stands for, collapses from within. The most intriguing and dramatically enacted countermove to Ivan’s viewpoint is placed at the very end of the long dialogue between the two brothers. After all of Ivan’s eloquence, his talking and story-telling, Alyosha’s simple response is to stand up and kiss his brother. It is an ironically broken gesture, accompanied by the brothers’ laughing, and it is a direct copy of Christ’s silent kiss for the Grand Inquisitor. The die is cast at an early point of the novel already.

A certain kind of philosophy (Ivan’s philosophy) is shown to have failed, but before it ultimately collapses, it will bring about the refutation of another philosophy (Western philosophy). Funnily enough, it is Ivan, the westerner and the enlightener, who most heavily criticizes Western and enlightenment philosophy, until this criticism itself is finally unmasked as being guided by the same shortcomings and, at least for Dostoevsky, slumps down to an empty nothingness. Once again, Patočka’s interpretation unfolds this nicely. Long passages of his undertaking are dedicated to the demonstration of how much of Kant’s moral theology is the secret focus in Dostoevsky’s critique. It is not simply that modern philosophy has lost the God of onto-theology, God as the proclaimed *ens maximum* or *ens necessarium*. For Dostoevsky, it is precisely Kant’s attempt to overcome the dilemma with the postulation of a moral God that leads to the deepest embarrassment. God, freedom, and immortality are postulated by pure practical reason as the safeguards for morality. Yet, how can this claim be justified? Or as Patočka asks in his analysis:

Yet is it necessary for the world to have a moral meaning? Is the morality of moral worth necessary and justifiable? Once we thus enter the domain of morality, we likewise enter the sphere of a God with whom one negotiates, the sphere of a moral God with his rewards and punishments, the moral sphere as the domain of *do ut des*,³³ of merit, guilt and remuneration, of transcendental keeping of accounts.³⁴

Ivan's argumentation in the chapter "Rebellion" starts off with exactly the assumption that it is impossible to prove the moral purpose of the universe to be apodictically necessary. But not only that. It seems that the most convincing core of his criticism is not to be found in logical argumentation but in the unbearableness of existence as it is. It is revolt, rebellion against the overall setup of the world as it is:

I need retribution, otherwise I will destroy myself. And retribution not somewhere and sometime in infinity, but here and now, on earth, so that I see it myself. I have believed, and I want to see for myself, and if I am dead by that time, let them resurrect me, because it will be too unfair if it all takes place without me. Is it possible that I've suffered so that I, together with my evil deeds and sufferings, should be manure for someone's future harmony? I want to see with my own eyes the hind lie down with the lion, and the murdered man rise up and embrace his murderer. I want to be there when everyone suddenly finds out what it was all for. All religions in the world are based on this desire, and I am a believer. But then there are the children, and what am I going to do with them?³⁵

The famous reference to the suffering of the children is Ivan's own radicalized version of theodicy: How can we cope with the suffering of the innocent who have not yet eaten the apple of knowledge? How can a God—a sort of transcendental bookkeeper that watches over reward and punishment—allow for a postponing of this justice until some infinite time? Justice should be taking place here and now and not be delayed to the prospect of some future harmony—this is maybe the kernel of Ivan's questioning of Kantian moral theology. It seems that Dostoevsky as the writer of this has a double position: he fully identifies with the criticism of the monstrosity of moral theology, yet at the same time he works out the monstrosity of Ivan's own argumentation.

It almost goes without further comment that the failure of the final trial in the book, the inability to judicially find out the truth about the murder, can also be seen as Dostoevsky's answer to Ivan's claim for justice here and now. But there is more. Ivan's statement is in such an apparent contradiction to the depiction of his character that from the beginning his rebellion itself looks like a desperate undertaking. Why should especially the most isolated, self-sustained, and self-righteous of all the characters care for the suffering of the children, when—at the same time—his brother Alyosha is very concretely taking care of the group of small Illyusha and his friends, working on reconciliation and love amongst them?

In his study, Patočka remarks at one point: "A skeptic of Ivan's kind represents a specific variety of the 'underground' man."³⁶ Although he does not fully develop that parallel, very much of the character of Ivan can indeed be nicely related to the underground man. It is indicative, holds Patočka, that "for him others are hell, that they alienate him from himself, but that this alienation at the same time makes up the entire substance of his own life, such that he is unable to free himself from it."³⁷ This is like an echo of the unbearable threat of the other's face that Ivan spoke about in the dialogue with Alyosha. With his attempted detachment from others, the underground existence begins to feel his/her estrangement as the only reality, leading to a hypersensitivity: "The underground man is 'terribly self-loving.' He is infatuated with himself, irritable and irascible, immeasurably over-sensitive with respect to himself, even though this self is false, paltry, entirely determined by this constant competition."³⁸

If taken as a characteristic that would also be valid for Ivan, then suddenly his argumentation over the suffering of the children appears in a different light. Ultimately, his concern would not go for the suffering of somebody else, but rather for his own lonely and unrelated subjectivity; “how can God make me suffer?” would then be the real concern behind the question.

But the full collapse of his world and philosophy is still reserved for the final denouement of Ivan’s tea-chat with the tired devil. Throughout the whole book, Ivan is Mr. Eloquence himself, but in the end it is the shabby existence that is more eloquent than Ivan ever was. This might be seen as yet another funny commentary on Ivan the philosopher, who in the end finds no better expression than in the words of the devil—or a devil. It is his devil, certainly, nobody else than he himself or an aspect of his personality. The guy is hellishly clever—what else would you expect? Yet Ivan keeps on insisting, even after the devil has left, that “he is terribly stupid, terribly stupid”—an attribution that is repeated several times.³⁹ The doubling of his person serves to lay bare the shortcomings of his thought. Philosophical cleverness un.masks itself as mere cleverness.

Ivan tremblingly repeats variations of the sentence “please don’t talk philosophy to me.” And what does the guy do? Certainly, he talks philosophy all the time:

Je pense donc je suis, I’m quite sure of that, but all the rest around me, all those worlds, God, even Satan himself—for me all that is unproven, whether it exists in itself, or is only my emanation, a consistent development of my *I*, which exists pre-temporally and uniquely. [. . .]⁴⁰

This is what the shabby and tired guy on the sofa has to offer like a starting remark of his gossiping. It once again brings the discussion back to the core subject of a critique of subjectivism and Western philosophy. Certainly, it is another funny side-story of Dostoevsky’s that it is precisely the devil who denies the devil’s existence. And if looked at as what he precisely is, namely a mere emanation of Ivan’s thoughts and feelings, the whole situation is even less favorable as a statement on subjective philosophy. The man on the sofa is nothing but a phantasmagoric nightmare—but he starts to declare that the only thing surely existing is precisely himself.

Ivan’s Breakdown and the New Beginning of “Philosophy”

Yet it is not only painful what his devil says, even more bothersome for Ivan is the tone and the effortless with which the devil produces his thoughts. Throughout the book, Ivan expresses his thoughts with a deep inner involvement, sometimes even with convulsive strain—and now comes this nightmarish alter ego who incessantly chatters philosophy. The deeper Ivan’s fatigue, the more lively his monster becomes. Lightheartedly does he rephrase the ideas of “a most charming and dear young Russian gentleman,”⁴¹ no other than the author of a poem entitled “The Grand Inquisitor.” This ardent young student once had a “dream” (the sober dream, the wake dream, not the tired nightmare)—and in his bottomless fatigue Ivan is reminded by the devil of his former dream, the fierce dream of a new man:

Once mankind has renounced God, one and all (and I believe that this period, analogous to the geological periods, will come), then the entire old world view will

fall of itself. [. . .] People will come together in order to take from life all that it can give, but, of course, for happiness and joy in this world only. Man will be exalted with the spirit of divine, titanic pride, and the man-god will appear. [. . .] Each will know himself utterly mortal, without resurrection, and will accept death proudly and calmly, like a god. Out of pride he will understand that he should not murmur against the momentariness of life, and he will love his brother then without any reward. Love will satisfy only the moment of life, but the very awareness of its momentariness will increase its fire, inasmuch as previously it was diffused in hopes of an eternal love beyond the grave.⁴²

Once again, it is full of ironic undertones that precisely the devil praises the happy acceptance of death, and projects the ideal of a world full of mutual love. However, more interesting in the present context are the references to philosophy. This passage does not only offer a proclamation of God's death or absence, but also a positive outlook at what this life without a highest being and the prospect of a future harmony might look like. It is a broken vision, indeed, a devilish vision of the man-god. But it is also a very earnest and deep search—a lot of Nietzsche could be read, not only into this passage, but into the entire book.⁴³ What it discusses is one of Nietzsche's main questions: not so much the event of God's death, but the consequences that this happening would entail.⁴⁴ And especially Ivan shares the same despair over the failure to not deal with the implications of his departure. But there is also something else in this passage: a final reference—not an accidental reference—to the concept of love.

The concept of love is Dostoevsky's positive vision that stands strikingly at the end of the novel. It is after the death of little Illyusha, when Alyosha gathers the group of all his friends (they are twelve) and gives his famous speech at the stone. The general tone of it is one of reconciliation, respect, and eternal love in memory of the deceased Illyusha. But especially the end of it, like the final message of the whole book, is much more practical. It is a call for community, togetherness, care for each other, or one could even say love: "And eternally so, all our lives hand in hand!"⁴⁵

This is almost the last line of the whole novel and it the ideal of a new community: a community in the world, outside of the monastery, a community that Ivan could only dream of ("to love the brother without any reward"). Yet for Ivan, it was an effortless dream, a dream without embodiment and suffering, a subjectivist dream as in the Cartesian philosophy that his devil ridicules. Only after his smashing fatigue and the turning of dream into nightmare (which entails his passive "being exposed" to it, not the active and somewhat disembodied envisaging) does he take part in it bodily. The whole process of his illness reflects such a development.

Alyosha, who rarely speaks about his visions or ideas, is the one to realize this ideal community practically. Most of the time he is described as being engaged in bringing messages, visiting someone, caring for others, mediating, etc. He realizes the community of love in the world and thereby also stays truthful to the legacy of his much admired Staretz Zosima, since it was he who had told Alyosha to leave the monastery and to work in the world. All of his engagement finally culminates in the new community that is portrayed at the end. The conclusive "Hurrah for Karamazov" reflects the success of Alyosha's efforts and is the ultimate acknowledgment for the conversion of the infamous Karamazov-family of ill-minded wasters and destroyers.

It seems obvious that this "new bliss" entails a religious or quasi-religious dimension. Yet with Dostoevsky, and probably beyond Dostoevsky, it might be possible to

reformulate his concept of love for a “Post-Christian” context (to use an expression from an earlier writing of Patočka).⁴⁶ “Love” could then be understood as the ultimate name for the transubstantiation of life that is brought about with the third movement of human existence, the so-called movement of “dedication” or of “giving oneself.”⁴⁷ This love is obviously not meant as an objective set of rules and values, not as *ordo amoris* in the sense of Scheler, but more of a lived-through discovery of a new horizon. It is an answer that is not a pre-given but gained in the exposure to meaninglessness and nihilism. “Love” would then obtain a third meaning beyond its understanding as either instinctual love or as moral imperative. Both of these understandings “subjectivize” love,⁴⁸ as Patočka says, whereas Dostoevsky’s concept of love “opens up” and is like the discovery of an entirely new meaning of the world. This is an understanding that will never be reached by a theoretical reflection in the sense of Ivan’s disembodied philosophy. In his study, Patočka therefore holds apodictically:

Theoretical rationalism [. . .] will never be able to encompass the whole. That’s fine, when it does not claim to be full-fledged knowledge. Yet in practice, rationalism leads necessarily into disorganization and chaos. Therefore Dostoevsky claims that society cannot become fully human without “love.”⁴⁹

Trying to sum up the main insights of his reading of the *Brothers Karamazov*, the following three aspects should be outlined: (1) The novel is a philosophical answer to Kant’s postulates of pure practical reason, and is an overcoming of his moral theology. (2) The novel is the literary expression of a quest that is similar to what one can find in Nietzsche; it is a parallel or better, an alternative attempt to cope with the death of God in modernity. (3) Perhaps most importantly, the novel entails an existentialist philosophy in a double sense: (a) First it is a continuous working-through of processes of existential upheaval as such, that is, processes of *metanoia*. (This is why the character of Ivan is most important: he is the philosopher, the answer to Kant and Nietzsche, but his encounter with the devil is maybe also the most intriguing existential happening in the book, namely the description of his fullest breakdown and a possible re-orientation afterward.) (b) Secondly it is the depiction of the “opening” that is entailed in this existential process, the breakthrough to a deeper realization of the world. The second component is nicely reflected in Ivan’s devil-story. The story is the shaking of Ivan’s subjectivist dream, his philosophical vision of the new world that disperses into a nightmarish nothingness until he comes to realize the world again—but now a fully changed world.

Ivan, in his conversation with the devil, has almost reached the end—an end that can ultimately only be understood as a new beginning. He starts trembling. The shabby existence continues with his tea-talk, the torture is not yet over. It all ends with a ridiculing of Ivan himself and, once again, a highly Nietzschean ridiculing of his ongoing belief in truth:

Anyone who already knows the truth is permitted to settle things for himself, absolutely as he wishes, on the new principles. In this sense, “everything is permitted” to him. Moreover, since God and immortality do not exist in any case, even if this period should never come, the new man is allowed to become a man-god, though it be he alone in the whole world. [. . .] There is no law for God! [. . .] Where I stand, there at once will be the foremost place . . . “everything is

permitted,” and that’s that! [. . .] If one wants to swindle, why, I wonder, should one also need the sanction of truth? But such is the modern little Russian man: without such a sanction, he doesn’t even dare to swindle, so much does he love the truth [. . .].⁵⁰

After this, Ivan has reached the point of breakdown—this is when he throws the glass, and only then slowly awakens from the whole scene, while his brother, the savior, is knocking at the door. Ivan’s nightmarish dream is over, the sleazy monster disappears, and it is as if it had never been there. Only Ivan knows it was.

Notes

- 1 Jan Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” cf. 95–135 of this volume. [Czech: “Kolem Masarykovy filosofie náboženství,” in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 12: *Češi I* (Prague: Oikumene, 2006), 366–422.] Further references cite the English translation in this volume.
- 2 The historical events before and after Patočka’s death, the atmosphere of underground seminars, secret gatherings, and the processes of publication in *Samizdat* have been nicely depicted by Ivan Chvatík, one of his students at that time and today’s head of the Prague Patočka-Archive. See Ivan Chvatík, “Geschichte und Vorgeschichte des Prager Jan Patočka-Archivs,” in *Studia Phaenomenologica. Romanian Journal for Phenomenology* 7 (2007), 163–92.
- 3 Only the last 20 pages of these 58 are preserved in the actual manuscript. See Ivan Chvatík’s editorial note on the text in Patočka, *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 13: *Češi II*, ed. Karel Palek (Prague: Oikumene, 2007), 435.
- 4 Patočka, *Kacířské eseje o filosofii dějin*, in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 3: *Péče o duši III*, ed. Ivan Chvatík and Pavel Kouba (Prague: Oikumene, 2002), 11–144. [English translation: *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, trans. Erazim Kohák, ed. James Dodd (Chicago: Open Court, 1996).]
- 5 Patočka, “Wars of the Twentieth Century and the Twentieth Century as War,” in *Heretical Essays*, 135.
- 6 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 130.
- 7 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 127f.
- 8 The chosen title has also to do with the fact that the publication of this article in *Samizdat* was planned in a volume entitled *Dvě studie o Masarykovi* [Two Studies on Masaryk], combining its publication with another article offering a more political reflection on “Czech National Philosophy and its Failure.”
- 9 I published my German translation of the same article under the title “The Question of Meaning in the Epoch of Nihilism,” reflecting the titles of Patočka’s shorter fragments and preparatory manuscripts that are in close interconnection with this long study. Cf. Patočka, “Die Sinnfrage in der Epoche des Nihilismus: Masaryk—Dostojewski—Kant—Nietzsche—Heidegger,” in *Tschechische Philosophen im 20. Jahrhundert: Klíma, Rádl, Patočka, Havel, Košík*, trans. and ed. Ludger Hagedorn (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2002), 209–312.
- 10 Patočka, “Europe and the European Heritage until the End of the Nineteenth Century,” *Heretical Essays*, 93.
- 11 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 93.
- 12 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 92.
- 13 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 110.
- 14 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 113.
- 15 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), 637. Hereafter *BK*.
- 16 “Alyosha, my dear, my only son, I’m afraid of Ivan; I’m more afraid of Ivan than of the other one. Only you I’m not afraid of [. . .]” Dostoevsky, *BK*, 141.
- 17 Dostoevsky, *BK*, 635.

- 18 Dostoevsky, *BK*, 649.
- 19 The whole legend of his throwing the inkstand probably just came up due to a misunderstanding. Luther himself never mentions the episode but says that he “tackled the devil with ink,” i.e., with his writings.
- 20 In a short reference in his *Heretical Essays*, Patočka points out the “dreadful immobility of suicides.” Human life “confronted with absolute meaninglessness” can, as he claims, only surrender and give itself up. Patočka, “Does History have a Meaning?” in *Heretical Essays*, 59.
- 21 Dostoevsky, *BK*, 651.
- 22 Dostoevsky, *BK*, 637.
- 23 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 113.
- 24 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 107.
- 25 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 113.
- 26 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 109.
- 27 In Zosima’s own words: “There was much talk even in town about his end [the wondrous change and the dying of Markel]. It all shook me then, but not deeply, though I cried very much when he was being buried. I was young, a child, but it all remained indelibly in my heart, the feeling was hidden there. It all had to rise up and respond in due time. And so it did.” Dostoevsky, *BK*, 290.
- 28 Dostoevsky, *BK*, 298.
- 29 Dostoevsky, *BK*, 299.
- 30 Dostoevsky, *BK*, 298. This is Zosima’s conviction before the duel. It is a sentence spoken to himself, individually and in a concrete situation, but its postulate is transcendental, spoken to everybody and before everybody as a human being.
- 31 John 12:24, quoted in Dostoevsky, *BK*, 390. Zosima quotes this sentence in his long dialogue with the “mysterious visitor.”
- 32 Dostoevsky, *BK*, 237.
- 33 Latin: “I give in order that you may give.”
- 34 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 102.
- 35 Dostoevsky, *BK*, 244.
- 36 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 103.
- 37 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 103.
- 38 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 103.
- 39 Dostoevsky, *BK*, 652.
- 40 Dostoevsky, *BK*, 642.
- 41 Dostoevsky, *BK*, 648.
- 42 Dostoevsky, *BK*, 648–9.
- 43 At some points the questioning is so similar that it is difficult to believe that Dostoevsky supposedly did not read and know Nietzsche, as philological sources say. Reversely, Nietzsche read Dostoevsky, though he discovered him only late (around late 1886 or early 1887). In a letter to his friend Overbeck from February 23, 1887, Nietzsche reports his recent discovery of Dostoevsky’s *Notes from the Underground* (in French translation) and comments: “The instinct of affinity (or what should I call it?) spoke to me instantaneously, my joy was beyond bounds.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *Selected Letters by Friedrich Nietzsche*, trans. and ed. Christopher Middleton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969; Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996), 261. Citation refers to Hackett edition.
- 44 Nietzsche’s “message” somewhat presupposes the announcement of God’s death. His main concern is the inability to deal with this. See, e.g., his programmatic proclamation in the *Gay Science*: “God is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown.—And we—we still have to vanquish his shadow, too.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), 167 (§108). [German: *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, in *Kritische Studienausgabe*, vol. 3, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (München: de Gruyter, 1999), 467.]
- 45 Dostoevsky, *BK*, 776.
- 46 See Patočka, *Andere Weg in die Moderne: Forschungsbeiträge zu Patočkas Genealogie der Neuzeit*, ed. Ludger Hagedorn and Hans Rainer Sepp (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2006), 77.

- 47 For Patočka's philosophy of the three movements of human existence, see especially the "Afterword" to his *Natural World as a Philosophical Problem*. See Patočka, *Přirozený svět jako filosofický problém* (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1992). [English translation: *Natural World as a Philosophical Problem*, trans. and ed. Eubica Učnick and Ivan Chvatík, (Forthcoming: Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2015).]
- 48 Patočka, "On Masaryk's Philosophy of Religion," 110.
- 49 Patočka, "On Masaryk's Philosophy of Religion," 120.
- 50 Dostoevsky, *BK*, 649.

11 Patočka's Discussion with Dostoevsky on the Future of Science and Christianity

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In the Middle Ages, the struggle between Platonists and Aristotelians ends with the defeat of both these doctrines in favor of modern science. Kant is the first to realize the problem for human meaning and responsibility in a universe perceived as a fine-tuned machine without purpose, aim or values. His attempt is to rethink a rational theology, thereby saving theology as well as natural science. Kant's endeavor to account for human meaning in a physical world stripped of all sense is countered by Dostoevsky: Ivan Karamazov rebels against utilitarian reasoning, leading ultimately to his madness; whilst Nicolai Stavrogin's struggle between the incompatible call of conscience and utilitarian reasoning ends in suicide. Yet, is this the only way to think about scientific reasoning and human existence? Jan Patočka's heretical history of European reason and science is an answer to Kant and Dostoevsky and their attempts to rethink human responsibility in a world where objective reasoning relegates human experience to the margins of knowledge.

Keywords: theology; responsibility; science; Kant; Dostoevsky; Socrates

The hypothesis according to which modern subjectivism is essentially responsible for the skeptical crisis which deprived European society of its belief in eternity is in itself extremely dubious.

—Jan Patočka¹

Introduction

In this paper, I will present a short outline of the changes in the conception of nature and reason since the rise of modern science, as a background to my discussion of human responsibility in the modern world. I will argue that changes to our understanding of humans' place in the world are concomitant with the modern re-conceptualization of reason. In the new scientific formulation of knowledge, characterized by "objective reasoning," human meaning is considered subjective, relative and not important. As Jan Patočka says, we live in a double world: one created by science, the other, the world of our everyday living. On the one hand, we have the epistemologically secure, objective, scientific world, accessible to everyone familiar with modern science's project; on the other hand, the world of our everyday living is, supposedly, subjective and fuzzy, hence relegated to irrelevance in regard to modern

knowledge.² It is important to note that these descriptions are already based on modern, efficacious reasoning, which began with the rise of modern science.

Patočka offers a different way to think about the present world by showing how the reasoning of Ancient Greece changed into modern, instrumental reason, which we now take for “reasoning” as such. He insists that this is not the only way to think about reason. Originally, instrumental, practical reason was just one way to think about and justify one’s beliefs. Sophists were the first to equate reasoning with the technique of argumentation. Reason is an instrument to win any and every argument, regardless of an arguer’s convictions. The fight of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle against this type of reasoning is already circumscribed by the sophists’ intervention. Yet, what is important to remember is, as Patočka insists, Socrates’ changed attitude, which brought to the forefront human concerns at a time of broken tradition. Patočka further claims that Immanuel Kant is the first philosopher to reflect on the meaning of *human* life, relegated to the sphere of subjectivity by modern, objective reason.³ To rethink the Western heritage of reasoning is important, especially now, when this reasoning has colonized the whole planet, since it is embedded in science and technology.

The beginning of the new notion of reason began in the Middle Ages. The struggle between Platonists and Aristotelians for the best understanding of the perfect *Kosmos* ended with the defeat of both their doctrines in favor of modern science, defined by cold, objective reasoning that aims to be equally accessible to all. Science is the highest achievement of this “objective” reasoning. Kant was the first to realize the problem of “objective reasoning” in terms of finding human meaning and responsibility in a universe perceived as a fine-tuned machine that is without purpose, aim or values. His attempt to stave off Humean skepticism—the outcome of modern, natural scientific reasoning—is to formulate a moral theology, thereby saving both natural science and theology. Kant’s heroic endeavor to account for *human* meaning in a physical world stripped of all sense, except the scientific, is countered by Fyodor Dostoevsky. His dissatisfaction with the Kantian solution⁴ is presented through the characters of Ivan Fyodorovich Karamazov in *The Brothers Karamazov*⁵ and Nicolai Vsevolodovich Stavrogin in *Devils*. Ivan rebels against scientific–utilitarian reasoning, leading ultimately to his madness, whereas Nicolai’s struggle between the incompatible call of conscience and utilitarian reasoning ends in suicide.

In Dostoevsky, the issue is framed in terms of a fight between two opposing beliefs: a belief in the immortality of the soul, and utilitarian reasoning. The battleground is defined by the struggle to account for the meaning of human lives. His novels do not only critique modern utilitarian reasoning, which strips nature of the meaning that anchored human lives in the world up to the modern period; he also shows the outcome of utilitarian rationality, leading to unspeakable horrors, if this reasoning is taken to its limit in the space of politics and morality.⁶ His novels are configured as the *reductio ad absurdum* of scientific utilitarian reasoning to play out the tragic clash between the new, instrumental reasoning and human responsibility. As Patočka points out, for Dostoevsky, the Kantian solution is problematic if God is conceived as a regulative idea only. Taking into account Kant’s solution and Dostoevsky’s answer, Patočka suggests that we need to rethink the history of European reason and responsibility by returning to the Socratic “learned ignorance,” and his concept of care for the soul.

Care for the Soul

In our contemporary world defined by the primacy of knowledge, a major problem is the impossibility of thinking the soul. What does Patočka *mean* when he speaks of the soul? What is the sense of Patočka's care for the soul? Nowadays, we are accustomed to giving sufficient reasons for all our claims in terms of what we call scientific reasoning.⁷ At the inception of modern science, Francis Bacon already says, "*ipsa scientia potestas est* (knowledge itself is power),"⁸ but knowledge can become power only if the reasoning supporting it is shared by different scientists everywhere. Scientific knowledge concentrates on *how* processes occur: scientists can learn the repeatable patterns of these processes in order to predict future occurrences, and thereby master those processes to be used in our human projects. Hence, to frame the question of the soul in terms of scientific knowledge—and there seems to be no other knowledge possible—is a hopeless undertaking. It is not a "thing" or a process that science can give an account of or describe. The soul is an untenable metaphysical idea, as modern science had shown.

However, Patočka's question is different. It is not a question of knowledge. He does not want to learn *how* the soul "works." He wants to think about human existence. For him, to care for the soul means to think through the way we care for ourselves, for our being. As Socrates says to the Athenians, "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?"⁹ This type of attitude cannot be reduced to scientific reasoning, which scientists use to describe the world in order to understand the way natural or social processes work. To care for our souls is to think through reasons that we have become accustomed to; it is to question traditional beliefs, which in our case are scientific. Although science is the highest achievement of objective reason, it cannot speak of human meaning related to our lived experience, because human experience cannot be reduced to the repeatable patterns of similar occurrences. To reason does not mean to apply objective reasoning to our existence, thereby reducing all to the common denominator, but to justify one's claims means to be consistent while presenting claims to others and always supporting them with reasons that they can understand. Those reasons cannot be objective reasons that we can repeat as the same in all situations, but rather are reasons that relate to our human existence. This also means accepting responsibility for oneself, others and the world in which we live by recognizing our situatedness, our finitude, and the impossibility of objectifying our lived experience. To reason in this way means to call into question truisms that we have inherited from tradition. When the ground of meaning relating to our human concerns seems to disappear with a now-absent God, it is imperative to search for a new meaning. Humans cannot live without meaning, but for Patočka, meaning is not something unchanging. We are not God, who can see everything at once. Human meaning is always in crisis because it is partial, incomplete and related to our place in the world. In this context, the most important question is to inquire whether the crisis of meaning, which is also our crisis, is the outcome of God leaving the world to itself. Patočka points out that the crisis of meaning is not the outcome of the loss of faith; rather, shattered meaning and the loss of faith are both symptoms of the new scientific conception of nature that we usually associate with the names of Galileo, Newton and Descartes.¹⁰

Descartes' endeavor is to secure our knowledge of nature against the attacks of skepticism, after the new, mathematized—that is, scientific—reconfiguration of nature begins its “conceptual march.” The only place secure against his famous *genius malignus* is in the space of thinking. In Descartes' system, the touchstone of reality is, for the first time in the history of thinking, enclosed within the human mind. Human experience is replaced with the mind's own operations. Thinking can go on without the need to worry about unreliable human senses, or the possibility of an “evil genius” who could deceive us.¹¹ The outcome of this Cartesian move is the split of the world into two substances: mind and matter. The split also leads, as Patočka never tired of pointing out, to modern—supposedly bad—subjectivism. This allegedly bad subjectivism is, as Patočka explains, the cause of egotism and the false belief that humans now occupy the place of God.¹² On this view, the Cartesian overturning of tradition threatens our moral, human world.

However, Patočka insists that to understand the ideas of subjectivism and objectivism is to grasp that the Cartesian subject/object split can lead to different accounts, depending on our analyses. To rethink our tradition, we need to return to Socrates and his “learned ignorance” as the ground of the Socratic care for the soul.

Human Meaning and Science

When I see the blind and wretched state of man, when I survey the whole universe in its dumbness and man left to himself with no light, as though lost in this corner of the universe, without knowing who put him there, what he has come to do, what will become of him when he dies, incapable of knowing anything, I am moved to terror, like a man transported in his sleep to some terrifying desert island, who wakes up quite lost and with no means of escape.¹³

To draw an outline of the origin of the transformation of modern reason, which for us is the only conception we know, let me begin with Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*, where he explicitly takes up the problem of modern reason in a world stripped of meaning, purpose or a final *telos*.

According to Ivan, in the modern scientific world “there exists no law of nature” impelling humans to love their fellow human beings. In other words, no laws of nature will tell us anything about our human existence or its meaning. To have faith in mutual relationship with others is simply a human prejudice based on an outdated belief in the immortality of the soul. Humans have simply overlooked the “fact” that God is dead.¹⁴ The larger issue is, of course, that if there are only “the blind, mute, merciless laws of nature,”¹⁵ which cannot account for morality or human meaning, then “nothing would be immoral any longer, everything would be permitted, even anthropophagy.”¹⁶ Or to put it differently, without God, with his promise of the immortality of our souls, “there is no virtue”¹⁷ and “everything [is] permitted,” even “evildoing.” This is the logical outcome of the belief that we are left only with the material universe. For Ivan, however, and contrary to his professed Euclidian—that is, utilitarian—logic, if the belief in immortality is destroyed, “not only love but also any living power to continue the life of the world would at once dry up in it.”¹⁸

So why is modern science held responsible for stripping the world of its aim, purpose and *telos*; and what implications follow from this new conception of nature?

In short, one might follow Nietzsche to say that the problem started when “we unchained this earth from its sun.”¹⁹ By contrast, in their different ways, Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger analyzed the problem as the mathematization and formalization of nature.²⁰ Patočka extends their analyses to examine the changes that followed from Galilean science, which replaced God as the new explanatory horizon.

From the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, the struggle between Platonists and Aristotelians over the best way to conceive *Kosmos* ended up in its abolition. The fearless man of Copernicus’ imagination, standing on the sun and overlooking all the planets, becomes the image of the new world.²¹ The Ancient and Medieval continuous, harmonious universe—intelligible to humans—turns, first, into a Copernican nature of “mathematical simplicity and harmony,”²² only to be transmogrified into “the mathematically expressible motions of matter itself” in space and time.²³ Now, identical laws rule both the heavenly sphere and earthly nature. Ceasing to be different, both realms become equally accessible to reason, yet no more accessible to the human senses—which the new science regards as unreliable.

Galileo’s merger of Aristotelian science with Platonic Ideas changes the way we understand the world, ourselves and the universe.²⁴ While, supposedly, nature itself is mathematical, letting us write it in the geometrical language of circles and triangles, humans with their unreliable senses are pushed outside of this new universe. This human displacement from the center of creation to its margins is not the outcome of the earth becoming one planet among many others; rather, it is a consequence of mathematization. Galileo’s project was to make the earth as divine as the other heavenly bodies. In the process, *Kosmos*, where humans dwelled until then, was no more. The fallible human senses and their qualitative experience of nature become an impediment to the new, quantifiable, scientific edifice. Mathematized nature cannot include human experience, which cannot be reduced to the repetition of the same; in other words, to regularity. J. W. N. Sullivan suggests that mathematized science “made of man an entirely accidental by-product of a huge, mindless, purposeless, mathematical machine,”²⁵ with no access to this machine’s “reality.”

E. A. Burtt notes that the new science abolished the teleology of the scholastics, which was “an ultimate principle of explanation,” and replaced it with the concept of *perfect* causality in physical nature: that is, with a mathematical concept that humans cannot experience.²⁶ In our experience, we understand that events follow one after the other with some regularity, but this type of cause and effect is imprecise, and therefore cannot be used in an exact, mathematized science. Science must lift this imprecise regularity out from our everyday experience and generalize it. In thought, we can *posit* perfect causality, but we cannot experience it.

The world that, until the advance of modern science, had been meaningful and harmonious, with its divine purpose intelligible to humans, ceased to exist. Mathematized nature was never imagined as a substitute for God, because its formal definitions are meaningless in terms of human experience. God was reconfigured as the first mover, who created the universe and left it on its own, leaving humans without any guidance to their lives.

One of the first to realize the problematic nature of these terrifying empty spaces—without meaning or purpose—was Blaise Pascal.²⁷ As Pascal puts it, already speaking in the language of mathematics, “what is man in nature? A nothing compared to the infinite, a whole compared to the nothing [. . .].” He is “a middle point between all

and nothing.” Worse still, without God, he cannot understand “the end of things and their principles.” So he is “equally incapable of seeing the nothingness from which he emerges and the infinity in which he is engulfed.”²⁸ Without God, “we burn with desire to find a firm footing, an ultimate, lasting base on which to build a tower rising up to infinity, but our whole foundation cracks and the earth opens up into the depth of the abyss.”²⁹

In the first *Critique*, Kant confronts reason’s desire to “build a tower that was to reach to heaven”³⁰ by arguing for the humility of reason. Although “human reason [. . .] is troubled by questions that it cannot dismiss, because they are posed to it by the nature of reason itself,” yet within the new scientific edifice, “it also cannot answer, because they surpass human reason’s every ability.”³¹ In other words, the ground of reasoning has changed. The tower has to be conceived as “a dwelling just spacious enough for the tasks that we perform on the level of experience, and just high enough for us to survey these tasks.”³² In his “Critique of Teleological Judgment,” Kant attempts to justify human experience that cannot be accounted for by new scientific reason.³³ As discussed above, human experience and the possibility of human meaning are eliminated from “the mechanism of nature,” as science conceives of it. Still, humans doggedly believe that “nature [is] acting from a purpose” and for our benefit.³⁴ Yet, we cannot attribute “an objective purposiveness”³⁵ to things, unless we think that nature is an intelligent agent, which, scientifically speaking, it cannot be. Once the *telos* and the purposefulness of nature are eliminated from the new scientific project, the question really is, “how purposes that are not ours, and that we also cannot attribute to nature” can be thought differently, in line with our so-called unscientific experience. To put it differently, how can we account for our belief that nature is being purposeful, as well as understand nature simply as “the sum-total of all that exists as determined by laws”? In his essay, “On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy,” Kant insists that we:

Can pursue two paths: either the merely *theoretical* path or the *teleological* path, and with respect to the latter either as *physics*, using only such ends for its intention that be known to us through experience, or as *metaphysics* using for its intention, in accordance with its calling, only an end that is fixed through pure reason.³⁶

By recognizing these two paths, we “could constitute, a special kind of causality, or at least a quite distinct lawfulness of nature”;³⁷ more distinct, that is, than the one offered by modern science. In other words, we can reconcile our belief in the purposiveness of nature itself, which Ancient and Medieval science was based on, with the modern mechanical understanding of the universe, which is oblivious to human needs.

For Kant, we cannot attribute to nature *telos*, purpose or harmony; however, we can re-think them. So he makes a distinction between efficient cause (*nexus effectivus*), which is at the basis of mathematized science, and final cause (*nexus finalis*),³⁸ which Aristotelian science attributes to all natural things and nature itself. And herein lies Kant’s innovation: harmony between our understanding and the “empirical basis outside of us” is our human contribution to knowing. And this harmony is not in nature. In other words, we cannot know whether nature is harmonious or purposeful, but we can think it: “this harmony, despite all that purposiveness, is cognized a priori rather than empirically”; it is we who think it. In short, “it is not a characteristic of things outside me but a mere way of presenting [them] within me.”³⁹ We might suspect

that “there is something else above and beyond those presentations of sense,” yet we cannot *know*. And this “something else” *might* be “the ultimate basis for that [. . .] harmony.”⁴⁰ To put it differently, we can stipulate it as an idea, but we cannot know it. Knowledge is secured as well as human meaning. In the end, human meaning is restored in terms of “man’s own reason,” because it is able to harmonize things with our understanding. Teleology is also secured, although we cannot “justify any absolute teleological judgment.”⁴¹ Instead of teleology and harmony, which were attributes of the Medieval *Kosmos* that God created, Kant introduces a different explanation in terms of human experience, by acknowledging our human participation in the constitution of meaning. We can think of the purposes of things and of harmony in nature as if they were a part of nature, but we *know*, or should know, that “the product of a rational cause [is] distinct from the matter of the thing.”⁴² So, Kant’s project is to justify human experience in the aftermath of the modern scientific re-conceptualization of nature, which is not interested in accounting for human experience. But is Kant’s attempt successful?

Morality and Science

Pascal insists that once “the causes of things” are shrouded in mystery, morality without the divine ground ends in a proliferation of theories that cannot provide their own grounding. As he notes: “One says the sovereign good consists in virtue, another in truth [. . .] another in total ignorance, another in indolence, others in resisting appearances, another in never feeling surprise [. . .] That is a fine answer!”⁴³ On this view, human responsibility in a world without God seems to end up in a wild proliferation of theories that try to replace Christian ethics, revealed in its nakedness without divine ground.

According to Patočka, utilitarianism is one of these attempts to fill the void left by the disappearance of God. Humans become objects among other objects, looked at from the outside, configured as self-interested individuals that can be accounted for in terms of their egotism, rationality and self-interest.⁴⁴ Living human beings disappear from such an account of “moral physics.”⁴⁵ Science becomes not one domain of human activity, creativity and thinking among many others, but rather, the only one invested with the power of knowledge. It also becomes a judge and arbiter of human affairs. Ethics will become “a sort of science,” as Mikhail Rakitin explains to Mitya Karamazov. The new scientific ethics has no need of God. It can account for Mitya’s presumed crime in that “[i]t was impossible for him not to kill, he was a victim of his environment.”⁴⁶ Thinking and reflection is simply an outcome of “nerves in the brain” with “little tails [. . .] and when they start trembling,” what we look at is transformed into “an object or an event.”⁴⁷ Numbers are turned into a sacred language for all, suddenly having an ability to freeze all human relations to a formulaic language, which reduces all to objective reasons accessible by all those who are familiar with the system—those who are not are left on the margins of knowledge. Our conduct in the world is simply, as Mitya notes, “because of the little tails, and not at all because I have a soul or am some sort of image and likeness.” That, apparently, is “all foolishness.” And as Mitya concludes, “It’s magnificent, Alyosha, this science! The new man will come, I quite understand that [. . .] And yet, I’m sorry for God!”⁴⁸ In such formal systems, God is irrelevant and human meaning and responsibility simply disappear.

For Patočka, in the last essay he wrote, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” Kant is the first to reflect on human meaning, although he never defines it as such. Patočka claims that Kant’s role in the history of theology and his recognition of the importance of “human meaning” is not clearly recognized.⁴⁹ His first *Critique* “destroys” not only speculative metaphysics but also rational religion, which replaced revealed religion under the influence of modern science. Kant’s achievement is to re-think the role of God and the place of humans in this modern, mathematized universe, which ceased to have meaning in itself; turning into a mechanically self-driven machine, oblivious to human ends and hopes, and devoid of any moral precepts.

Patočka, extending Dieter Henrich’s argument in *Der ontologische Gottesbeweis* [On the Ontological Proof of God],⁵⁰ summarizes the Kantian project, which shattered the old metaphysics by setting the boundaries of the flight of reason. Kant shows that the aim of rational theology, accepting the new scientific reasoning, is to offer an ontological *proof* for the existence of God. No such proof of God is possible. As Kant points out, we can neither *know* God, nor the immortality of the soul, nor freedom. Those are metaphysical ideas and not empirical facts. But can we think morality without these Christian pillars? Kant’s answer is to construe a theology derived from practical and reflective reasoning. This new, moral theology “understands God only in his relationship to man.” Kant’s theology is not revealed or rational, but it is, as Patočka says, “a new doctrine of God [. . .] conceived in terms of the meaning of human life within the overall meaning of the universe.” Once the metaphysical-theological speculations concerning God as the highest being in terms of his essence are challenged by the metaphysics of modern mechanism, the old revealed theology ends, turned into rational theology, accepting the new conception of reason. Kant is the first to realize the conflict between old metaphysics and the new material conception of nature that requires providing evidence for its results. He challenges the rational theology based on modern mechanism. As Patočka notes:

Modern mechanism [. . .] once deprived of the accompanied rational metaphysics must turn, conceived metaphysically, into a purely materialist doctrine of nature, now essentially deprived of all meaning. [. . .] Never before had it been either necessary or possible to reflect on the “meaning” of the world and of life.⁵¹

With the advancement of scientific thinking, the idea of God as *ens necessarium* or *ens maximum* becomes groundless.⁵² According to Patočka, Kant realizes that a rational theology that tries to combine faith with scientific reason is untenable. Not only does mechanistic nature not need anything outside of itself (therefore God is incomprehensible within the scientific conceptual edifice), it is also impossible to provide “empirical” evidence for God. Yet this removal of a transcendent ground brings about the realization that mechanistically conceived nature is oblivious to human lives. Humans have lost divine measure in the domain of meaning. Once nature with its purposes and *telos* is transformed into the geometrical manifold of modern science—into a self-running mechanism—divine reason, now superfluous, is replaced by a new type of reasoning, which Dostoevsky calls Euclidian.⁵³ Ivan’s inner voice, presented as a devil, spells out this new type of reasoning: “Conscience! What is conscience? I make it up myself. Why do I suffer then? Out of habit. Out of universal human habit over seven thousand years. So let’s get out of the habit, and we shall be gods!”⁵⁴

The Grand Inquisitor

A man's worst difficulties begin when he is able to do as he likes.⁵⁵

The problem that Dostoevsky grapples with is that of responsibility in our modern age, when the dominant mode of explanation is scientific. Once we accept that everything in the world is defined by scientific reason—or as Dostoevsky puts it, when man becomes God, when the idea that “if there were no God, he would have to be invented” becomes possible—the notion of God, the immortality of the soul and with it, future harmony, become problematic. Revealed religion—where God as the creator of the world is unquestioned—obscures human meaning and humans' active role related to responsibility. New scientific ideas shake this complacency to the point of disaster. God's “role” in the world of humans must be rethought: the offered solution is Kantian moral theology. Yet, if humans accept crude, utilitarian reasoning, then the Christian ideas of human freedom, the immortality of the soul and future harmony become doubtful. This is the problem of our times also. God cannot be “justified” by human reason, practical or reflective, but, in that case, how to think about the moral conduct of humans? In Dostoevsky, this is the problem of future harmony, which Ivan Karamazov refutes in his talk with Alyosha, using utilitarian justification for his argument. To put it differently, if the Kantian regulative idea is conceived empirically, as something really in the world, future harmony becomes untenable. Ivan turns the idea into an empirical individual. The basic premise is derived from “living” egotistical individuals who must be punished in this world if there is to be “this-worldly” justice and responsibility.

Several of Dostoevsky's characters stand in for the egotistical individuals that are supposedly produced by bad subjectivism, mentioned above. The enthusiast of Euclidean logic in the novel *Devils* is young Pyotr Stepanovich Verkhovensky, who has no problem in murdering one of his associates, as long as the others are present as accomplices—even though not literally murderers—during this deed. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Pavel Fyodorovich Smerdyakov, the illegitimate son of Fyodor, commits patricide. This is the *reductio ad absurdum* mentioned earlier. Once the Euclidean enthusiast embraces utilitarian logic and accepts without reservation that all is allowed, the conclusion is inevitable: disregarding everything except the wishes of oneself. It would not be Dostoevsky, master interpreter of the human soul, if he did not complicate this picture. Young Verkhovensky as well as Smerdyakov are not really unqualified enthusiasts. They both need a guardian to lean on for support in following through their utilitarian logic. And they both choose a strong individual to stand in for the ideas of this logic. It could even be said that they construct their own man-god in order to be able to follow through the idea that “everything is allowed.” And in both cases, those chosen are unwilling to support the inevitable conclusion. As I noted above, Nicolai kills himself, when he realizes what has followed from the ideas that he flirtatiously supported in his deep boredom, and Ivan ends in madness, while refusing to sanction Smerdyakov's accusation that it was he that guided Smerdyakov to commit patricide. In the end, Pyotr Verkhovensky leaves Russia just in time to escape punishment, no doubt in search of another man-god to rely on, while Smerdyakov, deprived of Ivan as his tower of strength, commits suicide.

Ivan accepts Euclidian logic but cannot accept its outcome. His conscience seems to resist this logic. Likewise, Nicolai's conscience leads him to his suicide. Despite his public exploits in his youth, he cannot face up to his conscience, which—as his inner

voice—reminds him repeatedly of his youthful abuses of others.⁵⁶ Similar to Ivan's predicament, this inner voice is presented as a personified devil. However, Dostoevsky is careful not to suggest that it is *really* the devil. In Ivan's as well as in Nicolai's case, the inner voice reveals the incompatibility between those different standpoints, Christianity and Euclidean reason. The inner voice stages a struggle between good and bad, between conscience and utilitarian logic, in the innermost souls of those two protagonists.

This could be read differently, relying on Patočka's conception of care for the soul. The Socratic idea is to care for one's soul as the way to constantly question incompatible presuppositions from one's own resources; through *dialegesthai*, "travelling through words,"⁵⁷ as Hannah Arendt would say, or dialectic. Only by hard work, questioning one's own self, and always giving reasons for one's conduct can the balance of the soul be achieved. But it can never end: it is the work of a lifetime. Once the care of the soul is re-configured by Christianity, as Patočka says, the soul is based on a relationship between an omniscient God and a person. The dialectic is eliminated in favor of Christian commandments. This is the problem of Ivan and Nicolai. Both of them rely on Christian teaching, instead of searching for the unity of the soul through their own reasoning. They both see the problematic nature of the Euclidean mind but cannot see a way out of it, since they accept modern reason, which is incompatible with the commandments. A similar problem, played out differently, is seen in the case of those who think that Euclidean logic is the only way to reason.

It is illuminating to compare the vision of the Grand Inquisitor with the system of Shigalov from *Devils*. Shigalov acknowledges that he started to construct his system to assure happiness and the satisfaction of the needs of all, with the idea of free humans; but the logic of his argument leads him to the conclusion that all must be enslaved—or, if necessary to teach them a lesson, most of them must be murdered in order to build a new society. In Ivan's poem "The Grand Inquisitor," humans are already portrayed as indistinguishable cogs in a huge machine, presented as a better model of Christian community than what Jesus—who foolishly insists on the freedom of individuals—teaches. As the Grand Inquisitor explains, once human beings are reduced to the bundle of passions, desires and needs that he proposes to satisfy to keep this society smoothly running, no opposition will threaten this utilitarian society. People do not really want to be free. They want to live with full stomachs and provisions for their needs in constant supply. Freedom is a burden, because it requires that people think for themselves. Once we accept that humans only want to satisfy their ever-newly defined needs and desires, Euclidean logic follows to its inevitable conclusion that there can only be one man-god: the rest must follow his lead.

Ivan realizes the necessity of this conclusion to the logic of the Euclidean mind, but he is not at all sure that it is a good logic; hence his struggle and suffering. On the one hand, he affirms the existence of God; on the other, he also accepts the Euclidean, utilitarian reasoning.⁵⁸ And he is well aware of their incompatibility. Euclidean logic gives him only this world; but, then, how to think divine justice, if one rejects transcendence? It is important to stress here that this transcendence need not necessarily be God—but this is how it is framed by Ivan (and Dostoevsky).

In his discussion with Alyosha, Ivan offers innumerable examples—collected from newspapers—of children being tortured as a basis for his refutation of God and the immortality on which future harmony is based. One should note, of course, that his examples are already examples of his Euclidean mind. They are not, as Zosima shows

later in the book, personal encounters with suffering, where compassion with the murderer—for example, the stranger or a woman visiting Zosima in the monastery—can lead to face-to-face forgiveness; and they are not theological examples from the Bible either. The presented list enumerates case by case the tortured children: a clear empirical study of the researcher-scientist, who accumulates his data to proceed by an induction to a general explanation. With Ivan, this explanation is reason to reject a world created by God. But does it follow? His question to Alyosha is already a utilitarian thought experiment that cannot be refuted on its own grounds. The only possibility is yes or no:

Tell me straight out, I call on you—answer me: imagine that you yourself are building the edifice of human destiny with the object of making people happy in the finale, of giving them peace and rest at last, but for that you must inevitably and unavoidably torture just one tiny creature, that same child who was beating her chest with her little fist, and raise your edifice on the foundation of her unrequited tears—would you agree to be the architect on such conditions? Tell me the truth.⁵⁹

But the required truth is already determined by the way the question is posed. The question is already framed with the possibility of only two answers. One might call it a fallacy of the excluded middle.

Zosima's Answer

Zosima gives an answer, but *not* in terms of “building the edifice of human destiny.” That is not for us to consider. His answer is compassion, understanding and love of other human beings. Yet, for us, his answer is hard to think, or accept, since we are even further influenced by modern instrumental/utilitarian reasoning.

Zosima recognizes Ivan's problem. He sees that Ivan is troubled by the acceptance of utilitarian logic. Ivan recognizes this logic as problematic, if accepted without reservation. He is aware where it might lead (unlike Rakitin). As Zosima says to Ivan (at the visit in the monastery): either you “are blessed if you believe” that all is permitted because there is no immortality of the soul, or you are “most unhappy.”⁶⁰ Zosima understands Ivan, and this is confirmed at the end of the novel, when Ivan goes “mad” because he cannot resolve his justice-dilemma between the physical world and the world beyond. He recognizes this even further, when his inner voice, personified as a devil, throws his reasoning back at him.

Zosima's alternative answer to justice, responsibility and human meaning is already based on his acceptance of the victory of utilitarian reasoning and the reduction of humans to a bundle of passions, desires and needs. Not that the old Church is presented by Dostoevsky as divine. The character of Father Ferapont is an example of how one can forget people in the self-imposed and exaggerated ascetic approach to life. Zosima is aware that the world has changed, hence his reminiscences of how he was lured by earthly possessions and desires. After all, his dying brother Markel already rejected the Euclidian world. He is a constant reminder to Zosima that love for others is what can keep community together. This is affirmed further by the scene between the young boys and Alyosha, when Alyosha says goodbye to them at the rock where their friend—the recently deceased Iljushka—loved to

come. He reminds them of the importance of remembering their love for their departed friend.

Perhaps the lesson from Dostoevsky's novels is to re-frame his struggle—which he defined narrowly as the struggle between faith in the immortality of the soul and utilitarian rationality—as the strife between good and bad in the innermost core of our being; which all of us must confront at some point in our lives. This is Patočka's project. Not only does he redefine the framework of Dostoevsky's offered descriptions of human beings, he also redefines the reading of Dostoevsky's characters in relation to the Euclidean mind that Dostoevsky took as the only reasoning in the modern world. Patočka's description of the underground man is an example of someone who sees the problematic nature of utilitarian logic,⁶¹ but does not see how to resist it. On the one hand, the underground man refuses to be defined by the logic of everyone and no one: by the public anonym, where most humans bury themselves in everydayness without questioning the problems that pile up everywhere. On the other hand, the underground man can only *react* against this logic by negativity. The public anonym is the attitude of most of us when we accept the smooth running of society, which reduces us all into interchangeable cogs. Only by changing one's attitude and positively redefining oneself as unique, not reducible to everyone and no one, might there be a way out. But this would require responsibility for our own being, through changing our attitude. The underground man cannot take that step towards one's own responsibility and love for others and he ends up hating others as well as himself. The precondition to the moral understanding of others that are part of the world is to accept the world into which we were thrown and for which we must be responsible.

The World Sense

After all, meaning is an ontological category that, originally, in its primordial being, is indifferent to human values, cares, and purposes. This is indeed so: Meaning as the basis of all understanding is the primordial difference between Being and beings, it includes neither purpose nor anyone's intention (as Hegel says, for example, that the absolute wants to be, and is, with us). This difference has no purpose or intention.⁶²

We are born into a meaningful world that is already here, already defined by the generations that preceded us. Hence sense is given to us in our historical situatedness: our sense of things, tools, events, situations, is different according to the specific world horizon that gives meaning to all. As Patočka terms it, it is the difference between Being and beings: the way we see a thunderstorm as the fury of Zeus or as an electrical discharge; the way we see nature as ordered *phusis* or as a resource for our use is not our subjective meaning, locked up in our consciousness. Here belongs Patočka's critique of bad subjectivism. Since we have become aware of the power of our understanding we cannot simply renounce subjectivity in preference to objectivity, as Masaryk proposed. Objectivity and subjectivity are interrelated. To think the one, we must think the other. There is also bad objectivity if we transgress the limits of reason, as Kant shows; or if we transplant scientific, objective reason into domains that cannot be reduced to the lowest denominator; that is, a precondition of the repeatability of the same, in other words, observable regularity. For Patočka, we need to re-think the subject-object relation that is bequeathed to us through the history of thinking.

Moreover, he stresses that without the subject, there is no possibility to think responsibility. To rethink subjectivity is important: to retain the belief that all the world is enclosed in consciousness leads to charges of egotism and self-interest. We are not creators of meaning, not everything goes. In this sense, meaning is not from us. It is not we that can “open” the space of manifestation of things that we encounter and that let us encounter them, independent of the history of thinking. But neither is there a world independent of us. As Kant and Husserl show, meaning is our human achievement.

Conclusion

I admit, though, that the chief factor was my own wicked will, and had nothing to do with my environment; of course nobody commits such crimes. But all, who are uprooted from the ground, do the same kind of things, although more feeble and watery. Many people do not even notice their nasty acts and think themselves honest.⁶³

Patočka notes that any theory that is based on the modern scientific view reduces human beings to pawns in the play of indifferent forces, such as some kind of mental processes or the predictable laws of society. No theory can account for responsible human beings who are free. Free humans take up responsibility for what they did not create and might not even want to create. They *assume* responsibility for situations and the world into which they were born,⁶⁴ as well as for life itself, even though they did not create it.⁶⁵ As Patočka insists, this aligns with Dostoevsky’s strange idea that we are all responsible for everything: “each of us is [. . .] guilty on behalf of all and for all on earth, [. . .] personally, [. . .] for all people and for each person on this earth.”⁶⁶

We came into the world, where others already live; we are born into families that accept us and provide warmth when we are young. We learn to move around the world with the help of others who love us. We begin to act on our own by impacting on the lives of others. When we start something, we can never predict the outcome because we are not alone in the world. Human acting is not a vase that one can produce in seclusion, knowing what the end of her labor will be. Human life is unpredictable and our actions are never ours only. We might cause harm to others without even realizing it in a way that might be imperceptible. As Dostoevsky shows, the ripples that our actions create influence others. We must take responsibility for them. As Patočka writes, “we did not personally bring about the adversity of our age and the present situation, we inherited it. Nonetheless, we are responsible for it.”⁶⁷

Perhaps there is another lesson in Dostoevsky. Either we affirm that we are free, and must take up responsibility for our and others’ actions, for the choices we have never made but whose consequences we inherited; or we can refuse that and become a part of the public anonym, satisfied with worshipping our passions, desires and needs, lost in our ever-changing projects, accepting only *carpe diem*. But there is also a danger when we renounce our freedom: we might end up in Shigalov’s society or the society of the Grand Inquisitor. There is a choice to be made.

Patočka’s heretical history of European reason and science is an answer to Kant and Dostoevsky and their attempt to rethink human responsibility in a world where objective reasoning relegates our human experience to the margins of knowledge; limiting it—at best—to the domain of the arts. As Patočka sees it, the most successful

attempt to anchor human responsibility was Christianity, which still needs to be rethought, as he suggests. Yet, for him, this solution is not adequate because it is based on the human relationship to a transcendent God who always watches over us and knows all about our acts, thoughts and intentions, while specifying religious commandments for human acting. As Zosima says in *The Brothers Karamazov*: “everything is from the Lord, and all our fates as well.”⁶⁸ A singular human responsibility is already rooted in the prescriptions of the omnipotent and omniscient God. How it is played out can be described differently for each person, but the ground is already given.

Kant’s project seemingly disrupts this ground, making it problematic. The Kantian shift to account for human meaning is not always acknowledged, and yet his problematic was brought about by the changes in the conception of new science. As a result of this changed conception of nature, the place of God and humans in the new universe becomes problematic. God turns out to be an unknowable and distant being, while nature is conceived as a self-running machine. As a consequence of this new, mathematized nature, the old surrounding world, full of colors, smells and warmth, which humans understood, is stripped of any teleology or harmony. Mathematized nature is oblivious to human needs. In this changed world, to think of human meaning and humans’ place in the world becomes impossible. Kant offers a new way to think about this. Kant’s contemplation of “*the starry sky above me and moral law within me*”⁶⁹ is, according to Patočka, a problematic solution in the world, where scientific knowledge replaces God in the edifice of human knowledge. The Christian theological venture is historically one of the most successful transcendent grounds to anchor human temporal meaning and singular human responsibility as “care for the soul.” Yet, it is built on an otherworldly ground. We need to return to the Socratic solution: Socrates tries to think through transient human meaning, without reliance on transcendence. His was a time of changes in the conception of *Kosmos*, when new answers were needed in place of the old, mythical ones.

Socrates offers a different way to think about the shaken meaning of traditional beliefs. Socrates’ learned ignorance is an acknowledgement of the incompleteness of human knowing. We can never know all. Instead, we need to ask questions about our commonplace understanding, which we think we already know. The Socratic inquiry is predicated on this critical approach to knowing. It is never final but it is always structured around an open question, urging us to reflect, again and again, on the shaking ground of our beliefs. The Socratic teaching is closed off by Plato, who offers a new transcendent ground in the form of his unchanging Ideas, to secure the changing opinions of humans by creating the unaskable ground of knowing. Christianity takes over this solution, further perfecting it by placing God as an unshakable foundation for human meaning, strengthening it through personal communion between a finite human being and this omnipresent God. The Socratic attempt to think through the shaken meaning of tradition without transcendence is eliminated by this offered solution of transcendence in the form either of the Platonic Ideas, or later, God, to safeguard human finite knowing through something permanent. Humans can err, they can doubt; but there is always secure meaning they can rely on. When science ceases to offer a ground for human meaning, we need to revisit the Socratic solution, formulated as “learned ignorance” and “care for the soul,” to think anew our human responsibility, in the world we live in today.

Notes

- 1 Jan Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” cf. above p. 120; hereafter title with references to this volume. [The Czech text can be found in Patočka, *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 12: *Češi I*, ed. Ivan Chvatik and Karel Palek (Prague: Oikumene, 2006), 366–422.—Eds.]
- 2 Patočka, “Přirozený Svět Jako Filosofický Problém,” in *Sebrané Spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 6: *Fenomenologické Spisy I: Přirozený Svět. Texty z Let 1931–1949*, ed. Ivan Chvatik (Prague: Oikumene, Filosofia, 2008 [1936]), 129.
- 3 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 35ff. (in this volume).
- 4 See also Yakov Golosovker, *Dostoevskij i Kant* (Moskva: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk CCCR, 1963).
- 5 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov: A Novel in Four Parts with Epilogue*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (London: Vintage Books, 2004). Hereafter *BK*.
- 6 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Demons: A Novel in Three Parts*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).
- 7 See Martin Heidegger, *What is a Thing?* trans. W.B. Barton, Jr. and Vera Deutsch (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1967) [German: *Die Frage nach dem Ding, Gesamtausgabe* [hereafter *GA*] 41, ed. P. Jaeger (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1984)]; Heidegger, “The Age of the World Picture,” in William Lovitt, trans. *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977) [German: “Die Zeit des Weltbildes,” *GA* 5]; Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996) [German: *Der Satz vom Grund, GA* 10].
- 8 See Francis Bacon, *Meditations Sacrae and Human Philosophy* (Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, 2010 [1597]).
- 9 *Apology*, 29d–e, trans. G.M.A. Grube, in Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper (Indianapolis, Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997).
- 10 According to Hannah Arendt as well, “the modern loss of faith” is the result of “Cartesian doubt.” See Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998 [1958]), 320.
- 11 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 277.
- 12 See Patočka’s discussion of “bad subjectivism,” which T. G. Masaryk identifies as the root of all the problems of modern humans: “Titanism,” in *Jan Patočka. Philosophy and Selected Writings*, ed. and trans. Erazim Kohák (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989 [1936]) [Czech: “Titanism,” *Čin* 7 (1936), 99–101]. Cf. Patočka, *Tři Studie o Masarykovi*; Patočka, *Věčnost a Dějinnost: Rádlův Poměr k Pojetím Člověka v Minulosti a Současnosti* (Prague: Oikumene, 2007); and Patočka, “Masaryk’s and Husserl’s Conception of the Spiritual Crisis of European Humanity,” in Kohák, *Jan Patočka*, 145–156 [Czech: “Masarykovo a Husserlovo pojetí duševní krise evropského lidstva,” *Kvart* 3/2 (1936), 91–102].
- 13 Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. A.J. Krailsheimer (New York: Penguin, 1995), 59 (fragment 693). [French: *Pensées*, ed. Louis Lafuma (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1962).]
- 14 Dostoevsky, *BK*, 69.
- 15 Dostoevsky, *BK*, 340.
- 16 Dostoevsky, *BK*, 69.
- 17 Dostoevsky, *BK*, 70.
- 18 Dostoevsky, *BK*, 69.
- 19 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974 [1882]), §125, 181. [German: *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, in *Nietzsche Kritische Studienausgabe*, vol. 3, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (München: de Gruyter, 1999), 481.]
- 20 See Edmund Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie, Husserliana VI*, ed. Walter Biemel (Hague: Nijhoff, 1962). [English translation: *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern, 1970)]; Heidegger, *What is a Thing?*
- 21 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 264.
- 22 Edwin Arthur Burt, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Physical Science: A Historical and Critical Essay* (London: Kegan Paul, 1925), 54.

- 23 Burtt, *The Metaphysical Foundations*, 92–93.
- 24 Patočka, “Galileo Galilei a Konec Starověkého Kosmu,” in *Vesmír* 33/1 (1954); Patočka, “Galileo Galilei a Konec Kosmu,” in *Aristoteles, Jeho Předchůdci a Dědicové. (Studie z Dějin Filosofie od Aristotela k Hegelovi)* (Prague: Nakladatelství Československé Akademie Věd, 1964).
- 25 J.W.N. Sullivan, *The Limitations of Science* (New York: A Mentor Book, 1933), 139.
- 26 Burtt, *The Metaphysical Foundations*, 95.
- 27 “The eternal silence of these infinite spaces fills me with dread.” Pascal, *Pensées*, 66.
- 28 Pascal, *Pensées*, 61.
- 29 Pascal, *Pensées*, 63.
- 30 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Werner Pluhar (Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company Inc, 1996 [1781]), A 707/B 735. [German: *Kritik der reinen Vernunft. Nach der ersten und zweiten Original-Ausgabe*, ed. Raymund Schmidt (Hamburg: Meiner, 1990).] Hereafter *CPR* with *Akademieausgabe* references.
- 31 Kant, *CPR*, A vii.
- 32 Kant, *CPR*, A 707/B 735.
- 33 See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner Pluhar (Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987 [1790]). [German: *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, in *Immanuel Kants Werke*, ed. Ernst Cassirer, vol. 5 (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1912–1922).] Hereafter *CJ* with English/German references.
- 34 Kant, *CJ*, 248–249/369–371 (§64).
- 35 Kant, *CJ*, 246/368 (§63).
- 36 “On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy,” trans. Günter Zöllner, in Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology, History, and Education. The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, ed. Günter Zöllner and Robert Louden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 195. [German: “Über den Gebrauch teleologischer Principien in der Philosophie,” in *Kant Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 8, ed. Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: Reimer, 1900ff), 159.]
- 37 Kant, *CJ*, 235–236/359 (§61).
- 38 Kant, *CJ*, 236/360 (§61).
- 39 Kant, *CJ*, 242/365 (§62), square brackets in translation.
- 40 Kant, *CJ*, 243/365 (§62).
- 41 Kant, *CJ*, 246/368–369 (§63).
- 42 Kant, *CJ*, 252/373 (§65).
- 43 Pascal, *Pensées*, 20 (fragment 73).
- 44 Jan Patočka, *Věčnost a Dějinnost* (1950), in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 1: *Péče o duši I*, ed. Ivan Chvatik and Pavel Kouba (Prague: Oikoumene, 1996), 33.
- 45 Patočka, *Věčnost a Dějinnost*, 28.
- 46 Dostoevsky, *BK*, 588.
- 47 Dostoevsky, *BK*, 589.
- 48 Dostoevsky, *BK*, 589.
- 49 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 96.
- 50 Dieter Henrich, *Der ontologische Gottesbeweis: Sein Problem und seine Geschichte in der Neuzeit* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1960).
- 51 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 95.
- 52 Patočka, “On Masaryk’s Philosophy of Religion,” 97.
- 53 See Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. David Magarshack (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1982), 235–236.
- 54 Dostoevsky, *BK*, 653.
- 55 T. H. Huxley, cited in E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 236.
- 56 See also Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Stavrogin’s Confession and the Plan of the Life of a Great Sinner*, trans. S.S. Kotliansky and Virginia Woolf (Richmond: Leonard & Virginia Woolf at The Hogarth Press, 1922).
- 57 Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind. One/Thinking. Two/Willing*, ed. Mary McCarthy (New York: Harcourt, 1978), vol. 1, 185.

- 58 See also Dianne Thompson, "Dostoevskii and Science," in *The Cambridge Companion to Dostoevskii*, ed. W.J. Leatherbarrow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
- 59 Dostoevsky, *BK*, 245.
- 60 Dostoevsky, *BK*, 70.
- 61 See Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Knopf, 1993).
- 62 Patočka, "On Masaryk's Philosophy of Religion," 128.
- 63 Dostoevsky, cited in V. Friche, "Stavrogin's Meeting with Tikhon: From Dostoevsky's Note-Book," in Dostoevsky, *Stavrogin's Confession*, 119.
- 64 Patočka, "Pokus o Českou Národní Filosofii a Jeho Nezdár," in *Tři Studie o Masarykovi*, 41 (*italics in original*).
- 65 Patočka, "Pokus o Českou Národní Filosofii," 49.
- 66 Dostoevsky, *BK*, 164.
- 67 Patočka, "Zpěv Výsostnosti," in *Sebrané Spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 4: *Umění a Čas: Soubor Statí, Přednášek a Poznámek k Problému Umění. Publikované Studie*, ed. Daniel Vojtěch and Ivan Chvatík (Prague: Oikoumene, 2004 [1969]), 418. Translation my own.
- 68 Dostoevsky, *BK*, 285.
- 69 Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Werner Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), 203 (*italics in original*). [German: *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, ed. Karl Vorländer (Hamburg: Meiner, 1990), 186.]

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Part III

Jan Patočka and Krzysztof Michalski

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Introduction

Letters between Krzysztof Michalski and Jan Patočka (1973–1976)

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The letters published here comprise the correspondence between Jan Patočka and Krzysztof Michalski in the years 1973–1976. Michalski (by then a Ph.D. student in Warsaw initially asking for help with his dissertation on Heidegger) later became founder of the Institute for Human Sciences (IWM) in Vienna and Professor of Philosophy at Boston University. The letters represent the full correspondence that has been preserved or found up to the present time (12 letters by Michalski, 40 letters by Patočka). Initially, much of the correspondence evolves as a discussion of Heidegger's philosophy. Gradually it also turns into a reflection on the "responsibility of the philosopher" and a document of solidarity forged in the exchange of philosophical friendship. The letters demonstrate how the engagement with a "life in truth" for many Eastern European dissidents was at odds with the aesthetics of banality and the bureaucratization of life.

Keywords: Michalski; Patočka; Heidegger; Eastern Europe; phenomenology

The years immediately following the spring of 1968 in Eastern Europe were years of diminishing spiritual hope and mounting political oppression. In Poland and Czechoslovakia, the return to "normalization" witnessed an exodus of intellectuals, writers, and artists, as vividly portrayed in Milan Kundera's novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. In the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, the restoration of power and authority under the regime of Gustáv Husák systematically reversed Alexander Dubček's initiatives for reform. As Václav Havel charged in his 1975 *Open Letter to Gustáv Husák*, "the order has been re-established at the expense of enslaving the spirit, desensitizing the heart and emptying existence." This emptying of existence progressed virulently in the two-headed form of an aesthetics of banality and a bureaucratization of everyday life. In Poland, the crisis of March 1968 provoked by university student protests was met with a violent suppression of dissidence and calls for liberalization. Emigration of (especially Jewish) intellectuals, university professors, and writers ensued in the wake of widespread repressive measures and an Anti-Semitic campaign promoted by the Minister of the Interior, General Moczar. Numerous academic departments were dissolved, with students and professors either expelled or imprisoned, or both; most notably, Leszek Kołakowski and Zygmunt Bauman were dispatched from their university positions, each permanently taking up academic appointments in the West.

In this vacuum and turbulence, a young Polish student, Krzysztof Michalski, approached the Czech philosopher, Jan Patočka, writing in his letter: “Unfortunately in Poland there is virtually no one able to help me in my study of Heidegger.” Contact with the venerable philosopher was facilitated by Irena Krońska, a specialist in Ancient philosophy and friend of Patočka, with whom she pursued an intellectually rich correspondence.¹ Many of the themes central to Patočka’s own thinking—the Platonic care for the soul, the movement of transcendence, and the philosophical idea and plight of Europe—were often discussed in these letters.² As importantly, this exchange of letters between Krońska and Patočka represented a precious philosophical conversation across the borders of Poland and Czechoslovakia at a time when intellectual contact was otherwise impossible and/or prohibited. For the young Michalski, who would eventually benefit from research grants to Germany during the 1970s, create the Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen in 1982 and organize the rescue of Patočka’s manuscripts to Vienna in the 1980s, a life of philosophy seemed materially and spiritually impossible; with the expulsion of his teachers (among them, Leszek Kołakowski) and many of his fellow students, he remained alone at home from what has been dubbed “the spectacular Polish revolutionary generation of 1968.”³

The contact initiated between Michalski and Patočka represented a further intellectual bridge across spatial borders, but as importantly it sparked a generational contact across time. Born in 1907, Patočka had studied with the “Masters” Husserl and Heidegger in Freiburg, had befriended Eugen Fink, had produced substantial works on Comenius, the historical reception of Aristotelian physics, and numerous other topics, and had been the recipient of the prestigious Cardinal Mercier Lectureship in Louvain.⁴ Born in 1948, Michalski had just embarked on his PhD dissertation “Truth and Time: The Problem of Truth from the Perspective of *Sein und Zeit*” only to find himself without teachers and community. Michalski asks if Patočka would be willing to read and comment on his dissertation, but also takes this opening with an invitation to contribute to a special issue of the journal *Studia Filozoficzne* (*Philosophical Studies*). In his welcoming, yet cautious response, Patočka writes: “I am not sure if your choice in me is best suited for the success of your thesis. Me, I am so to speak a taboo person here [. . .].” A young student of philosophy seeks out an established philosopher, who understands himself as a perpetual student—in Ricoeur’s apt characterization, “the most Socratic of modern philosophers.” It is a ritual repeated time and again in the history of philosophy, perhaps the *original* ritual of philosophy itself: a person who finds himself alone making contact with a person left alone as a taboo.

From these tentative approaches and gestures emerged a correspondence lasting until just before the year of Patočka’s death in 1977. In his last letter to Michalski, Patočka writes in closing: “Dear friend, I would like to believe that things are going very well with you and your wife; please excuse me that I am not more thorough today—I want that my letter depart as soon as possible and to reach you as quickly possible.” Beginning with the first letters in 1973, a vivid and at times moving portrait appears of kindred spirits and found solidarity forged in the warmth and exchange of philosophical friendship. Speaking of the “responsibility of the philosopher,” Michalski writes in his second letter to Patočka: “This problem, after all, concerns Heidegger to a greater degree than it does others; moreover for ourselves—here and now—it is particularly essential.” This emphasis on the *practical* significance of Heidegger and,

more generally, of philosophy was not divorced from a rigorous theoretical discipline of mind, as often manifest in the debates between Michalski and Patočka regarding technical and conceptual issues in phenomenology. Of special note are the discussions of Heidegger's conception of truth, the limitations and possible transformation of the phenomenological reduction, and what is philosophically at stake in the *gigantomachia* between Heidegger and Husserl. The practical responsibility of the philosopher *is* to take thinking seriously, and this call to thoughtfulness and reflection (both meanings economically captured in Husserl's—but also Heidegger's—preferred expression *Besinnung*) gives flesh and orientation to the genuine exercise of responsibility.

Much of the friendship formed in these letters quietly testifies to an essential structure, or better: movement, for the development of a civil society founded on institutions of conversation. As would come to be more visibly recognized, “civil society” came to mean for many Eastern European dissidents an engagement with a “life in truth” at odds with the aesthetics of banality (the “kitschification of the world” against which Kundera's character Sabina tirelessly rails) and the bureaucratization of life. Both philosophical virtues of Patočka's thinking—care of the soul and political solidarity—are realized in their letters. Indeed, the difficulties of sending and receiving letters, a form of writing at once private and public, as well as travel across national borders reveal in very material terms the profound obstacles for philosophical *and* human contact in a society eviscerated of its inner organs of speech.

The material question of which language to speak is equally present in their correspondence. Eight of the twelve letters from Michalski to Patočka were written in Polish, which Patočka could read, but not write; Patočka first responded in French, the language in which he corresponded with Krońska, but which Michalski could not read. Their correspondence finally settled into an exchange in German, the *lingua franca* of their shared philosophical heritage but as significantly of a common European *qua* German Heritage that the Cold War had sundered apart.⁵ Renewing this tradition, a project that for Patočka centered on the axis of a distinctly Czech philosophical tradition running back through Masaryk to Comenius, would rebuild a common and Central European space of thought, for which the circulation of letters, with Michalski as well as with others, formed a sort of prelude. In this regard, their correspondence gives valuable insight into the motivation and circumstances for the writing of arguably Patočka's most significant work, or at least, his best-known work, the *Heretical Essays*. Published in twelve *samizdat* copies in his homeland, its “tremendous impact on Patočka's Czech compatriots” and effect on the dissident generation of Havel and others can be seen as analogous, as Kohák suggests, to Comenius' writings during the Thirty Years' War. In both instances, we find the same strategy: “it accepts the collapse of all hope, yet in the collapse of hope it encounters an inner strength.”⁶ This inner strength shows itself as the deeply human quality of these letters, aside from their philosophical import and function. The young Michalski worries about his academic future, his slim chances at success for a scholarship in Germany, and his barred possibility of traveling abroad; the elderly Patočka complains of his ailments and illnesses, light-heartedly begrudges that he was only allowed 10 minutes for his Varna lecture, and expresses wonder at Heidegger's ability to work for three hours a day at such an advanced age.

My gratitude to Klaus Nellen of the IWM who first brought my attention to these letters and kindly made them available; to James Dodd and Ludger Hagedorn for their

patience and advice; to Patrick Eldridge (who co-translated Patočka's correspondence in German) and Vera Tylzanowski (who translated Michalski's correspondence in Polish); to Witold Płotka and Francesco Tava; and especially to Marci Shore for first reading to me Michalski's Polish letters, for her valuable suggestions with their translation, and last but not least, for afternoons of conversation at the IWM where she allowed me to mine her erudition thoroughly.

12 Letters Between Krzysztof Michalski and Jan Patočka (1973–1976)

Edited by Nicolas de Warren

*Translated by Nicolas de Warren, Patrick Eldridge,
and Vera Tylzanowski*

Editor's Note

The correspondence presented here is not complete: only twelve letters from Michalski are extant—the whereabouts of the rest is unknown. Patočka's forty letters represent, as far as it is known, the complete set of his letters to Michalski. The two sets of letters have been combined chronologically. All notes are mine, and have been provided to assist the reader with the identification of individuals, publications, and when deemed necessary, contextual references.

KM Letter = from Krzysztof Michalski to Jan Patočka

JP Letter = from Jan Patočka to Krzysztof Michalski

KM Letter 1

Warsaw, 4 January 1973

Dear Professor,

I am a PhD student at the University of Warsaw, where I am preparing a thesis concerning the problem of truth in the thought of Martin Heidegger. Unfortunately in Poland there is virtually no one able to help me in my study of Heidegger. Mrs. Irena Krońska told me that I could turn to you. Would you be willing to become a formal reader of my dissertation? Or, in any event, would you be willing to read it and comment on it?

The dissertation is titled "Truth and time. The problem of truth from the perspective of *Sein und Zeit*." I have already completed the [first chapter](#), which is devoted to Heidegger's revision of phenomenology ("Husserl and Heidegger: two paths to the thing itself").

Given my interests, the editorial board of *Studia Filozoficzne* [Philosophical Studies] has entrusted me with the preparation of a special issue devoted to contemporary hermeneutics. Would you be interested in contributing to this issue? We have set the submission deadline half a year from now (1 July 1973). I will enclose here a draft outline of the issue. I would be very grateful for your opinion about it.

Sincerely,

Krzysztof Michalski

JP Letter 1

11 April 1973

Dear Mr. Michalski,

Please excuse the lengthy delay of my reply—I see with some dread that your kind letter is dated January 4th—but I am not sure whether your choice of me best suits the success of your thesis.⁷ Me, I am so to speak a taboo person here, and this has made me long hesitate, especially since the subject at hand undoubtedly entails certain risks even in Poland, and for yourself and your future.

But if I can be of any assistance, I am absolutely ready to do so, and I am very honored by your proposal to serve in the capacity of official examiner of your work. Could you please therefore inform me of everything that you deem necessary to best serve in this capacity. You may perhaps send me individually the chapters of your work.

I would most likely not be in a position to write an article on the topic of hermeneutics in the requested time-span, given that I have numerous projects in the works that demand from me almost all the literary output of which I am capable.

Best wishes and in the hope of receiving news from you soon,

Jean Patočka

16900 Praha 6, Tomanova 44

JP Letter 2

31 May/1 June, 1973

Dear Mr. Michalski,

Your work exhibits a thorough knowledge of Heidegger's writings and writings about him. Further, your article about the book on Schelling has a very important critical conclusion.⁸ This conclusion should give rise to doubts as to whether Husserl's suspicion against ontology, which transgresses the limits of objectification, is so unfounded and uncritical. The "relation to one's own being in one's own being" entails that there is no sense in asking about the how of a being beyond Dasein's letting be; the "being as event" leads, as you rightly see, to a departure from the traditional concept of truth, which is oriented towards seeing, vision, evidence and presence. And this immense emphasis on the essence of human beings! Would it not be more "human" to characterize the essence of human existence simply in that the structure of world-unveiling finds itself "realized" in it? Whereby, rather than a myth of self-evasion and self-attainment, this heroicized ontology of Dasein, one could elaborate this structure in a phenomenological manner, from the essence of that which shows itself? There is no absolute ground of absolute consciousness, graspable in inner-intuition and therefore no reduction to pure immanence; but why must the ontological, the understanding of the being of the universe, be brought back to the ontological immanence of Dasein (i.e. the self-understanding of the being of Dasein)? Except for the fact that the human being knows about the universe and constantly relates to the universe, i.e., comprehends the unveiling structure of things and the structure of reaction to them, every science still considers [*the world*] in a purely objective way; is this ontologically entirely unfounded? From Heidegger's standpoint, there is no psychology, no sociology, no anthropology to develop. Dasein in Heidegger has no lived-body. I believe, however, that it is also not possible to fashion a philosophy of

history from Heidegger, for although Dasein is of course historical, Dasein is indifferent to the ontic tradition and its continuity. For us, just as with Heidegger, the essence of the human being remains distinctive in contrast to the being of things in that it understands being, in that things first come into relation to being through its power, even when it does not concern its being in its being, but rather primarily concerns the being of the whole; and even if this subjectiveness of being-human were nothing other than the presence of what is present, presentness in all its forms, then even so it can still become a phenomenon, and this means that it does not escape from being as present-at-hand.

It is your right to present things as you have; I would develop the critique of Husserl not so much against his subjectivism, but rather more against his lack of a critique of subjective reflection. But then one should also see Heidegger's subjectivism of being; as if the human understanding of being could do nothing else but span the relationship to our essence. Must Dasein therefore be ontological, because it understands its own being or because it understands Being at all?

Entirely yours,
Jan Patočka

JP Letter 3

2 June 1973

Dear Mr. Michalski,

Given that yesterday I have written in my letter much that is misleading, I would now like to add a few—hopefully—clarifying things after the fact.

Above all, I would like to stress that your work is extremely stimulating. What is also original is the contrast between the *styles* of the authors, Husserl and Heidegger (§ 13 “Zródła literackiego stylu S. u. Z.”).⁹ But is your critique against Husserl correct?

You say that existence can never be an object. Object—in what sense? Of course, if one thereby understands a thing or substance that has no relation to its being (which admittedly is also an essential determination and not a nothing), then existence is not an object. But should one thereby understand that existence can never become an object of representation, then one could not even reflect upon it. And your critique against Husserl concerns *this*: phenomenological subjectivity is grasped through a distanced reflection, with a cool glance to a *perceived* subjectivity. But on the other hand, the Husserlian ego is precisely that of which one can say: it is nothing other than the disclosure of itself. Husserlian subjectivity is not some kind of substance that awaits discovery, rather it is self-disclosing and only in this disclosure is it what it is. If this subjectivity is to be designated in the character of its being, as present-at-hand, then so must Heideggerian Dasein. As such, Heidegger has not then fundamentally proved his thesis that there exists a mode of being distinct from present-at-handness, but rather everything *is then* present-at-hand insofar as it can be reflected upon. Therefore in this sense I would recommend adopting my suggestion that there is only one manner of being—if one understands re-presentability (in the most general sense) as something being present-at-hand.

Of course this essential determination, which is nothing other than to be disclosed in disclosing, is fundamentally different from the essential determination of things. But from two things only one can be: either existence is not to be grasped reflexively, if

being-present-at-hand = unreflectability or Husserl's pure ego can withstand the critique, that Husserl uncritically presupposed that being = being-present-at-hand.

Phenomenology is a theory of *showing*. As you rightly stress, it does not deal with the what of things with respect to their content, but with the manner of how things exhibit themselves, their way of showing. One can now state: there are modes of showing other than mere *passive* representation. The hammer shows itself in hammering. But is hammering not a process that takes place *before me*, not in passive observation but, to be sure, with my participation? As if hammering were not a type of *view*! It is not a merely mechanically unfolding operation, and further its particular character can only be grasped in nothing other than reflection.

I think that one can above all then correctly appraise Heidegger's achievement, if one takes his theory of Dasein as a critique against Husserl's concept of an absolute ground of consciousness, as its critical dissolution. This would then be a genuinely *phenomenological* achievement. It seems to me that the strength of Heidegger's impetus against Husserl does not derive its force from ontology, but rather because he was more a phenomenologist than the founder of phenomenology himself. It is precisely phenomenology that leads to being, not the other way around. Uncovering and covering-over then are showing, or are oriented toward showing, which however occurs only within an understanding of being. Originarity—deficiency, proximity—distance, being-present in all forms—all of them types of such understanding that *beings* exhibit themselves or appear to exhibit themselves. And since one cannot reduce showing to noeses, which cannot be shown, one must refer back to this understanding of *Being*, which is a demonstrable factum within the presence of what is present, in its given and *referring* character, which uncoils *before us*.

Thus understood, Heidegger's approach is also safe from critiques that come from the side of Cartesian phenomenologists: because otherwise his theory could easily be taken as a dogmatic metaphysics of Dasein that shoots intuitions from a cannon, as in, for example, "the essence of Dasein resides in its existence" or "Dasein is always mine" or "Dasein is that being who is concerned with its very being." The issue here, I believe, is not primarily about ontological intuitions, but about determinations that can be brought into this approach with the help of something like phenomenology, a theory of appearance or showing. Without a being that possesses a direct understanding of being this is not possible, indeed, Husserl's attempted reduction to the immanence of *cogitationes* as such is not possible (since, in contrast to the *cogitata**, it is not given); and nevertheless being *shows itself*, the world in "the original" is *there*, shows itself, unfolds itself before us. The character of appearing and givenness are nothing other than the ways of its understanding of being, which accompanies its self-understanding.

Now in my letter from yesterday I said that it is not the case with Heidegger that Dasein's understanding of being is only "reached" through the understanding of its own being, that is, to understand it so that every understanding of being would only be grounded in the understanding of itself-in-its-own-being. This is not meant as if a direct understanding of being (or, preferably, a disclosure of being) would not be possible through Dasein. Rather, since Dasein is always being in the world, there must be along with the understanding of its own being at the same time an unarticulated, but explainable, co-functioning of endlessly unfolding horizons, somewhat comparable to what is the case with Husserl's theme of the life-world: the life-world is indeed subjective and bound to tradition, i.e. relative to a particular humanity, it is the world

of appearance, yet nevertheless only through the life-world's unfolding in rational forms does it become evident that, in itself, it already entailed a certain *foundation* for all of them and that they all would be senseless and groundless without the natural world. The subjectivity of the life-world is the forgettingness of its concealed horizons—its intuitability, its power to show is the source of all rationality. It is perhaps analogous with Dasein: Dasein appears to be disclosing-of-being only in an immediate relation to its environment, to the own-world of any given Dasein, but for us this is a springboard for an entirely different unfolding of being.

Please excuse me, dear Mr. Michalski, for my misleading explanations of yesterday; perhaps it would be best to completely “strike” out my previous bungled letter and pay it no heed, though it certainly sought to formulate a few reservations (there are many dangers with Heidegger—he certainly did not comply with phenomenology, has not committed to it, yet—and in spite of everything—this is precisely the reason why phenomenology is quite possible also beyond that which is written in *Being and Time*), but in this front *against* Heidegger it has exaggerated some things and formulated others unintelligibly.

So you see that your work elicited in me an unusually passionate reaction; please treat this as a sign of an intimate interestedness in your work—with warm greetings,
From your much devoted,
Jan Patočka

* *cogitata* are beings in the framework of characters-of-being in which Dasein discloses its ‘Da.’

P.S. I am writing this, and also wrote yesterday's letter from the hospital bed; therefore please excuse the scribbling.

JP Letter 4

29 June 1973

Dear Mr. Michalski, dear friend,

Many thanks for your precious letter. You have not wrongly interpreted my letter. I thank you very much for the philosophical way in which you have taken things. I would be very happy to receive the continuation of your text. Allow me to call your attention, in retrospect, to the fact that Heidegger himself in *Being and Time* does not go as far as you, when you say that the point of departure for Heidegger is the critique against Husserl's conception of being as a concept of presence-at-hand. Heidegger rather says that Husserl's transcendental subject remains ontologically indeterminate or under-determined, and that is possible to hold. I would however ask: can ontology be established on the basis of phenomenology or can phenomenology only first become phenomenology by way of ontology? But then where does ontology find the source of its knowledge? Furthermore, is not phenomenology in a certain sense much broader than ontology when one *considers* that on the one hand ontology leaves the theory of time outside its framework, and on the other hand ontology is not possible without this. His late work on *Time and Being* says conspicuously little about time, most of it is trivial, and that which is not trivial (the fourth time-dimension) cannot be the case, since the “approaching closeness” must in fact have something to do with the dimension of actuality.

I thank you as well for the news about Mrs. Krońska, to whom I shall write immediately by the same post as to you.¹⁰

Dear Mr. Michalski, you don't know how much good your letter did for me; once more, let me shake your hand in friendship, and remain
your devoted,
Jan Patočka

JP Letter 5

1 August 1973

Dear Mr. Michalski,

Many thanks for your kind letter. You overvalue my own. I am ready and pleased to continue our correspondence *and* discussion of Heidegger, and it would be wonderful if you, as you have proposed, could come here for some time, since I doubt whether I would be able to manage a trip to Poland—it would take me too long to explain at this moment. We should first of all fix the date, since I am expecting another visit at the end of September, and the collision would thwart our discussions. If everything comes together, you could, provided your expectations aren't too high, stay with me; my apartment is indeed small, but at any rate we have two rooms, where one could manage.

Regarding my participation in the discussion about Heidegger—I would love to, yet at the moment I have several of my own projects before me and I would not want to lose sight of them. Of course this is not too far off course for me; perhaps it is doable; however I would prefer not at this moment to promise anything definite. The same goes for the article on hermeneutics. I am no longer flexible enough to pull things out of my sleeve.

Biemel recently published a fine monograph on Heidegger with many famous and less famous photos and to some extent very interesting commentaries; it is not a presentation of Heidegger's thinking as a whole, but rather a series of remarks on some important texts, mostly about the questions of being and truth.¹¹ It was published by Rowohlt in the ro-ro-ro series and it would be easy for you to order it for some library or other. I believe, dear Mr. Michalski, that Biemel would be the right man to whom you could go in Germany, if your intention to study there for some time can be realized. Garewicz has recently expressed the intention to apply for a German fellowship; why don't you, who have a very relevant program of study, not see if you could arrange something similar?¹² It would be an honor and a pleasure for me to recommend you warmly to my friend, who, so far as I know, is still in Germany.

What you have written about our dear friend Mrs. Krońska is news to me: has she published something about me in *Znak*?¹³ I think that I recently heard that she had to refuse this, since she has so much urgent business.

Dear Mr. Michalski, I am *deeply* indebted to you for your wonderful lines and for the intention to send me the entire work when it is completed; please extend my warmest greetings to Mrs. Krońska, if she is still there; and I remain with kind regards and wishes

Your devoted,
Patočka

JP Letter 6

24 August 1973

Dear Mr. Michalski,

Many thanks for your letter and news. First of all: as far as I can see, nothing stands in the way of your visit at the end of September. I am looking forward to seeing you and to our discussions.

I would be grateful for your sending me the issue of *Znak*. I have received the issue *Twórczość* 8.¹⁴

With thanks and greetings also—though we haven't met—to your gracious wife,
I remain your devoted,
Patočka

JP Letter 7

26 September 1973

Dear, much honored Mr. Michalski,

I am very sorry that I was not able to meet you. I had so looked forward to it. At the last minute, the opportunity was offered to me to travel to Varna for a conference (I am a member of the steering committee of FISP), and hence I was unable to send you a message, since you had already departed and I did not know your vacation address.¹⁵ I did however ask Mrs. Sokol,¹⁶ with whom you spoke on the phone, to give you the number of our friend Dr. Zumr, who knew about my departure.¹⁷ Regrettably Mrs. Sokol told me that she had forgotten to do this.

A few Polish colleagues were witnesses to the catastrophe of my appearance at the conference (Mrs. Damska, Mrs. Gierulanka).¹⁸ I shortened my presentation such that my "paper" could fit into the prescribed ten minutes, which was not entirely successful, and so I had to yield to the chairman's bell and the applause of the present opponents and resign myself to not having achieved anything. That is however not the worst tragedy. The title of my paper was "The Danger of the Technicization of Science (according to Husserl) and the Essence of Technology as Danger (in Heidegger)." I must also write a small article about the conference for your *Kultura*.¹⁹ I intend to do so next week.

I have not yet had the chance to read through your work, this too must wait until next week. Please be assured that I shall do so with the greatest interest and attention. Regrettably we are limited to writing each other. But this has its positive side too since we will be forced to take greater care in our formulations.

Please write me soon as to how you are doing, and I would very much like to know whether my apologies have been met with mercy in your eyes. The opposite would make me very sad.

Your deeply devoted,
Jan Patočka

KM Letter 2

Warsaw, 16 October 1973

Dear Professor,

Thank you very much for your letter. I deeply regret that I was not able to meet you in Prague, oh well—*force majeure!*

I am daring to send you the next (penultimate) chapter of my dissertation. I delayed somewhat responding to your letter—I very much apologize—among other reasons, because I was waiting for the typescript. The second reason for the delay was that I needed to communicate with the editors from *Znak*, so that I could, with the editorial board's authorization, write something concrete to you about the planned meeting at *Znak* devoted to a discussion about Heidegger. And so: the meeting is to take place on 14–15 December of this year. I have already sent you the list of participants (a likely additional participant will be Father Wawrzyniak from the Catholic University of Lublin). If you would like to come, and are able to, the editorial board promises to cover costs for travel as well as accommodation. If the date is not convenient it could be shifted (only January and February are excluded, because at that time, Father Tischner and Dr. Stróżewski will be traveling to Leuven).²⁰

So will you come? And if so, would you prefer to receive an official invitation from *Znak*'s editorial board, or rather a private invitation—for instance, from myself?

If due to these or other considerations it is not possible for you to come, we would be very grateful (here I am speaking on behalf of the editorial board) if you would send us a contribution to the discussion (Dr. Krzysztof Pomian will also send us his contribution by correspondence from Paris). As I have already written, the topic of the discussion will be an attempt at a confrontation between Heidegger's thought and the values to which we have traditionally been attached. In effect this leads, I believe, to the problem of the responsibility of the philosopher. This problem, after all, concerns Heidegger to a greater degree than it does others; moreover for ourselves—here and now—it is particularly essential. It matters very much to me that this discussion at *Znak* expose Polish readers not merely to the theoretical importance of the problem posed by Heidegger's thought.

The title of your presentation in Varna very much interested me. Where will it be published? Would it not be suitable for the issue of *Studia Filozoficzne* on hermeneutics?

Please forgive me for foisting upon you the enormous number of pages of my dissertation. Your kindness creates a unique opportunity for me to hear a competent assessment of what I am doing. With terrible jealousy I am now following in Werner Heisenberg's memoirs (*Der Teil und das Ganze*) the conversations about physics and philosophy he engaged in with his friends and teachers from the time he was in school. My correspondence with you is my only opportunity for such a conversation.

Sincerely yours,

[Krzysztof Michalski]

KM Letter 3

Warsaw, 27 November 1973

Dear Professor,

Did you receive my letter of 16 October together with the next chapter of my dissertation? I am beginning to fear that you did not. And so I am daring to disturb you for a second time, for the date of the intended discussion at *Znak* (14–15 December) is slowly approaching, and we do not yet know whether or not you are coming, and if so, what the editorial board should do to facilitate that.

If you did not receive the previous package I kindly ask you to let me know, and in that case I will send you a copy by return mail.

Warmest greetings, for Mr. Zumra as well.

Sincerely yours,
[Krzysztof Michalski]

JP Letter 8

5 December 1973

Dear Mr. Michalski, honored and cherished friend,

I must yet once again appeal to your patience and tolerance. Since my return from Varna I have been able to neither rest nor work. I have indeed received your package, but since I suspected that it would contain the manuscript, for which temporarily, *mea culpa*, I could not invest any time, and as I have reserved a concentrated period for it, I did not immediately open it. Only after receiving your reminder-letter did I learn what *Znak* planned and what I would have wrecked for my part. However—only half-wrecked. I have yet to receive my travel papers back, which were taken from me after my return from Varna. The return of my papers seemed to be in sight but hasn't yet happened.

I have offered to *Znak* an elaboration of my Varna-lecture.²¹ I will soon send it to you in German.

I have now thrown myself into your manuscript. One can see that Heidegger for you is not all an “academic” matter. That is also, I think, the only correct approach to Heidegger, since he is a thinker of our European late-epoch and the thinker of composure in times of catastrophes. The “original relation to truth,” with which Heidegger is concerned, seems to me to be that which was once set as the foundation-stone of Europe and history. History is (primarily) history of the West, for every other culture and part of the world have history only in a secondary manner. One should reflect on this and even attempt to show this.

Now it seems to me that the most recent phase of European development still remains thoroughly determined by the conception of history as an earlier law of self-discovery of the essence of humanity. Even the self-understanding of man as the bearer of technology and therewith the accompanying dominance over the world fits within this image of history. Where this relation arises from is clear: from German Idealism and its conception of the infinity of the spirit that arrives at itself. The present time, without even suspecting it, swims in the waters of an understanding of being that arose 170 years earlier.

Heidegger's philosophy comes across as un-academic to anyone who labors to enter into its understanding, because in it, according to its own perspective, perhaps something like an epoch of the understanding of being and therewith an epoch of history announces itself. It is not the advent of a theological metaphysics of history, but rather the repetition of finitude that for the first time is being essayed in its full radicality as the ground of philosophy.

Heidegger's first and second philosophies both have finitude, so I think, as their common denominator.

Husserl's phenomenology attempted to ground the infinity of spirit in a new manner: not through a dialectic of history but rather through a reflexive intuition, a peculiar transcendental empiricism. This attempt has proven that philosophy, in a time that is

adverse to speculation, seeks after that which shows itself of itself and that it can soar to new heights as a theory of the appearing of beings in their essence: from the formality of the theory of knowledge all the way to the “things themselves.”

Now, Husserl tried to show with the phenomenological reduction that phenomena in a genuine philosophical sense are relative to transcendental subjectivity, which can be arrived at through the suspension of belief in the world, i.e. the suspension of the “general thesis of the natural attitude” with the help of *epoché*.

Heidegger’s position seems to me conditioned by the only radical response to Husserl’s highly speculative thoughts about the reduction. To show in a phenomenological manner that transcendental phenomenology in Husserl’s sense is an impossible thing, this appears to me the meaning presented by the fundamental ontology of Dasein. The “belief in the world” is accordingly not a belief, the general thesis is not a thesis, not an act (even if unthematic, though still an act of belief), that one can suspend in an “intellectual” manner. It is not a matter of an “action” that would be fundamental but also just one among other acts of a subject, and which could be represented as separable from its essence. If one were to suspend this “belief,” nothing would be left with respect to content. According to Husserl, an act of perception remains after the epoché an act of perception. With Heidegger precisely that is entirely impossible. Phenomenology is a phenomenology of finitude, or it is nothing.

This touches upon an entirely simple and fundamental phenomenon: the being-delivered over of the being of Dasein. To think this responsibility means to discover the structure of being-moved of thinking, the “throw” of thrownness, wherein the “project” and therewith the entire unfolding of the world.

Heidegger’s position is therefore the following: the understanding of being, which throws open the world, is not a “belief,” not a “thesis,” but rather it is the being of Dasein itself. In the course of our “life of consciousness” we do not achieve any acts of belief on the basis of a completely general and unthematic act of belief; rather, to be in the world is *our* being. Without this we are nothing and we are not. Husserl’s speculative attempt at a reduction does not uncover the true character of the world as act of belief, as general thesis, but is only the late arrival of the nature of an idealism of consciousness and its theory of acts.

Being delivered over is at the same time inseparable from the “nothingness” in the being of Dasein. Being delivered over, nothingness, and thrownness belong together. On this basis, the view you hold, that the early Heidegger is the “summit of subjectivism,” because here the “subject” is bereft of any support from other grounds, to me seems to be somewhat exaggerated. The resoluteness of the being of Dasein is a manifestation of finitude, which simultaneously refers to beings that are situated “outside” of me and which makes any additional “proof” for an outside superfluous. In this sense, Heidegger’s philosophy is a turn back from German Idealism to a deepening of the Kantian standpoint, and the deepening is significant enough; this shows what remains incomplete with Kant and dogmatically asserted; while Heidegger’s phenomenological-ontological position is self-contained.

In another sense, one can claim that Heidegger’s late-philosophy represents a very difficult attempt to go beyond transcendental philosophy (interpreted as fundamental ontology) by its own means. Despite the factum “there is” being only in understanding, understanding is not apprehended as the ground of being, not even a partial ground, but inversely original truth, openness, are grasped as the ground of the understanding of being.

This may be: but to illuminate the essence of man, this then remains as an autonomous philosophical task to be accomplished. On this basis, it seems to me however that the phenomenological attempts of people like Merleau-Ponty, Ricœur, de Waehlens, etc., are not satisfied with Heidegger's position. That Heidegger's position is unsatisfactory on this point seems to be indicated by their attitude towards the problem of the lived-body and towards the problems of community, of being-with and of *Mitdasein*. With Heidegger, all of this is only meagerly indicated and in the last count it is wrapped up in the catastrophe of his complete rejection of all metaphysics.

On a few other points as well Heidegger seems to have left his first philosophy undeveloped, e.g., the perhaps very significant base of responsibility in the phenomenon of being delivered over. Heideggerian philosophy ontologizes responsibility and thus negates the modern separation of ethics from ontology, which has given rise to so many disasters, for which the false moralism of the moderns to a large extent bears the blame and which has contributed to Nietzsche's abolition of morality. Responsibility is not a relationship to just any being, but rather an ontological movement of Dasein. This is highly important: Heidegger moves partly along the path of Aristotle, correctly understood. Yet doesn't one comprehend falsity and inauthenticity too narrowly and perhaps fail to capture them properly at their real site, if one completely relinquishes it to the phenomenon of the "they-self" and then interprets the entire movement of Dasein from there (as flight, running-ahead, etc.)?

Another point: how does Heidegger's renunciation of any metaphysics relate to, or agree with his conception of the unscathed world, the world of the "fourfold," as it is conceived of in his *Vorträge und Aufsätze*? Is this world actually just an understanding, and only there in the understanding? And how does it generally relate to the *physis*? It seems to me then that Heideggerian philosophy, important as it may be due to its many points of departure, rather presages a program than its implementation, that it presents a beginning, which has not been taken up because philosophy in general is not at all desirable in our present age (because we close our eyes to the collapse of Europe).

Perhaps one could say that Heideggerian philosophy suffers from an inverted version of the affliction that Husserlian philosophy suffers. The latter suffers from an ambiguity about the ontological, although it attempts to parse out a great deal of ontic phenomena which has attracted—in spite of many critiques as well—a great deal of interest from psychologists and sociologists in the postwar period. Heidegger's philosophy has discovered the ontological once again but has not found its way back to anthropology.

Nevertheless the breakthrough to the finitude of Dasein and being seems to me to mean an approach that determines us all, whether we want it to or not. I return now to the beginning of my modest remarks. The strange relationship to history, which has spread throughout the East just as much as the West, reveals the same origin. People have encountered and continue to encounter mass slaughter and any kind of degradation happily bereft of any responsibility, because the march of history in its inner and lucid necessity makes this "sacrifice" necessary. It is of little import whether certain people in remote corners still believe that some divinity is coming towards them, or if history has been humanized, but man has been superelevated and at the same time degraded as the bearer of this logic of history, as the expression of the

structure of history itself. In any case in these motifs, which we live and which we are today, there are positions that have not been thought all the way through, masses of thoughts that point beyond themselves, which owe their existence and their power to their not-having-been-thought-through-to-the-end. In the face of all this, to have posed the question concerning the meaning of being (and of happening and of history), but therein to have remembered the finitude of Dasein and of being is indeed a great accomplishment.

Dear Mr. Michalski, please excuse this rash improvisation. I'm giving it to a dear friend who has the kindness to bring it to Krakow earlier than the Post could manage. Please deliver to the editors of *Znak* my best thanks for their readiness to make so many sacrifices for my visit; as you can see up until now this would have been in vain, as I am still always kept in the dark about my travel possibilities.

And above all—once again I ask forgiveness regarding your manuscript, which I intend to comment on soon in greater detail.

For today I close with thanks and greetings and hope for more favorable opportunity and time, when we can actually meet.

Your much devoted,
Jan Patočka

KM Letter 4

Warsaw, 10 January 1974

Dear Professor,

Thank you very much for your letter. I will translate the statement you included about Heidegger's philosophy and send it to *Znak* as a contribution to the discussion I wrote to you about, which took place in Kraków in mid-December. The issue of *Znak* that will include the discussion is foreseen for April–May 1974.

My dissertation is now finished. I will send you the last chapter separately, with a request for your evaluation. I am most attached to this chapter—in it I tried to include certain tones critical towards Heidegger. The [first chapter](#), almost in its entirety, has appeared in the tenth issue of *Studia Filozoficzne*. As soon as I receive the offprints, I will send you one.

In addition, I am working on preparing a selection of Heidegger's essays in Polish. Some of them will appear earlier in journals. The first translation—*Die Zeit des Weltbildes*—will appear in the February issue of the monthly *Odra*. If you are interested, I would be happy to send you this issue.

Will you come to Poland? And if so, when? I would very much like to have the chance to talk with you. If you do not plan on coming to Poland, is it possible for us to meet in Prague? I could perhaps manage to come to Prague for a few days. When would it be most convenient for you to devote a bit of time to me?

Once I defend my dissertation and send the Heidegger volume to press, and after the academic year ends, I would like to try to go to Germany. Perhaps—this is not yet certain—I will manage to get a fellowship for a few months from the Germans (although now, following the signing of official agreements, this is more complicated than it was before)—and in that case, perhaps I will also manage to get permission to travel. At the moment, though, these plans are far from being realized. Yet I would very much like, after completing my doctorate, to study “at the

source” and finally listen to the lectures of the German professors whom I am reading.
Warmest wishes, sincerely yours,
[Krzysztof Michalski]
P.S. Krzysztof Pomian asked me to pass on to you his warmest wishes.

JP Letter 9

25 January 1974

Dear Mr. Michalski,

The last section of your valuable and idea-rich work is safely in my hands as well as your kind letter, where you mention forwarding the letter to the journal *Znak*. I am leaving now for a few days to the countryside for relaxation and after my return I will take up your text immediately, and will soon thereafter write you with my immediate impressions and observations.

Meanwhile, the unfortunate news about the passing of Mrs. Krońska has arrived, and I can barely express to you what this terrible loss means for old friends, as one couldn't hope for a replacement of such a relationship in this life.

It would of course be better, by which I mean more realistic, if we could arrange for a meeting in Prague. In principle, I am always ready to welcome you here in Prague and you could, as already mentioned, stay with me. I am in fact trying to renew a request for a trip to Germany (I recently received an honorary doctorate from the Technical University of Aachen, where my friend Biemel works at the philosophical faculty, and would like to receive the diploma), but, first of all, that is a golden mountain and, second of all, even if it works out, the trip is not a pressing concern. The only obstacle would be the arrival of other friends and acquaintances from abroad. It would be nice if you could tell me when it would be best for you, so that we can determine something more concretely. As a retired person I have plenty of time in principle, which is not the case with you, therefore I shall let you take the initiative.

In the hope of hearing from you soon, I am with kindest greetings and New Year's wishes,

Your much devoted,

Patočka

P.S. Zúmr thanks you very much for your greetings, which he warmly returns.

KM Letter 5

Warsaw, 23 February 1974

Dear Professor,

Thank you very much for your letter and for being willing to trouble yourself further with reading my dissertation. I am anxiously awaiting your assessment.

The death of Mrs. Krońska plunged us here, too, into great sadness and mourning. How seldom today we have the chance to meet someone of such broad learning and integrity—and how acutely one feels the absence of such a person! Although it was only a short while ago that I began to see Mrs. Krońska more often, I felt her departure as the departure of someone truly close.

Would it be convenient for you if I were to come to Prague at the beginning of May? I still have quite a lot of work, but I think that I will manage to finish it by the end of

April—so that in the first days of May I should be free. Would this be a good time for you?

Here at the Polish Academy of Sciences Dr. Garewicz organized a session devoted to Kant, at which I also presented a paper. In it I tried to relate the experience of the limits of transcendental philosophy that we encounter in Heidegger. The theses of this paper are in principle contained in the [third chapter](#) of my dissertation, the one titled “The Limits of Transcendental Philosophy.” I am also continuing to prepare the Heidegger volume for print—although recently the chances of its publication have significantly decreased.

Please accept my most sincere congratulations on receiving the doctorate *honoris causa* from Aachen.

Sincerely yours,
[Krzysztof Michalski]

KM Letter 6

10 March 1974

Dear Professor,

I am sending you my translation of your statement-by-correspondence for *Znak*. I ask you kindly to look at the translation and check whether it reflects the original to a satisfying degree. I had some difficulties deciphering your handwriting—some doubts I resolved myself (in accordance with your intention?); other sentences indecipherable to me I left out, judging that I could do so without greater damage to the whole; in one case, however (in the translation this is page 5, 2 lines from the bottom) I left an empty space, not knowing what I could write there and at the same time feeling that I could not leave out the sentence.

I translated the Heideggerian terminology according to the accepted convention in the volume of Heidegger translations I am preparing. *Dasein*—*przytomność* [presence/consciousness], *bycie przytomne* [being present/conscious], *był przytomny* [a present/conscious being]; *Sein*—*bycie* [being], *Seiendes*—*był* [a being], etc. Given the lack of an adequate Polish word for the German “*die Überantwortung*” [being-delivered-over] I decided to translate it not very literally as *faktyczność* [facticity]—do you accept such a solution?

And so I ask you kindly to correct my translation. If you consider it satisfactory, please send the text directly to *Znak*’s editorial office (Kraków, ul. Sienna 5). The editorial board would undoubtedly be very grateful if you would be willing to send it as soon as you find a moment to look it over. Making use of this opportunity, I am permitting myself to send you an offprint of my article from *Studia Filozoficzne*, the content of which you know from the manuscript (it is part of the [first chapter](#) of my dissertation).

Sincerely yours,
[Krzysztof Michalski]

PS. For comparison I am enclosing as well your original letter. I would be grateful if you would then be willing to send it back to me—your letters comprise for me the most precious part of my archive.

JP Letter 10

11 March 1974

Dear Mr. Michalski,

Today, briefly: I would be very pleased to see you in Prague at the beginning of May. Should something arise between now and then, I will send you word immediately. But already your *excellent* work instills joy in me. I cannot today take a fixed position, since I am at the moment ill, and have to deal with a lot of pain, and that is not conducive for concentration. But I hope to get rid of this thing soon. I am also currently preoccupied with transcribing an article, which has taken a good deal of my time. But as soon as I am finished with it, I will of course write to you more extensively about your work.

Your much devoted,
Patočka

P.S. Friends are departing: last week it was van Breda . . . after Mrs. Krońska another difficult loss.²²

JP Letter 11

27 March 1974

Dear Mr. Michalski, esteemed friend,

Please excuse me that I only reply to your letter today and complete the corrections for the translation of my short text on Heidegger.²³ Last week, a very dear friend, Professor Walter Biemel from Aachen, was here for a visit, and that left no time for this kind of correspondence. Professor Biemel is the chief editor at Vittorio Klostermann which has taken on the large edition of Heidegger's works, which, in addition to all publications will also include all the lectures, and he has himself taken up the task of editing the lectures on "Logic" (1924), which contain the actual genesis of *Being and Time*. Thus you see there was much of interest to experience here. Since he has many connections, some of which are very influential, I did not miss the chance to recommend you for a grant, which would naturally lie outside the framework of a stipend from the exchange program and other similar institutions, which are administered through your administrative authorities; and he recognized the importance of such an arrangement. So much as regards the Biemel visit.

Concerning the translation, I found it excellent, but allowed myself on p.1 in the sentence "dochodzącego do samego siebie *prawa*" to replace the word "prawa" with "ducha," since there you weren't able to decipher my handwriting. On p.5 in the gaps I inserted the words that I quote here: "Ludzie szli i idą naprzeciw każdego masowego ubijania i poniżenia w wesołym przeświadczeniu, że zwolnieni są od wszelkiej odpowiedzialności . . ." ²⁴ In case there's a mistake with the Polish, I would ask you please to correct it according to its meaning, as I permit myself to ask of you to oversee the corrections for *Znak*. As soon as I have copied the text for myself I'll send the manuscript of the translation addressed to the journal, and I ask you to subsequently retrieve the original, since even the wording has some meaning for me. I thank you sincerely, Mr. Michalski, for your kind words; I was very touched, since you can imagine how isolated my life is here and what this means for me. I appreciate your talent, your thoroughness, and your knowledge *very* much and have already learned much from you, and hope to learn even more in the future.

I'll close for today, but will soon again contact you. And I look forward already to your visit.

Your much devoted,

Patočka

16900 Praha 6, Tomanova 44

P.S. The honorary doctorate from Aachen causes me more difficulty than joy. And also for poor Biemel, who initiated this whole thing. Nonetheless, I thank you for your congratulations.

JP Letter 12

5 April 1974

Dear Mr. Michalski, esteemed friend,

Enclosed is the letter that rightly belongs to you, I do not place so much value upon it myself and it is indeed yours.

I would like to thank you once again for your work. I'm still reading it and have been thinking a great deal about the problems you raise.

It is known that with Husserl as well as Heidegger the theme of truth has enjoyed the attempt at great enrichment, but has also been laden with many difficult problems. Most of the difficulties seem to accompany the "specific concept of truth." Already with Husserl, truth is not merely one of two parties of *antiphrasis*. Rather, it is above all an antithesis to mere meaning-intentions, to empty intention. Truth/falsity do not solely concern the copula, but the entire state of affairs. Already the "specific character of truth" is pushed back to its original condition: the "is" or the "not is" of the copula depends on the fulfillment of intentionality and its modes. With Heidegger this goes farther. Of course, if one considers truth above all as discovery and revealing, then questions such as the ones you propose are unavoidable. Everydayness is every bit as revealing as authenticity. The same is the case with ontological truth. One evidently cannot get by with truth as being-discovered, being-manifest, manifestness. But perhaps one could find some clarity with the following consideration. There is not only the opposition between true and false, correct and incorrect, but also between original and derived, similar to the distinction between *episteme* and *alethes doxa* in Plato. When, for example, one asks for the Being of Dasein, starting from Heidegger's designation: a being, to whose Being belongs an understanding of Being and that, in its Being, has a relationship of Being to its Being, then one can probably not ask: an understanding of Being—how it is or how it is not? But rather one must ask: understanding of Being in an original or derived sense? Perhaps this dimension of originality, the dimension of where one could possibly enter into (yet also the one that closes itself off, when the problem is treated purely formal, as is the case with the *antiphrasis*-consideration), is more important for the problem of truth than the "specific" consideration of truth and falsity, which occupies the same level and does not enter into the deep ground of truth.

Please excuse these improvised lines, perhaps you may find something more meaningful and appropriate to the problem. I remain, however, with many greetings and much anticipation for your arrival,

Your much devoted,

Patočka

P.S. I'm awaiting an important visit from Germany in April. My visitor does not currently know whether or not he will have to push his trip back to the first half of May. In this case, (which seems to me at the moment unlikely) I would have to ask you to push back your visit a few days, so that the entire program does not become confused.

I will immediately send you a typed-copy of my letter. I have allowed myself to keep another copy.

JP Letter 13

24 April 1974

Dear Mr. Michalski, honored young friend,

I write today in a hurry due to a practical matter: concerning your trip to Prague. It would be best for me if your visit could happen on the second week of May, since I am thinking about leaving Prague between 30 April and 5 May. Apart from that, my warm invitation is still open, and that you could stay with me during the above-mentioned time, such that we might converse as much as possible and discuss themes of interest to us both.

On Monday evening, Mr. Póltawski from Krakow was here, with whom I spent a very stimulating evening.²⁵ He was on his way from Rome to Berlin; in Rome he attended a conference on [St.] Thomas; in Berlin, a conference on phenomenology.

I would like to—in light of our most recent discussion about the concept of truth in Heidegger—remark that Heidegger in *Zur Sache des Denkens* criticized his own conception of truth of being: *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking* (p. 76–78).²⁶ According to this view, *aletheia* is *not* = truth of being and above all *aletheia* is *not yet* truth; truth is from the beginning the *orthotes* and a transformation in the essence of truth, as once believed to have been established with *Plato's Theory of Truth* and *Letter on Humanism* is not the case.

Yet that does not mean that one does not experience truth in a *more original* manner if one questions back from the *orthotes* to *aletheia*, i.e. to the clearing and hiddenness of being, etc.

I think however that you are right when you claim that the fascination with the problem of truth that pervades the European Spirit ultimately does not find with Heidegger the decisive expression that it would require. Thus one must experience an inner transformation, insofar as one goes back to the origin (and even descends into the essence of metaphysics): what are thinkers and poets for in desperate times?

I remain with warm greetings and in expectation of your visit,

Your much devoted,

Jan Patočka

24.IV.74

KM Letter 7

Warsaw, 27 April 1974

Dear Professor,

Thank you very much for the news. Since you are not certain about your schedule for the beginning of May, perhaps the second half of May would be more convenient?

Say between May 15th and 20th? In no case would I want to cause you even the slightest problems.

Thank you very much also for your comments on the problem of truth. I am wondering, though, what the relationship is between the opposition primordial-secondary and the problem of the mediatedness or non-mediatedness of the human relationship to anything at all. Is it not the case that, if we accept the primordial-secondary opposition as intransitive (and likely only in that case can it functionally substitute the opposition truth-falsehood), then we are also compelled to acknowledge some kind of *unmediated* contact with the dimension of primordially, of ultimate primordially? Yet is any kind of unmediatedness possible, does it not stand in contradiction to the *finitude*, radically understood, of man? It is not at all clear to me how the later Heidegger himself understands this—some researchers, for instance F. Wiplinger in *Wahrheit und Geschichtlichkeit*, ascribe to Heidegger a recognition of a certain unmediatedness, and thus of a certain sphere ultimately “originary,” “primordial.” Yet how to reconcile this with the conviction that our being is a “hermeneutic circle,” with the conviction of the historicity of being itself?

Sincerely yours,

[Krzysztof Michalski]

JP Letter 14

6 May 1974

Dearest friend Michalski,

I found your kind letter upon my return. The 15th–20th works well for me. On the 15th, I have to give a lecture to a group of psychiatrists on the theme of “Dasein.” Otherwise, I do not have anything on the schedule for this time.

Concerning your remark on the opposition primary-secondary: don’t you think that it remains valid even when that which is designated as “primary” proves itself not to be primary in an *absolute* sense? Otherwise I found your remark very profound and rich.

I await our meeting with many hopes
and am
your much devoted,
Patočka

KM Letter 8

Warsaw, 31 May 1974

Dear Professor,

I am writing today still in Polish for I have much to do—and I want to pass on the news to you as quickly as possible. I delayed writing until now precisely because I wanted to collect all the pieces of news. And so, in order:

1. Yesterday I was in Kraków, where at *Znak*’s editorial office I learned that your article about “the end of philosophy” as well as your memoirs about van Breda will be joyfully accepted. As soon as you have them ready, I kindly ask that you send both texts to me, I will translate them and send them to *Znak*—and they will be published without delay.

2. I spoke with Mr. Bristiger—he kindly asks that you send him your article (of any length) by the end of June, for at that time they will send the next issue to print. Otherwise it will take another year—*Res Facta* appears only once a year.
3. I also spoke with Mr. Garewicz; more than 2100 zlotys are waiting for you at the Polish Academy of Sciences as an honorarium for the article about Husserl.
4. *Studia Filozoficzne* is awaiting your article on Husserl and Heidegger, in accordance with what I spoke about earlier—I am also awaiting it, far more impatiently, as I am very interested in the article.
5. With respect to potential honoraria from *Twórczość* and *Studia Filozoficzne* for “Romana Ingardena teoria obrazu” [Roman Ingarden’s theory of the picture],²⁷ I have not yet received information as to whether they are available and, if so, in what amount. But I am bombarding them with phone calls and I will soon get the necessary information.

As for myself, I have passed the economics examination required for the doctorate. I think that the defense will take place soon and then I will be able to get on with my work. My visit with you very much mobilized me; it was one of the greatest experiences of my life. I feel extremely grateful and indebted—and I believe that the best way to pay this debt is by intense work. And I cannot wait to begin.

Sincerely yours,

[Krzysztof Michalski]

P.S. I am passing along sincere regards and warmest greetings from Mr. Bristiger and Mr. Garewicz. I am also sending, as agreed, Pomian’s book about the Middle Ages.

JP Letter 15

16 June 1974

My dear young friend,

Your *very* kind and extensive letter touched me very much upon my sick bed, and only after I received the important book by Pomian (which for me seems to exhibit the entire Medieval problem of chronicles) have I pulled myself together enough to respond.²⁸ I am suffering since last week from a nasty flu, bronchitis, and general fatigue and most of the time I remain in a sleep-like state; temperature went up to 39 and after taking a good deal of salicylic acid, which of course wreaks havoc on the stomach, this morning I managed to land on a temperature of 37.5, but nothing lower, I am very haggard and worried.

However I wanted to tell you, dear Mr. Michalski, that I have rarely met such a thoughtful and determined young man, and assure you that your stay was just as fruitful for me as you claim it has been for you (one must of course first wait to see what comes out of it). Above all I believe that it is only through you that I for the first time truly begin to see the significance of Poland for Europe and for us, to have begun to guess at this fundamental meaning, and the structures on which they are based. By the way, it was only three days after your departure that Professor Seńko visited me and what he presented was in such a strange accord with your own explanations, at times it was as though it had come from one and the same mouth.²⁹

Also I found further confirmation for my interpretation of the particular meaning of Heidegger’s philosophy for our East-European nations and for my belief that it entails

a certain philosophy of history. This philosophy of history is undeveloped and, due to specific reasons, it is perhaps even undevelopable, because it cannot be accommodated into a systematicity *à la* Hegel. But this philosophy concerns the history of being itself and therefore is about to supersede the one which is prevailing today. And that is precisely what is striking—that no one in the West has connected to *this* side, which is the greatest and most vibrant.

What makes me very unhappy is the circumstance that every bit of intellectual work at the moment exhausts me. Now that I have written this I will most likely have to sleep the whole morning away. I did not want however to postpone my response any longer. I even burn with impatience to get back to work to satisfy all of the requests. When one stays in bed, one has the impression that everything is finished in one's head, and that it is just a matter of pouring everything out—a common author's illusion. In any case, many different ideas about work chase each other around in my somewhat pained and dizzy head. Above all, I am diligently taking antibiotics and am trying to gain my strength. This illness has arrived so inopportunistically.

I thank you for the good news about the progress with the exams and wish you all the best for the defense, and I am convinced that your mastery will shine through there. And thank you once again for your attention to the material things, as well as for the wishes from friends and acquaintances. I have learned from Mr. Seňko which I did not yet know, that Mrs. Kroňska wanted to receive a *Viaticum* and obtained one and received a Catholic burial.³⁰

Dear Mr. Michalski, please write in which ever language you please, but write soon again!

Always yours,
Patočka

<In the margins:> I hope to be able to send you a special printing of Funke's Festschrift on the phenomenological *epoché*. Small but quite arduous and, as I have found, very much <influenced> by Heidegger's *Was ist das—die Philosophie?* p. 40. That seems to me to be of yet unrecognized importance for *both* versions of phenomenology.

JP Letter 16

19 June 1974

Dear Friend Michalski,

I am very ill, it seems to be something wrong with the lungs, and the bronchitis will not yield.

Nevertheless I wrote an article about van Breda, my son-in-law is here with me to transcribe it, and I shall send it soon.³¹ The article about Husserl and Heidegger will soon follow.³² I will then move on to the translation of the article on the end of philosophy into German.³³ Whether under such conditions I can still satisfy Bristiger is for me doubtful; *most likely not*.³⁴

Not only did I very much like Pomian's book; it *enraptured* me. Nevertheless, one could ask whether, for example, regarding the issue of writing history, one should not rather proceed from the notion that the early Middle Ages' conception of being was originally constrained to the concept of revelation (and authority) (and therefore: theological) and only in addition, insofar as the realm of the non-believed comes into question, is influenced by the Platonic schema of presence (and immediacy). It might

even already be the case for Augustine. Why is there this alliance between Platonism and a theological conception of revelation in the early Middle Ages? Difficult to say, one can only note that Platonism (Neo-Platonism) represented the only philosophy at the time, and perhaps it suggested and distinguished itself through its *emphasis on transcendence*.

Pomian has in any case provided a general key for Medieval chronicling and its methodological procedure.

It would perhaps be worthwhile to place this in contrast with the approach of ancient historiography but also to bring out what they have in common (being = presence). Ancient historiography therefore = essentially history of the present.

Strange that nobody, as far as I know, has stressed the Cartesian origin of modern historiography (document = result of methodical skepsis; construction of the past on the basis of documents = historical reality – not something *transmitted*, but *actively gathered*). Cogito as the basic principle of modern history.

Mr. Póltawski sent me Ingarden's "Little Book about Man," but I have not yet read through all of it, I see however that it is not a unified work but put together from articles.³⁵

I would be very interested to get into my hands the book by H. M. Serejski *Idea jednośćo*, Warsaw 1937.³⁶ Perhaps I can dig it up somewhere here.

I wish you all the best for your defense!

Entirely yours,
Patočka

KM Letter 9

Warsaw, 28 June 1974

Dear Professor,

Many thanks for the letters—I also received yesterday your article on van Breda. I will soon translate it and then send it immediately to Krakow.

I was made uneasy by the news regarding your health. Is now everything in order? In any case, I wish you, dear Professor, a speedy recovery and thus hope my best wishes can soon be realized.

I inquired with the editors of *Twórczość* and *Studia Filozoficzne*, and that a sum of around 3000 zł will be made available for you, around 1000 for the article in "Fenomenologia Romana Ingardena" and 2000 for "Faust" in *Twórczość*. You therefore have in total a sum of around 5000 zł in Poland along with the honorarium from *Archiwum Filozofii* . . . The money can unfortunately only be given to you in person—perhaps you could make it here, maybe if you came to us June of next year on occasion of the conference on phenomenology. I also learned in Krakow that the Catholic Institute for Contemporary Thought, under the directorship of Prof. Tischner, my friend, plans to send you an invitation; if it would be possible and if you have time and motivation for this, then perhaps you could come to Poland earlier.

My defense is already over—without difficulties. Kuczyński accused me however of "methodological errors," namely, that I did not notice that Heidegger's philosophy is a deliberate and deliberately hidden polemic against Marxism. The question is, however, whether Kuczyński consciously or unconsciously follows Lukács on this point and that I did not at all develop a confrontation between Marx and Heidegger.

But all of this was a normal ritual—nothing dangerous—and for my friends, who were present during my defense, it was a good distraction.

I have given the manuscript to the publishing house PWN (Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe)—there is still the possibility for publication.³⁷ I would like to improve some things, re-formulate some things and add some things. But I must now work on the remaining translations of Heidegger's essays as well as write for them an introduction. I am now not working so fruitfully—perhaps I shall therefore take a few days in the countryside. I have also asked for a passport—in case I receive the permission, I shall make my way to Vienna at the end of July.

Many thanks for the remarks on Pomian's book. If you'll allow me, I will send him a copy.

It's unfortunate that you most likely will not finish the article for Bristiger. Could you not make this work a priority? *Znak* can wait—and *Res facta* is published infrequently; if you could still send your article in July, it could then be published in the next edition—if not, then you most likely would have to wait another year.

You once told me that your son-in-law works on Schönberg and is a musicologist. I forgot to ask his name. Perhaps he could write something for *Res facta*? Could you please send me his address; the editors could then contact him directly. I will find out immediately about Serejski's book.

I send you, Professor, warm wishes and remain grateful and full of respect
[Krzysztof Michalski]

JP Letter 17

17 July 1974

Dear Mr. Michalski, young friend,

First of all, warmest congratulations on your successful defense! As I see, you are non-tiring in your intents concerning diligence, refinement of language, and hopefully also Greek and Hegelian philosophy! Your way is now free for further goals—and hopefully your important book on Heidegger will soon appear. You should now take some real rest, since more work awaits you, and please also consider that one is truly healthy only once, as soon as something in the organism starts being disruptive, it will most likely remain a permanent limitation.

Will you be able to stop over here during your trip to or return from Vienna? It would make me very happy. Provided that I am already back from the hospital. Tomorrow I am going to the pulmonary division of the university hospital for a thorough examination. They promise me that I will be released after 7–10 days, but who can fully trust doctors? The x-rays still reveal pneumonia in the back of the right lung.

What you arranged for me concerning my honorarium and other things are for me tokens of a touching friendliness. I will strive next year to come to the Heidegger discussion in Poland. Whether I can still write the article remains uncertain, since I now can only work with great difficulty. It would of course be good if I could finalize the thing for *Res facta*,³⁸ but I can alter my course only very poorly and sluggishly—it's difficult for me to go from Phenomenology to German Idealism. The article on the question of technique however is almost finished.³⁹

Many thanks for your effort that you gave to the article on van Breda. It is not philosophical, but pertains to the peculiar destiny of a philosopher.

Your recommendation for my son-in-law Ivan Vojtěch, the musicologist, made me very happy.⁴⁰ He is currently in the countryside, but he will certainly contribute something interesting for *Res facta*, since he just recently finished an introduction for a collection of Schönberg's theoretical writings, which will be published by S. Fischer. For some days Mr. Declève from Brussels was here, who translated my *Natural World* together with a Czech colleague into French, and he asserts that it would be good to publish the book now.⁴¹ Of course, with a short afterword that will draw attention to the new standpoint. Perhaps it will be recommended for *Phaenomenologica*.⁴²

Dear Mr. Michalski, all the best to you and your dear family, and let me hear from you soon!

Your much devoted,
Patočka

P.S. It's very kind of you that you want to write to Pomian regarding my enthusiasm for his book!

KM Letter 10

Warsaw, 12 August 1974

Dear Professor,

Many thanks for your letter of 17.07. Are you now back home? I hope that the examination, which you had to undergo, did not reveal anything and that you will soon be healthy again!

I am responding this time with some delay because I have been waiting for the passport; I did not know whether I could come to Prague on my way or not. Now I already know—I regrettably did not receive the passport. I am now prohibited even from traveling to Eastern countries. I must therefore patiently wait for your visit to Poland in order to see you. Maybe this situation will change with time.

I am therefore staying for the moment in Warsaw; I am trying to recruit higher authorities. I also have unfinished business to take care of. In September I would like to recover a little—if I can find an affordable place. That is however not easy! At the end of September there was a colloquium in Heidelberg on “Music and Time,” to which I was invited by Prof. Georg Picht. But it is extremely likely that I will not be permitted to travel there.

I have already translated your article on van Breda and sent it to *Znak*. Meanwhile, the issue on Heidegger in *Znak* has already appeared. The editors will certainly send you a copy—if they do not do so, please write me and I shall send it immediately.

Regarding Vojtěch, your son-in-law: could he contact *Res facta* directly and suggest what he would like to write for them? I've spoken with Bristiger about this and he awaits the suggestions. The address: *Res Facta*, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, Aleja Krasińskiego 11a, Krakow.

I have allowed myself also to send you an issue from the bi-monthly journal *Teksty* with my article on Heidegger's theory of emotions.

I wish you all the best and remain respectfully

[Krzysztof Michalski]

JP Letter 18

29 August 1974

Dear friend,

Thank you very much for your lovely letter and all of your news. If I haven't responded for some time, it was because shortly after my return from the hospital I was again taken by an ailment. Because of this it was even difficult for me to read your most welcome and wonderful article in the *Teksty*.⁴³

The article is wonderful and radical, yet I have some concerns in not approaching Heidegger's statements on the problem of attunements as "descriptions." They are of course not objective and external descriptions, but if they weren't descriptions, how else could one distinguish them from other "appeals to the understanding of being" as there is also poetry and religion? And how could one speak of analyses, examinations, if nothing is grasped? Is it not so that Heidegger can in fact grasp the sense of attunements better than Husserl, who is also able to describe the emotional, but by "making it understood" (in the transcendental domain) ultimately has to deprive it of its fundamental meaning, namely finitude?

It seems to me as though Heidegger's philosophy *in this* article comes very close to Jaspers. Would Heidegger ever designate philosophy as a *chiffre*?

That philosophy attempts to express something, a theme which language is not originally made for, could very well be the case, but this does not mean that it is inexpressible since this "originally" belongs to the essence of language.

Heidegger does not *absolutely* reject intentionality, and not always. He's looking to go deeper and in a more original manner, however, in *Vom Wesen des Grundes*, for example, intentionality is explicitly mentioned as something he takes into consideration. And frequently so. It goes without saying that moods are beyond intentionality, but *how* this is so must be demonstrated; how is this to be accomplished without any description, i.e. comparison and contrast?

That Heidegger does not recognize objectification as an original function that discloses the world cannot mean that he does not recognize philosophical knowledge as a theoretical attitude. The theoretical attitude is of course conditioned by its own interest; a specific interest that has little or nothing to do with the interest in the inner-worldly.

Due to my illness as well as his vacation, I have not been able to speak with my son-in-law for some time. He returns next week and it will be a great pleasure to convey Mr. Bristiger's suggestion to him.

I thank you very much for the translation of the article on van Breda. The Husserl-Heidegger article will arrive shortly, as I am fervently working on it, and it deals precisely with these questions, of which we have been speaking above, and is closely connected to the theoretical attitude with Husserl and Heidegger.

What truly pains me is what you write regarding your travel possibilities. That is really something very frustrating. I shall not despair and if there's no other possibility, then I'll have to go to Poland.

But you should try everything you can to get to Heidelberg! Picht is without a doubt interesting.⁴⁴

Hopefully I'll soon hear from you! For now once again thank you in advance and the warmest greetings from your,

Patočka

KM Letter 11

Warsaw, 10 October 1974

Dear Professor,

Many thanks for your letter of 29.08. How's it going with your health? I have been sick for nearly three weeks—but today is everything good again.

I thank you for the critical remarks on my article in *Teksty*. You had already demonstrated to me in Prague that I sometimes bring Heidegger too close to Jaspers; I have of course taken note of this, but the article was at the time already in production and it takes normally around half a year and I could no longer change anything!

Your article on van Breda will be printed in the first issue for 1975 of *Znak*. A propos *Znak*: I have another request to make that concerns the editors. The editors have planned to publish a special issue on the sense of history. Could you write for this an article on “phenomenology and history”? Planned is not any technical-philosophical work. *Znak* is actually not a philosophical journal. I hope that you'll recall our discussions in Prague, and that you also did not want to write about this for philosophers. Phenomenology is currently awakening interest only among academics—I think that Ingarden was here guilty. You could change this situation, and present in the broadest sense the phenomenological conception of the sense of history. The issue is planned for April 1975 and the essays should therefore be sent to the editors by the end of January.

I was unfortunately not successful in traveling to Heidelberg to Picht; my possibilities for travel are still restricted. I am now beginning with my work at the university and am eagerly reading Plato, but regrettably only in German and Polish. I am also starting with Greek. How unfortunate that I do not have any possibilities to learn Plato from you.

I wish you all the best, especially for your health. In gratitude and respectfully
[Krzysztof Michalski]

JP Letter 19

20 November 1974

Dear Mr. Michalski, honored young friend!

With some concern I have learned that you are sick, yet you did not say what exactly is going on, but an ailment lasting for three weeks is no small affair. Please do not be offended by your experienced old friend if he reminds you that one should take care of oneself, even in one's youth; that no illness takes root and let no illness take over! The state of my own health appears now to be satisfactory; I have pulled through the first Fall congestion—a good sign.

Many thanks for attending to the article on van Breda. Perhaps you know that *Znak* is not allowed here. My son-in-law was recently in Krakow and got the issue with the Heidegger Symposium, and he was especially struck by your contribution.⁴⁵ He has not yet lent me the volume, since many acquaintances are suddenly interested in it and he could not resist them.

The suggestion that I should write an article on “Phenomenology and History” is very welcome. Apparently, it is not meant to be an article about the phenomenology of *historicity*. That is more or less presented e.g. in *Sein und Zeit*, but very little is said there about history itself. I could try to show how history as Western history (of which

European history is a part) came forth from a pre and proto-historical existence as the *expressly-human concern for the public space* in which being-human realizes itself. Since the beginning of the Greek *polis*, history has taken over as its task this unitary problem, the *caesurae* of which do not interrupt continuity and the catastrophes of which only offer the possibility for its extension and in the end entangle the planet into one unified movement of history.

Such a presentation presupposes a phenomenology of human life-movements and the world present within them. Public space is a configuration that must be understood from a phenomenology of the life-world. If the world is in an ontological sense always mine, then one must ask which trait of this world-structure it might be that enables something like the “public sphere,” the communal, something superordinate to individual life: is it really only the tendency of fallenness to worldly matters, or shouldn’t it be necessary to presuppose something else here? In any case, it appears to me that the structure of the they-self (*das Man-Selbst*) is insufficient here, because the public space precisely presupposes a fundamental exposure and clarity regarding one’s own finite freedom, since the public space can never simply be “assumed,” but has to be won in struggle. It is in this way that the *polis* arose, through violent unification and then through common struggle against the unifier, which the citizens undertake. It is therefore impossible to understand the *polis* as mere part of the universe, as something naturally given, as would still be the case with castle and city in the ancient Orient, where both were directly or indirectly given and ruled by the gods; the *polis* rather has to be understood as the work of humans and the place of human freedom. However much it stands under the protection of the gods, it remains separated from the order of the world. That seems to me to signify the beginning of history. Plato exhibits this when he accepts that the state in its “simple” form is grounded in human needs, whereas the “higher” one derives from care for the soul, thereby drafting the state in reference to the *chorismos* (i.e. from the worldly reality of the *doxa*), even where it touches the divine or may be grounded in the divine. This Platonic theme will be remembered at the beginning of the Roman Empire, when the Roman *res publica* suffers its crisis and when the citizens are pushed back into the private sphere and the *res romana* nonetheless requires backing from the citizenship: the solution is only brought about by the Constantinian concept of the Empire—never again will the state be seen as part of the universe, since it is now grounded in transcendence. Likewise the church turns into the new public space, it becomes the ground of probation that will survive the crisis of the Roman Empire.

I cannot develop this problematic any further here, but perhaps the way that I pose the problem has become clear. History as a Western event arises with the question of the public sphere as one separate from the natural world, i.e. a sphere wherein human freedom can realize itself.

According to Husserl, European humanity is distinguished by a rational entelechy, which had here its breakthrough (in the primal institution of philosophy). However the primal institution (*Urstiftung*) of philosophy first became possible because this public space was originally instituted as a purely human creation, as an activity of a life freed from the concerns of life. This liberation is what politics has in common with philosophy. The philosophical attitude as a receding back from the universe is analogous to the political founding of the distance between the *oikos*, the household, the simple-daily concern for life, which still was the all in all for the Ancient-Oriental state. The exertion of one’s own freedom is in both cases the institution of something

permanent, *logos* in one case, community in the other; here humans have to leave the ground of beings behind in order to institute values. The philosophical liberation as a liberation from the political however presupposes the political. That is why the Husserlian thesis about the history of European humanity is insufficient.

Therefore, the question seems to be, whether one should not also include the Ancient Orient into history as a necessary presupposition. I believe however that not every presupposition of historical continuity is itself already historical, otherwise one would enter in a process, the antecedents of which would become lost among natural events. Only where human beings act in a way that institutes freedom has history and its problem, a being in freedom and in truth, emerged. That is however not possible in isolated existence. That is why Hegel's theory is false that history begins in the Ancient Orient, where one person is free. However, this one individual is understood there as divine or as an intermediary. That might not be an obstacle for Hegel, since he sees the essence of human beings as infinite and therefore divine. Yet where another, essentially finite conception of human existence obtains, the Hegelian beginning of history cannot be maintained.

This is how I envision the main lines of my article—what would you say to that? It might be better to call it “Phenomenology and the Problem of the Beginning of History.” Couldn't we modify the title this way?

Please excuse me for writing so much, as if I were already in a position to plan the article. You can plainly see that I have gotten into the swing of things through your impetus.

My work on Husserl and Heidegger still occupies me very much; it has become clear that many more extended studies are still necessary, as I had first guessed.

The Heideggerians (W. Marx)⁴⁶ have pointed out some difficulties with the concept of the life-world in Husserl, but if one thinks the matter through, one also arrives at certain difficulties with Heidegger's concept of world.

What is *apriori* in the concept of the world is the ontological. But if the world is always mine, how do I understand the one reality of the world, common to all?

Since the Husserlian concept of the world, likewise as his concept of being, is essentially contemplative, presupposing space and time as given, this difficulty does not arise for him.

Please excuse me that I am suggesting so much without developing it more clearly, but for that this letter would have to become a treatise.

I would be happy to receive some news from you soon, especially concerning the question whether your ideas about the envisioned article were basically similar or completely different.

Your much devoted,
Jan Patočka

P.S. I sincerely regret that you were not allowed to visit Picht in Heidelberg. My travel to Aachen, where I had hoped to finally put this doctorate affair in order, has also been refused. In my case, this is laughable, but for young people, who want to and should learn something, that must be taken much more seriously.

I do not know whether the topic, as I have grasped it, fully accords with what you understand as a “phenomenological interpretation of the sense of history.” Would you be so good as to give me your opinion on the matter as soon as possible, such that I don't miss the deadline?

J.P.

JP Letter 20

5 December 1974

Dear Friend, honored Mr. Michalski,

You'll receive the article for *Znak* earlier than you thought this time, since Mr. Cywiński, who was recently here to visit my son-in-law, has picked it up and promised to pass it on to you soon.⁴⁷

I am so sorry that you have been sick and evidently not yet gotten over it fully. I hope that it's going better for you! On the other hand, I have been reading with pleasure about your fervent writing and translating activities.

Concerning Plato: Wilamowitz is the least fruitful among those old things. Friedländer (also Ritter's second volume) is here already better, especially the analyses of dialogue in the second volume; the first one is to some extent committed to the George-Circle.⁴⁸ (In my time one would enjoy reading Friedemann's book, which came from these same waters, though I believe that today all of its scent has vanished.) G. Krüger's *Einsicht und Leidenschaft* is still important. More recently also the writings of the Tübinger circle around Gaiser (especially K. Gaiser, *Platons ungeschriebene Lehre*). In Gaiser's book you'll find some orientation with regards to the philological investigations about the problem of oral teaching, but it is also a philosophically important book, admittedly entirely metaphysical. From a philosophical standpoint, Jaeger's *Paideia* volume II is still important, although . . . even Stenzel is still worth reading.

For an analysis of the dialogues, there is still: Wyller, *Der späte Platon*. I'm forgetting the excellent Englishmen, above all Cornford. All of his commentaries on *Parmenides*, *Theatetus*, and *Timaeus* are extremely concrete and rich. I don't know Ryle's book, but given his own philosophy I don't expect anything good. But of course one can always be mistaken, as some praise "Plato's Progress" very highly.

Your plan of study is very nice, but for the near future it seems to me to be too large. Aristotle seems to be handled a bit too step-motherly—that will change once you make contact with him. But it's good that you're already thinking about the Habilitation! That you must now only decide on a topic! Will you choose a problem or an interpretative topic?

I've forgotten the title of Teichmüller's book and at the moment cannot find it. But I'll soon remember after I've looked through the *Überweg*.*

I've not finished the article on technology, it is growing immense. But I think that it will become something; it will then be sent to you immediately.

Dear Mr. Michalski, thank you very much once again for your lines and please let me hear from you again soon!

Mr. Cywiński brought me the highly interesting issue of *Znak* with your discussion-contribution on Heidegger—it is clearly the best contribution as regards the overall message.—In my contribution there is regrettably a meaning-distorting typo: on p. 714 it should read "osadzenia filozofii w skończoności" [to establish philosophy in finitude] instead of "w nieskończoności" [in infinity]. But my "article" too is also cut from the same cloth as others.

Entirely yours,
Patočka

* It is called *Die wirkliche und die scheinbare Welt* (1882)

JP Letter 21

10 January 1975

Dear Mr. Michalski, best friend,

First of all, many thanks for the telegram, whose wishes I already returned in spirit, but which I now also reciprocate in written form. It was a very pleasant surprise.

I must sincerely apologize that I am always burdening you with my translations, since you of course need every minute for your own work. At the moment we're attempting to create a philosophical working-group here with a few colleagues, who are working more intensively than before, and hopefully we will be successful in training people who are capable of doing phenomenology and Dasein-analysis on their own.

I can only approve of your decision to postpone the study of Plato and Aristotle until your Greek is more cemented. Your program is anyway still broad enough, and together with the seminar and Habilitation I do not know whether you are over-reaching. Please think about your health, that is not just an empty phrase but a genuine concern—we all need it!

I have in my hands now a book by Walter Schulz called *Philosophie in der veränderten Welt*. It's supposed to be a kind of philosophical "analysis of time" but already in the beginning section (on Husserl) it is partisan and superficial, so I'm very much tempted to let it go.

I was very pleased that you've rid yourself of your illness, which has afflicted you for so long. Hopefully this will last.

We received a visit from Biemel from Aachen, which was very nice. Biemel is now editing one of Heidegger's as yet unpublished course of lectures on logic from the twenties (1924?) in which Husserl's Sixth Meditation is the topic, but breaks off in the middle and goes over to an analysis of time: the genesis of *Sein und Zeit* is visible.

I myself am working very hard on the problem of history and on an article about Czech philosophy of the inter-war period.⁴⁹ Moreover, a friend from Bochum has asked me to work on a new translation, which will mean for me a good deal of work.⁵⁰

I would be happy to read something from you soon, and am now with the best wishes and greetings for you in the New Year

Your much devoted,
Patočka

JP Letter 22

10 February 1975

Dear Mr. Michalski, faithful friend!

Many thanks for all the news and your lovely words. As soon as I have a clean copy of the further article on history, entitled "Pre-historical Considerations," I'll send that to you as well, and you can then decide which of the 2 suits *Znak* better.

Unfortunately I don't know Chiaromonte, but will make a note of this publication you mention.

Concerning Bristiger: I'm at the moment reworking the article in my mind, especially in relation to Schelling, the figure who seems to my mind to represent the bridge from German Idealism to the late 19th century. I have not been able to speak with my son-in-law, since he is currently looking for new work after he was fired from the faculty.

The article on technology is not yet finished, but it now seems to me that it has been thought-through to the end, and the editing should happen soon. A publication in Polish would be very fine, if it should happen. Biemel's book on modern art is in part very illuminating but is basically a constant application of Heideggerian ideas.⁵¹ He's now writing a book about the novel. I know neither Mr. Strassen nor his book, but would be thankful for more information.

Your offprint is very welcome, thank God that this publication will be continued, you know how highly I consider it!

You didn't write this time about your plans other than what your next publications will concern (your activity is worthy of admiration) and also nothing about your health, which I find a very conspicuous omission. Hopefully, things are going well for you and look after yourself!

We have here for some time a circle for methodological questions in psychotherapy, which basically follows in the tracks of Medard Boss' eidetic analysis of Dasein, but is also partly independent. A young man named P. Rezek is at the center [of this circle].⁵² Should you come here, you must absolutely meet him as well as Mr. Jiří Němec.⁵³

I am myself sinking under unmanaged and perhaps insurmountable tasks. Health-wise I'm not doing that bad, aside for some dizziness there's nothing worse to report. We have had a number of visits from Germany, the Biemels were here and recently Prof. Schaller, the educationalist from Bochum. As you can see, we're living, even without newspapers and other public materials.

I've seen a small article on H. Arendt's "Vita activa" in *Twórczość*. It is a book that one wishes would have much more success than has been the case up until now. It would be worthwhile to dedicate a large phenomenological study to it.

Dear Mr. Michalski, until later, and do not forget your old friend
Jan Patočka

JP Letter 23

14 April 1975

Dear Mr. Michalski, young friend!

For some time I have been preparing to answer your lovely letter from 6.3. It hit upon an obstacle: I would like simultaneously to send you the two further articles on the problem of history for your selection (in addition to a few corrections to the article "On the Beginning of History") and they are indeed finished, but one has not yet been copied out, although it is ready in German, the other one so far in Czech only. The first is called "Pre-Historical Considerations," the other is called "Does History have a Meaning?" But now I am telling myself that I should not hesitate any longer. The texts will soon follow, hopefully the friend who is typing them up for me will hurry. You can then choose which of the three would be most fitting for the revue *Znak*.

Besides those, I will also send other things that deal with general phenomenological questions. What you've written about the article on "asubjective phenomenology" is relevant in this context. But above all detailed discussions of the problem of *epoché*, reduction, phenomenon as vulgar-phenomenon and as depth-appearance (ontological). Also the article about the crisis and Heidegger's conception of science will soon be in your hands, if God grants me health. In this regard, I must say that I cannot complain this winter, as the old ailments have not returned and perhaps I can consider myself healed. I would very much like to see how it stands with you in this regard.

The analyses of Ms. Arendt are indeed not phenomenological, they must first be rendered phenomenological. But supremely fascinating in any case. They go back to Aristotle. Your friend has presented things very well and generally it is important to promote this philosophy.

I don't know Gethmann's book, but if you have read it, please write to me what you've gotten from it and what's going on there.

You've complained about not being able to do anything other than the lectures—but that is already very much, dear friend! Besides, you're in fact doing much more, as I can see from your letter—Heidegger selection and preface. I would be thankful to you if you could cite the quotation that you have attributed to me, I think it's right but can't remember it anymore.

Dear friend Michalski, pay attention to your health and do not take on any more work! And if you have the time, send me another sign of life soon

Your ever devoted,
Patočka

P.S. I thank you very much for the *Znak*, I hadn't yet received that issue although Mrs. Cywińska was recently here. I also enjoyed your offprint very much.⁵⁴ When will the entire book be published?

I draw your attention to Nicholson's article in the revue *Sophia* about Disclosure in Heidegger (*Internat. Studies in Philosophy* VI, 1974, 139ff.). Very instructive.

JP Letter 24

20 May 1975

Dear Friend, honored Mr. Michalski,

Many thanks for the journal *Teksty* with your article and the translation as well as for the letter.⁵⁵ If you have not heard from me for some time the fault lies in the circumstance that I did not have somebody at hand, who could do the transcriptions of the *now finished* Czech version of "Considerations on History" as well as that of the *partly finished* German. I therefore could not yet send anything. The article "Does History have a Meaning?" is now in the proofing stage and you will certainly receive it at the beginning of June. But also the new version of "The Beginning of History" (the old version is to be discarded completely, please do not translate it under any circumstances!) and "Pre-historical considerations" will soon follow, as well as the rest, "European History at the Close of the 1900's" and "The Wars of the 20th century and the 20th century as War." With this, there will be a sketch of the preliminary whole for a consideration of history on a phenomenological basis. You mustn't think that I have been lazing around; however it was not the best time, I could not do more.*

There is still no trace of an invitation to a symposium. It would be interesting to know whether I will be permitted to travel to Poland, I would be very inclined to go this time. I don't have much hope, things are similar here with me as with you over there, even worse.

Your article on time seems to me to have energetically brought out the problem of time in *Sein und Zeit*. Would it not have been good to place a comment around pages 66–67 that the later Heidegger allows for time to be *four-dimensional*, and to mention the problem of "approaching nearness"? But that would have exceeded your main intention, to work out time as temporality in contrast to the vulgar concept of time.

Under no circumstances should you allow yourself to be deterred by the rejection of your book. Things will work out one way or another; the more resistance you encounter, the more it becomes clear that there is an attempt to struggle against something important here.

I've just sent a copy of my Heidegger contribution from *Znak* to Heidegger. Biemel recently wrote that it would certainly be a great pleasure for him. You should do the same with your article on Heidegger from the *Philosophical Studies* along with the issue of *Teksty*. I believe that you could make a good first impression on him in this way. If you do not do so, you must at least allow me to do so in your name.

There is a vibrant interest here among the psycho-therapists for Dasein-analysis and there's a good group that has come together, who are working together intensively.

Dear Mr. Michalski, many thanks once again, wishing you much inspiration for your work, much success, and above all good health
your old friend,
Patočka

* I have in the meantime also other things ready and could send them.

JP Letter 25

8 June 1975

Much honored Mr. Michalski, dear friend!

I must once again ask for your forgiveness for my constant lateness in sending my article. As you will see, composing the text was not easy and there were unexpected difficulties with the transcription since I can only write very slowly on the type-writer, nevertheless it would in the end probably have been better, if I had typed the article myself.

But now I am uncertain whether the article is truly appropriate for *Znak* and it must surely arrive too late to possibly be translated on time. Under no circumstances do I want to see the article I sent earlier offered for publication in *Znak*: it is too much a sketch for that. It's also possible that the present treatise on the sense of history seems too long. Perhaps it could appear in two installments, and the [first part](#) could go up to page 12 and the [second part](#) could begin with the words "In the historical epoch . . ."

Now, I have a very big favor to ask. My daughter Jana, a former editor of the formerly famous and good newspaper *Divadlo*, is dying to go to the plays at the T.N.P. [National Polish Theatre] next week in Warsaw—for a few days, yet has evidently no place to stay overnight. I allow myself to ask if you would be so friendly as to give her some advice in this regard, or recommend her to some of your acquaintances. But please, only if this would be possible for you without difficulties. I very much understand that Warsaw at the moment is experiencing an invasion, and thus that something like this is out of the question. She is also not blessed with worldly goods, but she'll already have some money, and perhaps she could also with my full approval withdraw an honorarium for me? I have not yet heard anything about an invitation to a symposium in Poland, but that does not surprise me. I am also somewhat sick again, nothing serious, so I hope, but I have felt very run down these past days. I'm very sorry that I will not see you and cannot speak with you, which would have been important

for me. As of late we have here a good group, which tries to work in a phenomenological manner in psychology and psycho-therapy and I have attached some concrete hopes to some participants, actually to two.

Dear friend, I'll stop for now, so that the letter can soon be sent off, and hope to hear from you soon.

Respectfully yours,
Jan Patočka

JP Letter 26

16 June 1975

Dear friend,

I have just written to my friend Landgrebe and gave him your address. I hope that you will both meet.

Warmly, your Patočka

JP Letter 27

18 June 1975

Dear friend Michalski!

My telegram already contains gratitude and apologies for your unsuccessful efforts. My daughter Jana is very, very sad about this outcome and I had wished so much for her trip to Warsaw, she has had difficult times with a husband, who must now leave the faculty and is unemployed, and her work in a thankless bureau. But she wouldn't have had any peace of mind, if her Daniel had to do without her motherly care; and so there is nothing else to do except for me to warmly once again thank you on my behalf and in her name for your courteousness.

Concerning my own matters, I haven't seen any invitation at all to the Ingarden Symposium, such that I do not even know when exactly it will happen. Otherwise I would have at least been able to send a telegram.

Since your telegram responds to my first writing, which was included in the parcel, which also contained the manuscript of "Does History have a Meaning?," I infer from this that everything is in order and finds itself in your hands. As soon as the other chapters of my essay "On the Meaning of History" are ready in German (I am translating them myself one after the other), you'll receive them too.⁵⁶

I have also read attentively your very impressive paper on Gadamer. I don't know whether you share in my view that with this thinker one can claim that there is a strange mixture of main ideas. He does not say, for example, how verification occurs for interpretative anticipation nor does he say how language is constructed, but rather limits himself to a mere "negative phenomenology." That makes him for me less profitable than one would have expected. He does not handle the inheritance of Heidegger creatively enough.

Regrettably Prof. Fink, without a doubt his most worthy successor, is at the moment out of action, since he has recently suffered a not too serious stroke.⁵⁷ Hopefully, he will soon recover fully, as it was with Heidegger's when he had a similar misfortune 2 years ago. By the way, I should thank you very warmly from Heidegger and send his greetings—he recently sent me a brief thank-you letter for sending him your publications

in *Znak* and *Teksty*. He's evidently following attentively everything that concerns him, and you are not a stranger to him.

I am writing a review right now of Holenstein's book on Jakobson for *Philosophische Rundschau*. Holenstein sees Jakobson as a Husserlian structuralist and as *the* philosopher of this current. He has successfully put together and systematically presented a doctrine that was dispersed across innumerable individual publications. There are many nice things there. Only the attacks against hermeneutics and Heidegger are neither necessary nor justified. A few young people here are engaging with Rombach's "integral structuralism" which aims at the unification of science and ontology; evidently a timely problem. But I don't know it as yet.

For any piece of news concerning yourself (also about the progress of your Habilitation), I would be very thankful.

I wish you good health and success in your work. In sincere friendship and with many thanks,

Yours,
Patočka

JP Letter 28

24 June 1975

Dear friend Michalski!

I am very much in doubt whether the article is appropriate for *Znak* but, since it is principally intended for you, I would like to send you a small afterword that should be added after the paragraph ending with the words "has no sense."

My daughter's young son is not dangerously ill, he has an infectious gland-inflammation, but she has nonetheless decided not to travel since complications could arise and since she would anyhow not be able to enjoy the theatre performance.

I'm also not doing especially well these days, my ability to work is limited due to all sorts of depressing things. Anyhow, I cannot get to the end of the review of Holenstein's book.

With hearty thanks and greetings, yours,
Jan Patočka

KM Letter 12

Warsaw, 16 August 1975

Dear Professor,

I'm allowing myself to send you my translation of your article. I have hazarded a few small abbreviations and re-formulations—often necessitated by the peculiarities of the Polish language, and often due to the lack of ability of the translator. I believe, however, that no harm was done to the meaning of your text. Please feel free to send me any corrections.

I am preparing a volume for the Polish Academy of Sciences that will be dedicated to hermeneutic philosophy. The publication of this volume is not entirely certain, but probable. It will have as its title "Understanding and Sense," and will contain translations of Heidegger, Gadamer, Ricœur, Habermas, Apel, and Albert as well as some essays by Polish authors, Cichowicz, Tischner, Bieńkowska and myself on

hermeneutical philosophy. I would also like to include your essay on the sense of history—of course, if you agree with this.

I have in the meantime received a very nice letter from Professor Landgrebe who offers, due to your recommendation, assistance for my eventual travel to West Germany. I am extremely grateful to you for this. Unfortunately my chances to receive a permission for a scientific stay in Germany are fairly slim. I nonetheless want to try.

How's your health? Did you receive my last letter?

I remain as always grateful and respectful
[Krzysztof Michalski]

JP Letter 29

22 August 1975

Dear Friend, honored Mr. Michalski!

Your translation of my article arrived here yesterday. Many sincere thanks for the great and successful effort that you have given to my text! I looked through it immediately and did not find any places, at least so far, where I would have made any objections.

Thus once again my most profound thanks! Also the possible publication in your collected volume on hermeneutical philosophy demands my thanks, even if nothing comes of it; only the proximity to such great authors stirs some fear in me. I should also communicate that my “Heretical Essays on History” are now all together and hopefully will soon all be translated into German, and—it goes without saying—that you will be among the first to receive a copy, little by little. The essay “Does History have a Meaning” is number 3 in this collection and there are 6 essays in total.

I'm pleased to hear that Landgrebe fulfilled his promise to write you: he is a very reliable and overall refined person. *Hopefully your trip will be successful, for this would be a very important thing.* Landgrebe and Biemel can make recommendations for you everywhere and generally make things easier for you. Regrettably, my most honored friend Eugen Fink died on July 25th. Perhaps it would be good to publish something about him somewhere in a Polish journal. He was the most willing to make sacrifices, as a young man he gave up his university career to help Husserl and then later, when Heidegger was frowned upon, he worked for him and towards his being called back to the lectern. And no one, who did not know him, could have an idea of what a geyser of ideas he was.

I have kept all of your letters and have now gone through them, the last one is dated July 2 of this year, regarding the Ingarden meeting and the theatre season in Warsaw. Normally I take care to answer very soon but in this case I have evidently put things off a bit, since I thought that you're going on holidays anyway. That is also why your question concerning “Asubjective Phenomenology” remained unanswered. Of course I would be happy about this publication.

I can wholeheartedly endorse your plans to study “Nietzsche” and to translate “Hölderlin.” “Nietzsche” has not at all been exhausted and up to now hasn't been a properly appreciated book. Among other things, it contains an entire philosophy of history.

Biemel says that Heidegger is still able to work at least 3 hours a day—amazing. I have here now the small essay “Phenomenology and Theology” from 1970, which a guest brought to me, and which contains a text from 1928 and a letter from March

11th, 1964. Both are very interesting and go against any attempt to misuse Heidegger as an ontologist of atheism, and serve as a decisive counterproof. Religion and Theology are shown to have once again the most vibrant currency through new moral-historical events and Heidegger is of great interest in this regard: his solution to the problem of philosophy [and] theology is highly original.⁵⁸

A small question: would there be a possibility to gather my Polish honorarium somewhere, so that I would not need to travel all over the place from Krakow to Warsaw and back? And didn't the gentlemen from *Twórczość* not maybe reckon up my honorarium from back then with the issues of the journal that were delivered to me since then? Please excuse that I permit myself to bother you with such a thing—but I would like to have clarity here.

Once again sincerest thanks from your much devoted,
Jan Patočka

JP Letter 30

22 September 1975

Dear Mr. Michalski,

Many thanks for your lovely letter and all your efforts. Especially for the issue of *Twórczość* with your article on Heidegger.⁵⁹ Since I already have my own copy (I wanted to write anyway in order to congratulate you), I will send your copy along to Prof. Heidegger.

Regarding my trip to Poland, I can only report that I have a valid passport with the necessary stamp for travel abroad, but this does not mean that I will be allowed to travel—something unexpected can occur. I would not like to give many lectures, but would rather converse with you and other friends. *When* however such a trip can occur one must still give some thought to. Everything that you write about it is very enticing.

At the end of November I must be here since Prof. Biemel is coming from Aachen.

You've written nothing about the fate of your request to travel to Germany. It would be very nice if that could come about. Landgrebe as well as others would undoubtedly be *very* happy.⁶⁰

I'm working as much as I can but am often very restricted due to repulsive bread labor.

I wish you all the best for the coming semester! And please let me hear from you soon!
Your much devoted,
Patočka

P.S. I will soon write a *more substantial* letter. Landgrebe sent two articles very rich in content that I would very much like to tell you about. Also about other things—many things have been coming together. Have I already written to you about Holenstein and Jakobson? You know how old people forget everything!

JP Letter 31

31 October 1975

Dear Friend,

Many thanks for the issue of *Studia Filozoficzne* with your very nice and extensive review of Biemel.⁶¹ I will soon write to him and tell him about this, that will certainly please him. As it pleased me by the way.

I am expecting him here on the 23rd of this month by the way, as he is coming with a colleague and a group of students from Aachen, and this will certainly provide some opportunity for *symphilosophie*.

Nothing new seems to be going on in world philosophy. I infer from the report in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* that the XI General Congress of Philosophy, which just recently met in Göttingen, did not have too many new ideas to display. "Desolate times" as Löwith already characterized it some years ago. My young friends build their hopes on Boss and Rombach.⁶² The latter for me is little accessible in many regards, Boss often too prim, too construed. But perhaps that's just an impression? Fink was a great loss. I read an essay in *Twórczość* on Pavese; what do you think of Fink's considerations?

It is doubtful whether I'll appear in Warsaw in the foreseeable future, but I'm not letting it out of my sight. And heartiest thanks for everything that you have done for me. And please, write to me about your problems!

Yours,
Patočka

JP Letter 32

17 November 1975

Dear friend Michalski,

Here some bibliographic references.

M. Boss, *Grundriss der Medizin*, Hans Huber Verl. 1971

Der Traum und seine Deutung, 1953.

Recently also another book on dreams, but I don't know the exact title. Also a description of his travels in India. As soon as I can, I'll send these references.

From Rombach the following: *Gesetz—System—Struktur*, around 196x, I don't know the exact date at the moment.—*Strukturalontologie* 1973 (?). I will also send more complete references for this as soon as I can. I can strongly recommend his contributions to the Festschrift for Max Müller (On Education) and the one for the collected volume *Wer ist Gott?*, very nice and clear as well. He has also written on Cusanus and has idiosyncratic views on Descartes, who, according to him, is not to be understood one-sidedly as a mechanist and a "Cartesian."

Apologies for the fragmentariness of these references, as I cannot simply give them spontaneously, and I do not own any of the works from the above cited authors myself.

Concerning the obituary for Fink, I would be happy to write it, but I would be grateful to me if you could speak with the people from *Znak* or *Twórczość*—so that I can prepare it in the right length and at the right time, that is when and how many typed pages. I would also be happy to write for both. You know that Pavese was his favorite author; in *Twórczość* there would be a point of connection.

The publications by Rudolf Berlinger, a long-term friend of Fink, also appear important to me.

Biemel recently wrote that he will try to recommend Fink's lecture course on Hegel for an edition (and maybe even prepare it?). That would be great. I believe, however, that he fundamentally was closer to Schelling, although he was not a philosopher of nature, he was deeply connected to the Mythos of the earth.

I send you my warmest greetings again and wish to hear from you again soon. I will also write immediately after the visit.

Yours, in an already long friendship,
Patočka

JP Letter 32a

18 December 1975

Dear most respected friend Michalski!

In response to your letter of December 5 I am able to communicate that I did *not* write to the merchant bank, as I since learned in the meantime that it is forbidden by law for Czechoslovakian citizens to open bank accounts in a foreign country. I'm therefore sorry that I am not able to do this.

For the information regarding the article on Fink I am indebted to you and will soon proceed to its realization. The circumstances noted above do not diminish in any way my interest in Polish publications. I also thank you for your willingness to translate. Has the article on the meaning of history appeared or what has actually happened with it?

I now have a very important announcement for you. I have spoken with the local cultural attaché [*Dr. Gründer*] and she expressed her willingness to write to her colleague in Warsaw concerning your case. Landgrebe and Biemel are very much in favor of not only inviting you for a lecture in Germany, but also in support of a grant. You must however speak with the responsible person at the German Embassy in Warsaw yourself about what kind of stipendium it should be, most likely not a Humboldt, but instead an academic exchange stipendium. Landgrebe and Biemel, as well as myself, we are all ready to put together a letter of evaluation. The attaché from Warsaw will most likely expect a visit from you soon after Christmas, or perhaps even give you some sign. Maybe it would be good if you were the one to take the initiative. In any case, Dr. Gründer, who is the local cultural authority, has told me that she will definitely make contact with her colleague from Warsaw before Christmas and bring your case to his attention.

The days that Biemel and Landgrebe spent here were truly wonderful, filled with many philosophical conversations. Unfortunately I can only return with difficulty to the normal tempo of life and work. For some reason I have been inhibited for the past while.

Whether under these circumstances I'll be able to travel to Poland is for me uncertain. But I will not lose sight of this. And in any case I wish you, dear Mr. Michalski, all the best for the Christmas celebrations and for the New Year. That you have also taken into your program the *Logical Investigations* is very good. Husserl is not dead, I have convinced myself of this once again through my discussions with Landgrebe. Landgrebe possesses an amazing vitality and has written very fine things recently, for example, on the foundation of the social sciences (an examination of Luhmann's systems-theory).

Let me hear from you again soon, I'll do the same. With the request to give greetings to all our acquaintances from
your long devoted,
Patočka

JP Letter 33

16 January 1976

Dear Mr. Michalski, cherished friend!

Two days ago I returned from the hospital where I was examined because of my lungs; they found something with the heart, which now requires a certain amount of caution from me. What this means is that I can only think about a visit to Warsaw later. This is why a frequent exchange of letters with you would be even more welcome.

The most important news is however that volume 24 of Heidegger's collected works has appeared as the first publication of this colossal work. The first section, which will contain the published works, is estimated to be around 16, the second section, which will contain the lectures from Marburg and Freiburg, nearly 40 volumes, and further there will be a third and a fourth section. It will be *the great work* of the century. This volume 24 contains the topic of "Sein und Zeit" *as a whole* under the title "Basic Problems of Phenomenology, the 1927 summer semester lectures from Marburg." One sees here concretely how Heidegger's position develops a reflection on intentionality from an appropriation of the philosophical tradition from Plato, Aristotle, the Scholastics and Kant. Every page is exciting, every page is instructive. Should you somehow have the possibility, do have the book ordered from Klostermann.

Landgrebe is working on a "Phenomenological problem of History" and says that a very dense outline for a book has come from this.

Orth sent me the first volume of "Phenomenology today," that is the publication series of the German society for phenomenology. There is an interesting essay by Ricoeur on Husserlian phenomenology and hermeneutics. Orth's own essay is also good. For the fourth volume Orth is looking for someone who wants to undertake a report on phenomenology in different countries. Could you do this for Poland? Would you perhaps know a way one could approach the Georgian phenomenologists (in the tradition of Natsubidze⁶³) or would you have any advice? The people from *Twórczość* seem to me to maintain good relations to the Soviet Union to a certain extent, would there not be someone there one could ask for information?

I would be grateful to you if you'd like to tell me whether the process for your stipendium appears feasible, and how things are developing there generally. As you know, I am ready and willing to draft all the necessary recommendations for you.

Personally, I have been working for a long time on an essay about "Phenomenology and Cartesianism" in relation to Husserl, Heidegger, and M. Boss.⁶⁴ It also covers the Freudians to some extent, but only through Boss. The aim is to understand what the Husserlian theme of an overcoming of the crisis of science could look like when one gives phenomenology a form that deepens intentionality in view of transcendence and includes the problem of freedom.

Naturally it concerns the problem of sense as a theme of science. Freud was the first to see the possibility of depicting science as the disclosure of neglected and impeded possibilities, but obstructed this understanding through his turn towards the natural-scientific project. Boss is the one trying to undo this.

My friends Němec and Rezek have written a kind of phenomenological introduction to psycho-therapeutic problems, which I believe is very interesting, but regrettably only available in Czech.

Dear Mr. Krzysztof, I thank you for your congratulatory telegram and warmly return your wishes. So lots of health and productivity, bonne chance for your study opportunities in the West, above all for phenomenology!

Your much devoted,
Patočka

P.S. I forgot to write that Hohenstein was here, who writes interesting things about the philosophy of language, particularly concerning Jakobson?⁶⁵

Have I already sent you an offprint of my contribution for the Funke Festschrift?

JP Letter 34

17 February 1976

Dear Mr. Michalski,

I must apologize for the long period between receiving your letter (and the book by Grassi on the power and powerlessness of spirit) and my answer. It was due to not feeling well, a few visits, and a great burden of work, for which I am less and less cut out. I am not doing so well, even though the illness does not appear to be anything imminently dangerous. The heart is dilated, the blood pressure is variable, there is a sound caused by the irregularity of the connecting function of the right valve and chamber. I'm on a lot of medication and because of this I have nausea. On the whole I am weak and have little enthusiasm for work. So the letters are piling up here and that then increases my unease. I have informed Mr. Orth that you would be prepared to take on the contribution for Poland and as soon as I receive an answer from him, I will tell you.

I could not make any contact with Dr. Gründer of late because of the reasons noted above, but I am sure that she has certainly informed her colleague in Warsaw. I would be very happy if you could soon have positive prospects for a stipend.

The matters concerning Fink are not progressing very well for me. Those in Freiburg would like to have me there, I have looked for exchange-assignments but the prospects look meager. I also have not been able to write one iota for the obituaries, which pains me. And I am not even able to finish writing the article on Boss' reform of medicine, which has stood before me for months. I hope to soon rouse myself and to be able to work regularly again.

I was recently informed that someone with an issue of *Znak* is on the way, which must be the one you promised, many thanks!

I am sending you the article on Husserl's reduction and the possibility of its expansion with the same mail.

Be well! I wish you the best for the prospective marriage which, if it works out, will signify the biggest step in your life, and a foundation from which a properly human life, a living-with, first arises.

With all the best greetings and wishes for you and your bride, and especially your work and your success,

I am your ever devoted,
Jan Patočka

JP Letter 35

25 March 1976

Dear Friend Michalski,

I was so happy with your letter as well as with the card from the mountains! It's great that you both were able to spend a few pleasant days in such a gorgeous setting and hopefully with favorable weather.

Hopefully the attempt with the AAD will be successful.⁶⁶ In my next letter to friends in the FRG I'll call attention to this and hopefully we'll have success.⁶⁷ But if things will turn out with the passport? On my end there is no trace of an exchange-assignment—precondition for an application for permission to travel. I must write to the Interior Ministry, but there's no chance of me doing that.

The most important thing I wanted to tell you is that the deadline for the submission of manuscripts (for the contemporary questions in phenomenology) would be the end of 1976. Should this date seem too soon, then the planned deadline for volume 4 (spring 1977) would have to be postponed or the “regional phenomenology” allocated to the fifth volume. Mr. E.W. Orth, the editor, has agreed that you will be the author of the Polish contribution, and is waiting for news about the Georgians.⁶⁸ I see in the index of SSR new publications for the first quarter of 1976 there is a plan to publish a book on time by Margvelashvili (actually it is a book on Heidegger's conception of time).⁶⁹ Do you have any idea who that is and whether and how he could be reached?

If you have nothing against this, I will write to Orth that the end of 1976 appears to both of us as entirely possible; I would ask however for confirmation of this decision as soon as possible. You write also about my article on history. All of this has made me happy. You'll soon receive the German translation of “Pre-historical Considerations” and “The Beginning of History.”

With wishes for all the best for you and your most honored wife; please send to her my most devoted greetings.

I am your much devoted,
Patočka

JP Letter 36

26 April 1976

Dearest Friend Michalski!

If I did not respond to your kind letter right away it was due to a flu, which pestered me all of Easter, and due to very urgent work, with which I am now finished. I hurry now to thank you for your Easter greetings, which I can no longer return—though hopefully you know that I have only the best wishes and intentions towards you!

I was very concerned by what you reported about the AAD stipend—that is truly fatal, but one should not despair. What I am now saying, I mean *concretely*, even if I appear to only write abstractly. And if up to now I have not sent the continuation of my reflections on history, it was for the reason that I want to make it better than before for you and for the Polish readers. But it is coming and soon to be sure.

Hopefully you already have volume 21 of the collected works, the *Logic* from 1925, in your hands. It is just as important a volume as the “Basic Problems of

Phenomenology.” Heidegger *in statu nascendi* lies before one here and one can follow exactly the genesis of ontological phenomenology.

That is also the main topic of a work that I am currently finishing and which is called “Cartesianism and Phenomenology.”

A Czech version is meant for local ends, a German version I intend to prepare for the Dutch *Tijdschrift voor Philosophie* [sic].

The “Natural World” has appeared with Nijhoff, but I unfortunately do not have any free copies at my disposal, otherwise I would of course send one, even though for you it has no purpose, since this is a work that gives an account of a Husserlian standpoint long since overcome.

Dear Mr. Michalski, do not lose courage, be true to your own path and continue to go it incessantly! Such an approach might in the end perhaps lack success, but it will never lose its greatness and its meaning. And eventually that is also the kind of success that lasts longest and is worth the most.

In the hope of hearing from you and your wife, I am,
Your much devoted,
Patočka

JP Letter 37

16 June 1976

Dear, most honored friend Michalski!

I must thank you for a very nice letter in which you express your dismay over Heidegger’s death; he was certainly rich in years and led a fulfilled existence like few do—there is nothing to worry about for him, but rather for us, as we are bereft of a good spirit, whose being gave us spiritual support.

I just sent to you last week a manuscript of the 1st *Essay on History*; it is normal that it takes some time before it reaches your hands, but hopefully it has already fortunately found its way. I extensively re-worked everything for the German and Polish reader, so that the relationship between the natural world and history comes into clearer view; whether I was successful, I of course do not know, but I attempt to summarize in the final paragraph. I would be grateful for any critical comments, and please also inform me whether the essay seems to you appropriate for the publication.

In the next weeks my daughter Franziska is going to Warsaw and will try to contact you. She will be soon in Warsaw and I would be very grateful if you could be helpful to her in case of any difficulties and on the other hand be so friendly as to please tell her what I can do for you from here.

I can soon deliver a small overview of Heidegger; I have already considered what could be said to educated laypersons, which could illuminate the significance of this thinker for everyone. I will also include the obituary for Fink along with this.

I would be very happy to learn more about your further plans and work—maintaining contact is our only real refuge. Mr. Orth has not been in touch for some time, but I hope that you have included this matter in your work plan.

With the best greetings and wishes for your wife and for yourself
Your much devoted,
Patočka

JP Letter 38

29 July 1976

Dear Mr. Michalski, dearest friend!

Please excuse the lengthy delay in answering your kind letter. I have not been well for this last while and besides that there have been many visitors here.

Also Franziska deeply regretted that she did not meet you, but she was just stopping by Warsaw, so to speak, and will most likely visit your town again in the foreseeable future.

You'll find enclosed a letter to the Humboldt Foundation, which I ask you to use as a supplement to your application.

I have read your article on Heidegger in *Kultura* and it made quite an impression on me. It belongs to the best reactions to the thinker's passing-away. How unfortunate that he has made for us a confrontation with the gossiping so difficult with the Spiegel-interview! Of course, this interview is important and illuminating in the end. But the gossip will evidently throw itself upon the fact that he did not expressly distance himself from National Socialism and also did not condemn the atrocities, etc. And "only a God can save us" will scare all the people who grew up with Feuerbach-Humanism and Engelsism and everyone will kick up a great fuss altogether.

I will write to Biemel (who has now taken up a position at the Academy of Art in Düsseldorf) and Landgrebe at the first opportunity about your case and I am certain that they will do everything they can. (Both are probably on holiday now).

I am pleased to hear that the Pre-historical Considerations have found their way to you. There are some parts that perhaps could be published, though not the whole thing.

Hopefully you were able to recuperate fully at the coast, so that you can carry out your projects, which are so demanding and so many.

I remain, with the best greetings and wishes, also for your wife,
Devotedly yours in an already long friendship by now,
Jan Patočka

JP Letter 39

7 October 1976

Dear friend Michalski!

I have not written for so long that I can hardly find a point of reference to the earlier letters and must therefore apologize profusely—while letters after letters, articles, books, and cards arrived from you—in such a quantity that I can scarcely respond to everything in an adequate manner.

Your obituary on Heidegger was already noticed here even before you were so kind as to send a copy.⁷⁰ I find it very nice but fear only that it does not stress enough the "simple" things, which were renewed through this accomplishment of this thinking and which concern *every one of us*: conscience, responsibility, and above all history, truth, "waiting for God" or rather the preparedness for this waiting. This is not a *critique*, for I only mean that it is perhaps also the duty for us who assiduously read Heidegger to try to show that he is speaking to everybody in our time. I myself have not written anything except a study about the conception of phenomenology up to Husserl and Heidegger, where I try to show, against the widely held belief about the

absence of the *epoché* in Heidegger, that Heidegger's ontology presupposes in fact a generalization of Husserl's deliberately limited *epoché*. The article is to appear in a Festschrift, I wait every day for confirmation that the manuscript has arrived.

Otherwise I have been working a great deal in the last months, but have written little.

I will not be going to Germany just now, but perhaps I shall try to get permission to travel in the spring, for at the moment I have all too much to do here.

Presumably Ms. Bieńkowska has sent you my greetings among other things, for example, that it would be good to improve the German of the otherwise great article on mathematics as the language of physics and that I would be prepared to do so, but am waiting for your approval.⁷¹

Both of your articles on Kant I have received with gratitude and read with pleasure.⁷² My comment on "Attempt at an Interpretation of Kant" is simply that this exposition emphasizes what is common to Kant, Galileo, and Descartes, but much less so what separates them, which would be no less important. Also the thought that transcendentalism is negated in Heidegger's "second" philosophy, would have some merits, if it stressed at the same time the independence of the "other thinking" from the transcendental.

I would be very grateful to you, if you could find the time to give me some news about you and your work.

Until then, dear Mr. Michalski, I remain bound to you in thankful friendship,

Patočka

N.B. I also ask you to give your wife my most sincere greetings.

JP Letter 40

13 October 1976

Dearest friend Michalski!

Our letters must have crossed each other, the mail is terribly slow; but perhaps my lines have since reached you. So it would be unnecessary to once again write about your very welcome publications, as you already have my comments and thanks in your hands.

It goes without saying that I would be happy if the essay could appear in *Archiv*, maybe it would be better to print it in German, since this would save on the work of translation and would also then have a slightly broader readership.

You'll receive the essays for sure. But I would especially like to offer the German version of *all of them*; it would be too time consuming for you to read it in Czech. It would also be easier for Mr. Woźniakowski to become familiar with them.⁷³ And the German version still requires some time to complete.

Could Mrs. Bieńkowska already speak with you after her return to Warsaw? She promised to extend my greetings to you, and I was also able to tell her how much I appreciated you and how much hope I have for you.

I would be extremely delighted about every kind of continuation of your work on Kant. But you must also further expand on the ideas about language that are developed in your article.

Dear friend, I would like to believe that things are going very well for you and your wife; please excuse me that I am not more thorough today—I want that my letter depart as soon as possible and to reach you as quickly as possible.

With many thanks and greetings, and a kiss on the hand for your gracious wife,
your long devoted,
Patočka

Notes

- 1 Patočka delivered a lecture in Warsaw in 1971 in French, “La philosophie de la crise des sciences d’après E. Husserl et sa conception d’une phénoménologie du ‘monde de la vie’” [English translation: “Edmund Husserl’s Philosophy of the Crisis of the Sciences and His Conception of a Phenomenology of the ‘Life-World’,” in *Jan Patočka. Philosophy and Selected Writings*, ed. and trans. Erazim Kohák (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 223–238]. It is not known to me whether Michalski was in attendance.
- 2 See Wojciech Starzyński, “La correspondance entre Irena Krońska et Jan Patočka comme document principal de la vie philosophique «familiale» tchéco-polonaise,” in *Filozofia. Journal for Philosophy* 68, Supplementary Issue 2: *L’individu et la famille* (2013), 71–80. For Krońska’s study of Socrates, *Sokrates (Myśli i Ludzie)* (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1964).
- 3 Timothy Snyder, “Krzysztof Michalski (1948–2013),” in *The New York Review of Books*, March 21, 2013.
- 4 For Patočka’s philosophical biography, see Erazim Kohák, *Jan Patočka*.
- 5 On the significance of the phenomenological tradition in Eastern Europe, see the fine study by Michael Gubser, *The Far Reaches: Phenomenology, Ethics, and Social Renewal in Central Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).
- 6 Kohák, *Jan Patočka*, 128.
- 7 Krzysztof Michalski’s PhD dissertation, *Heidegger i filozofia współczesna (Heidegger and Contemporary Thought)*, eventually published in Warsaw in 1978.
- 8 Krzysztof Michalski wrote a review of Heidegger’s *Schellings Abhandlung Über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit (1809)*.
- 9 Reference to a section from Michalski’s PhD thesis, “The sources of the literary style of *Being and Time*.”
- 10 Irena Krońska (1915–1974), Polish philosopher, who facilitated Michalski’s contact with Patočka.
- 11 Walter Biemel (born 1918), Rumanian/German philosopher, who studied with Heidegger, and worked at the Husserl Archives in Leuven and Cologne; he edited numerous editions of the *Husserliana* and Heidegger’s writings in addition to extensive publications. The book referenced here is: Walter Biemel, *Martin Heidegger* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1973).
- 12 Jan Garewicz (1921–2002), Polish philosopher, who worked on Schopenhauer and Fichte, translator of Scheler, Jaspers, and Hartmann.
- 13 *Znak* [Sign], Polish journal in which Patočka published three essays, two of which were translated by Michalski.
- 14 *Twórczość* [Creativity], respectable Polish literary magazine published by the National Library in which Patočka published an essay on *Faust*.
- 15 FISP, *Fédération Internationale des Sociétés de Philosophie*, organized the 17th International World Congress in Varna (Bulgaria) in 1973.
- 16 Mother of Jan Sokol, husband to Patočka’s daughter Františka. Patočka at the time resided in Sokol’s house, until his death in 1977.
- 17 Josef Zúmr (born 1928), Czech philosopher, translator and editor, and currently Chairman of the Supervisory Board of the Masaryk Institute.
- 18 Izydora Dąmbska (1904–1983), Polish philosopher, prevented from teaching during the 1950s and 1960s, who worked on logic and epistemology. Danuta Gierulanka (1909–1995), Polish phenomenologist, who worked on Ingarden, Husserl, and Heidegger.
- 19 *Kultura* [Culture], prominent Polish émigré literary and political magazine published first in Rome, then in Paris.
- 20 Józef Tischner (1931–2000), eminent Polish priest and philosopher.
- 21 In fact, the article could not be published in Poland for political reasons. It remained unfinished (cf. below footnote 29).

- 22 Herman Leo Van Breda (1911–1974), Franciscan priest and philosopher who founded the Husserl Archives at the Catholic University of Leuven in 1939.
- 23 Patočka's essay, "Heidegger," translated by Michalski and published in *Znak* 26 (Krakow, 1974), volume 240, nr. 6, 713–716.
- 24 "People have encountered and continue to encounter any kind of mass slaughter and degradation with the happy conviction that they are bereft of any responsibility. . ."
- 25 Andrzej Póltawski (born 1923), Polish philosopher and anthropologist who participated in the Warsaw Uprising and studied with Roman Ingarden.
- 26 Pages refer to Patočka's German edition of Heidegger's text.
- 27 The article in *Twórczość* is the Polish translation of Patočka's study on Faust. [Original: "Der Sinn des Mythos vom Teufelspakt. Eine Betrachtung zu den Varianten der Faustsage," in *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 15 (1973), 291–303; translated into Polish by I. Krońska as "Trzy fazy legendy Fausta [Three Phases of the Faust Legend]," in *Twórczość* 29 (1973), 91–102.] The piece on Ingarden, entitled "Uwagi o Romana Ingardena filozofii obrazu" [Reflections on Ingarden's Philosophy of the Picture], appeared in the collection *Fenomenologia Romana Ingardena*, ed. Janusz Kuczynski (Warsaw: Wyd. specjalne Studiów Filozoficznych, 1972), 262–275. [Original: "Zu Roman Ingardens Ontologie des malerischen Kunstwerks," in *Philosophische Perspektiven* 4 (1972), 117–125.]
- 28 Krzysztof Pomian (born 1934), philosopher and historian, who emigrated to France in 1968, and is currently academic director of the Museum of Europe in Brussels.
- 29 Władysław Śeńko (born 1928), historian of Medieval philosophy and currently professor at the Polish Academy of Sciences.
- 30 *Viaticum*: Eucharist, or communion, administered in the Catholic Church to the dying as part of the last rites.
- 31 Jan Patočka, "Herman-Leo Van Breda," trans. Krzysztof Michalski, in *Znak* 27/247 (1975), 88–92.
- 32 Jan Patočka, "Was ist Phänomenologie?," in *Reason, Action and Experience: Essays in Honor of Raymond Klibansky* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1979), 31–49.
- 33 Jan Patočka, "Das Ende der Philosophie?" trans. Fr. Matula, in *Ketzerische Essays zur Philosophie der Geschichte und ergänzende Schriften. Ausgewählte Schriften II*, ed. Klaus Nellen and Jiří Němec (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1988), 432–460.
- 34 Michał Bristiger (born 1921), Polish musicologist.
- 35 Roman Ingarden, *Książeczka o człowieku* [Little Book about Man] (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1974).
- 36 Marian Henryk Serejski (1897–1975), Polish Medieval historian.
- 37 Polish Scientific Publishers.
- 38 *Res facta*, Polish journal of musicology.
- 39 Jan Patočka, "Die Gefahren der Technisierung in der Wissenschaft bei Edmund Husserl und das Wesen der Technik als Gefahr bei Martin Heidegger," in *Die Bewegung der menschlichen Existenz. Ausgewählte Schriften IV: Phänomenologische Schriften II*, ed. Klaus Nellen, Jiří Němec and Ilja Šrubař (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1991), 330–353. The article was in fact never finished and was found only after Patočka's death among his manuscripts. It is a reworked and extended version of his lecture on the world-congress of philosophy in Varna 1973. The English translation by Erazim Kohák of the earlier version, entitled "The Dangers of Technicization in Science according to E. Husserl and the Essence of Technology as Danger according to M. Heidegger," is reprinted in this volume (13–22).
- 40 Ivan Vojtěch (born 1928), Czech musicologist.
- 41 Henri Declève (1924–1988), Belgian philosopher who co-translated (with Jaromír Daněk) Patočka's PhD thesis into French—*Le monde naturel comme problème philosophique* (Hague: Nijhoff, 1976)—and who introduced Patočka's writing to Francophone philosophy.
- 42 *Phaenomenologica*, book series in phenomenology published by the Husserl Archives in Leuven.
- 43 Krzysztof Michalski, "Uczucie i fenomenologia" [Feeling and Phenomenology], in *Teksty* 2 (1974), 106–120.
- 44 Georg Picht (1931–1982), German philosopher and theologian.
- 45 Krzysztof Michalski, "Heidegger w oczach współczesnych," in *Znak* 249 (1975).

- 46 Werner Marx (1910–1994), German philosopher and successor to Heidegger’s chair in Freiburg.
- 47 Bohdan Cywiński (born 1939), Polish social activist, writer, and historian of ideas.
- 48 The Stefan-George Circle, the group of poets, writers, and academics gathered around the charismatic poet Stefan George.
- 49 “An Attempt at a Czech National Philosophy and Its Failure.” English translation published in: *T.G. Masaryk in Perspective*, ed. M. Čapek and K. Hrubý (Ann Arbor: SVU Press, 1981), 1–22.
- 50 Klaus Schaller (born 1928), German philosopher, educationalist, and specialist in Comenius.
- 51 Walter Biemel, *Philosophische Analysen der Kunst der Gegenwart* (Hague: Nijhoff, 1968).
- 52 Petr Rezek (born 1948), Czech phenomenological philosopher and art theorist.
- 53 Jiří Němec (1932–2001), Czech philosopher and dissident, organizer of the *Charter 77* movement.
- 54 Krzysztof Michalski, “Martin Heidegger i problem prawdy” [Martin Heidegger and the problem of truth], in *Studia filozoficzne* 12 (1974).
- 55 Krzysztof Michalski, “Heidegger: filozof i czas,” in *Teksty* 6 (1974).
- 56 Patočka refers here to the collection that was later published under the title *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History* [Patočka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, trans. Erazim Kohák, ed. James Dodd (Chicago: Open Court, 1996); Czech: *Kacířské eseje o filosofii dějin*, in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 3: *Péče o duši III*, ed. Ivan Chvatík and Pavel Kouba (Prague: Oikumene, 2002).]
- 57 Eugen Fink (1905–1975), German philosopher, assistant to Husserl and Heidegger.
- 58 Patočka’s German sentence reads: “seine Lösung des Problems Philosophie X Theologie von einer grossen Originalität,” where “X” is here taken to mean “and.”
- 59 Krzysztof Michalski, “Heidegger,” in *Twórczość* 8 (1975).
- 60 Ludwig Landgrebe (1902–1991), German philosopher and assistant to Husserl.
- 61 Krzysztof Michalski, “Walter Biemel o Heideggerze,” in *Studia Filozoficzne* 7 (1975).
- 62 Medard Boss (1903–1990), Swiss psychiatrist. Heinrich Rombach (1923–2004), German philosopher.
- 63 Shalva Natsubidze (1888–1969), Georgian philosopher, founder of Tbilisi State University, and known for his critique of Husserl from a materialist point of view.
- 64 “Karteziánství a fenomenologie,” contributed to a privately circulated *Festschrift* in honor of Karel Kosík. English translation: “Cartesianism and Phenomenology,” in Kohák, *Jan Patočka*, 285–326.
- 65 Elmar Holenstein (born 1937), Swiss phenomenological philosopher.
- 66 AAD was the original name of today’s DAAD, the German Academic Exchange Service.
- 67 FRG: Federal Republic of Germany.
- 68 Ernst Wolfgang Orth (born 1936), German philosopher and specialist in Neo-Kantianism.
- 69 Givi Margvelashvili (born 1927), Georgian philosopher and writer, who writes on phenomenology and Heidegger.
- 70 Krzysztof Michalski, “Heidegger,” in *Kultura* (18 July, 1976), 4.
- 71 Ewa Bieńkowska (born 1943), Polish writer, essayist, and translator.
- 72 Krzysztof Michalski, “Mathematic als Sprache der Physik,” in *Philosophia Naturalis* 4 (1977); “Granice filozofii transcendentalnej,” in *Dziedzictwo Kanta* (Warsaw, 1976).
- 73 Jacek Woźniakowski (1920–2012), Polish writer, art historian, journalist, and publisher; mayor of Krakow from 1990–1991.

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Part IV

Jan Patočka and Contemporary Phenomenology of Religion

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13 Givenness—Dispensation of the World¹

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I. The World as Aporia

One should not be surprised that the world or the very idea of the world remains aporetic. This is so not only because as one of the objects of *metaphysica specialis*, it would be able to (and should) share the very crisis of metaphysics as a whole, but also especially because among all these objects the world appears the most irreducible to an *idea*, or even to *an* idea. From the outset, the world falters between two worlds, floats between two waters. On the one hand stands Wittgenstein's celebrated opening of the *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*: "Die Welt ist alles, was der Fall ist."² One usually translates: "The world is everything that is the case."—Maybe so that one would not have to choose between the weak translation (that the world is entirely accidental) and a stronger translation that would require far more conceptual engagement (the world is everything that comes about or even everything that happens). Yet, without going any further, if this "is the case," of what is it the case? A first explanation seems clear: "The world is the totality of facts, *not of things*" (Die Welt ist die Gesamtheit der Tatsachen, *nicht der Dinge*).³ In order to avoid having to face up to things (thus for example the division of things in themselves with phenomena), one is restrained or, rather, one tries to dodge the issue by confining oneself to the apparent simplicity of facts: the fact, the state of facts, is everything. Yet it is still at least somewhat necessary to make clear what these facts are and the apparent simplicity immediately becomes a tangle of questions. For if "was der Fall ist, die Tatsache, ist das Bestehen von Sachverhalten,"⁴ that is, if what is in fact the case is the consistency of the relations between things, then these states and relations between things are themselves really made up of things (*Sache*), and their unspecified status oscillates between or is identified with thingness, the matter in question, and objectness. What follows recognizes this, whether voluntarily or not: "The state of affairs is a connection between objects (things, stuff)" ("Der Sachverhalt ist eine Verbindung von Gegenständen [Sachen, Dingen].")⁵ Hence the world really is composed of the links between things, or even between objects, although it had been assumed precisely *not* to consist of things, but of that of which this is the case. Does the world consist of things or not? Is what happens or occurs by accident a matter

of the thing or not? Must one attribute incoherence to Wittgenstein? Without doubt, as the sequel showed.

Yet this incoherence only repeats the indecisiveness of metaphysics, which in turn above all reflects the indecisiveness of the world itself. For it is not self-evident that the world can be *thought*, as is in principle possible of things and objects. One must only clarify the questions to test this. (a) What totality does the world constitute? In what sense can Kant begin by assuming such a “whole that is not a part (*totum quod non est part*)”?⁶ Yet is there a totality of things, of affairs (*Sachen*), of objects, or of something still different at stake? And does this totality remain homogeneous with the elements of which it is made up or must it not instead have an entirely different mode than they do, because it gathers them together? In what does the vagueness of these modes consist? This question hence is concerned with the *what* of totalization. (b) Second, does a totality, i.e. the totality of totalities without remainder, still remain thinkable in general? One would at least have to ask oneself what change and what form such thought would have to take in order to reach such a supposed “object,” albeit only as a simple idea of reason. How does one reach such a limit and, above all, how does one define it? Is there a limit in general or instead an endless transgression of any limit? In short, does the world remain finite like the thought that aims at it or infinite as its totality would assume? This question hence affects the *how* of totalization. (c) Finally, where would one place the one who thinks the world? Either at the interior of the world; but then how could one think it in its totality? Or outside the world: “Via space the universe contains and engulfs me as a point, but via thought I contain it.”⁷ Yet in order to think through what he is saying, Pascal must assume Descartes’ radical position (which Kant and Husserl take up again), namely that the ego that thinks is not found in the world that it thinks, except maybe as *solus in mundo*,⁸ the only thinking [thing] in a world that does not think, the only non-extended [thing] in a world of extension. If one shrinks back in the face of this consequence, only a deflationism remains that would admit that the world only becomes an object for the divine understanding.⁹ This question hence contests the *who* of totalization.

As if in passing, Patočka outlines a very similar critique in a striking note:

Similarly [i.e., in comparison with Avenarius] Wittgenstein’s “The world is everything that is the case”—either meaningless because it comes down to denoting “all that is, all being”—or *facts*, and that is not the world.¹⁰

For all that, we cannot avoid a parallel: Could this objection not be made just as well and almost in the same terms against a phenomenology of givenness?¹¹ In fact, if all phenomenality comes down to givenness, if consequently the world also has to be understood as a given (“The question of the world hence definitively quits the horizon of objectivation for that of the being-given—as *the being-given as a whole*”¹²), then will one not come across the same aporiae of totality? And if one in addition gives up on the facility of presupposing the immediacy of this given, will one not enforce a factuality that *expends* the phenomenality of the world without permitting any withdrawal but also no opening? Does one then not arrive at a world without give or leeway, so to say already congealed in itself and closed? In short, does this not come down to the undoing of any possible world? Does not the set immediacy of the given also get rid of worldhood?

In fact, even classical phenomenology encountered these insufficiencies without overcoming them. To the contrary, at times it reinforced them. At least that is what Patočka's re-reading of phenomenology shows. It is a critical but very educative re-reading that will guide us from now on.

II. What Husserl Does Not See

Although they are not conclusive, if one follows Patočka's reading of them, Husserl's analyses of phenomenality remain troubled by several presuppositions.

The first concerns the identification of the world with the actuality of the whole of real objects: "The world itself is the intentional object—*Die Welt selbst ist der intendierte Gegenstand.*"¹³ In fact, the [act of] placing in parentheses has bearing on an actual and permanent world; consequently, what it isolates and conserves also bears the traits of subsistence, which remain in fact and by right phenomenologically inappropriate for defining the phenomenality of the world: "*this entire natural world therefore* which is continually 'there for us,' 'present to our hand' and will ever remain there, is a 'fact-world' of which we continue to be conscious, even though it pleases us to put it in brackets."¹⁴ Subsistence does not suit the question of the world, because *passing* is proper to the world, since no substrate remains in it. The unquestioned privilege granted to the permanent present radically lacks the historical, historial, and event-like dimension of the world. This also leads to missing the essential possibility of the world and to maintaining the metaphysical primacy of actuality in it.

A second presupposition subordinates the world as a region to consciousness, conceived as a different region, but as such established as absolute and as absolutely certain. In a strict Cartesian gesture, one thus ends up turning the world into a *relative* totality—relative to the ego that makes it thinkable and governs it. This is hence also a *relatively* total totality, a world subjected to a condition, namely the condition of its founding: "The natural world as a correlate of consciousness (*als Bewußtseinskorrelat*)," "[. . .] as correlate of absolute consciousness (*als Korrelat des absoluten Bewußtseins*)." This results in a formula that is really contradictory: "The absolute consciousness as residuum of the negation of the world (*Das absolute Bewußtsein als Residuum der Weltvernichtung*)." ¹⁵ As if a residue could describe a totality; as if the negation of the world would suffice to define an absolute, even by contrast. For in the regime of reduction the world becomes neither doubtful nor obscure, but always remains valid, because it is always already there:

The world as a whole is never verified but is rather always the presupposition of all verification. From that it follows that the givenness of the world as a whole is not less indubitable than the givenness of lived experience in its self-givenness.¹⁶

Really at worst (or at best), if the world were not to fulfill the laws that consciousness claims to impose on it a priori, one should not conclude the general uncertainty of its existence from this, but only its unforeseeability, its a priori unpredictability: "It seems to me that one can only affirm with certainty the absence of legality, not the non-existence [of the world]."¹⁷ Instead of abolishing or dissipating the world, chaos remains one of the figures of its opening, and doubtlessly one the most apt and least uncommon.

A third presupposition follows from these two and brings them together: this world that has become thing-like is disclosed in, or rather masked by, the figure of a permanent and especially of a *regional* object. Possibly contrary to Kant's and Husserl's intention, the world would not be able to exercise the slightest a priori function. It loses its transcendental role and, in a word, it neither *opens* nor dispenses anything. For Husserl and Kant, *physics*, the (metaphysical) science of the world, remains always essentially, as for Aristotle, a *second* philosophy.

III. What Heidegger Still Presupposes

Perfectly aware of these dead ends, Heidegger achieved an essential conquest (at least at *first*) by establishing that the world does not come from objectness, because it proceeds from the non-objective being par excellence, namely *Dasein*: "The 'world' is ontologically not a determination of being that is essentially not *Dasein*, but it is the mark of *Dasein* itself."¹⁸ This could just as well be formulated negatively—"The world is not an intra-mundane being"—as positively: "Being in a world belongs essentially to *Dasein*."¹⁹ Thus Heidegger condemns the reduction's world-less subject (*weltlose Subjekt*),²⁰ which closes the phenomenon of the world, head-on—it is really a world-less I (*weltloses Ich*), inheritor of Descartes' world-less thinking thing (*weltlose res cogitans*) as much as of Kant's isolated subject (*isoliertes Subjekt*).²¹ Incidentally, it is this point that will confirm his rupture with Husserl in the dispute over the *Encyclopedia Britannica* article.²² *Dasein* implies and is even implicated in the world at this point where this world intervenes at the core of the structure of care (*Sorge*), in the way of being worthy of *Dasein*, and of it alone: "Sich-vorweg-schon-sein-in (-der-Welt) *als-sein-bei*(-innerweltlich-begegnenden Seienden)."²³ In short, *Dasein* radically depends on the world in order to be displayed as such in its exceptional ontological structure.

But this asset also raises a question in the shape of an objection: Does not the conclusion according to which "the world is 'subjective'—*Welt ist 'subjektiv'*"²⁴ lead to the height of subjectivism and consequently does it not fall under the blow of *a*-subjectivity? It is to Patočka's credit to have resisted such a tempting conclusion and himself to have disputed its relevance. This is the case first, as Heidegger immediately adds, because this subjectivity itself remains more "objective" than any object, if one understands by this that it guarantees the irreducibility of the world far more and far better than its metaphysical interpretation as a permanence of supposedly subsistent objects. And besides, as Heidegger constantly insists, *Dasein* is *not* itself a subject, rather it brings about the best thinkable destruction of the subject. This is secondly the case because in contrast to the Husserlian *I*, the world depends less on *Dasein* than *Dasein* depends on the world, as long as "world" means first and above all existence or opening (onto a world, not onto things filling a space). *Dasein* demands an *In-sein* (an *In-Being* [*Dans-ité* = "*In-ity*"], as we might dare to translate), hence a world, in order to be according to *its* special mode of being (*daseinsmäßig*). Therefore, it above all does not constitute the world, which accordingly remains already *a*-subjective. Nothing manifests this more clearly than the *Gegend überhaupt*, the general environment, which only befalls *Dasein* together with anxiety (*Angst*). And anxiety precisely *happens* to *Dasein* in the form of event [*arrive événementialement*], in no way does *Dasein* provoke it, trigger it or constitute it. The world, the "world in general," the world as world (*Welt als Welt*) *happens* to *Dasein*, which undergoes it to

the point of finding itself individualized (*vereinzelt*) there.²⁵ Patočka highlights this ambivalence perfectly:

[. . .] this a priori of the world is at the same time that which makes possible the relation to self and, consequently, this self in its ontological constitution. Does that mean that the world becomes henceforth something subjective after all? Only in a certain sense, for the “subjective” is ambivalent and signifies not only that which belongs to the subject as structural component, which constitutes an aspect of the subject, but also, on the other hand, that to which the subject is related as a horizon of its comprehension. The world is subjective in this second sense, and it is the *epoché* that allows us to reach this subjective dimension.²⁶

Patočka finally recognizes with Heidegger that the world no longer is given as a being or as an object (*noema*) or as the totality of objects, but as an existential of *Dasein*. The world is found nowhere (as the earliest Christian theologians stress for God). Maybe that is because it precisely *gives* place to everything? Does Heidegger allow us to think this? Without any doubt, in light of the texts we know today with the *Gesamtausgabe*. Yet Patočka did not know these texts or at least he does not refer to them. He hence attempted on his own to respond to the question of that to which the world can *give place*—of that which the world *dispenses*.

IV. The Liberation of the World as Possible

How does the world give rise to everything and to what totality? Patočka tried (successfully) to confront this question by exercising several apparently paradoxical reversals.

Rather than putting the world in doubt via the reduction, he established that the *epoché*, this time accomplished without reduction, manifests the indubitable and irreversible opening of the world as such, instead of releasing the apodictic ontic certainty of the ego. The world, and the world as totality, finds itself always already given, for all the reductions always suspend only specific theses, that is to say, expectations (whether disappointed or not) of singular objects, which presuppose and hence manifest all the more the indubitable totality:

There is no reason that could shake this givenness if, as a horizon, the world itself is *unverifiable* and yet the condition of all verification. [. . .] The world as a whole, however, clearly means something that is present and certain in presence but that does not in principle reduce to any givenness of the particular, so that its thesis can never be excluded by suspending the theses of such particulars. [. . .] The transcendence of the world as a whole consists precisely in that the whole is present, given as a whole, that is, that it can never appear as a particular, that I can never have it “before me” as a particular object but rather can only have all objects, all individual realities, only within its framework. The world is in principle something containing, never something contained.²⁷

By right one must oppose “[. . .] the world, unfalsifiable noema” to the ego’s certainty and to the doubt about the existence of the world.²⁸

Yet obviously the unfalsifiable world no longer coincides with the one who calls into question Cartesian doubt and the Husserlian reduction: At stake is no longer the more or less heterogeneous collection of objects placed outside or next to another, in an atomic existence. It is the only one that, so to say, might attack by turns, concentrating on hitting a single, isolated target. The unfalsifiable world no longer amounts to the indefinite sum of objects, of objectified beings in the objectness of permanence, to the sum of present actualities according to its metaphysical definition—"The world is the series (multiplicity, totality) of *actual* finite [beings], which are in no way a part of another."²⁹ In this way an essential turn occurs in the world's way of being, which passes from actuality to possibility. The world becomes unfalsifiable only inasmuch as it henceforth finds itself conceived as a possibility, in front of the always possible falsification of singular theses of objective actualities. Consequently, one must thematize the "world in the strong sense of the word: the world as the aggregate of all realities, the sum of all that can be included in the unity of objective temporal sequence."³⁰ Or also:

Thanks to the universalization of the *epoché*, it will then also become clear that, just as the self is the *condition of possibility* of the appearing of the mundane, in the same way the world as originary horizon (and not as the whole of realities) represents the *condition of possibility* of the appearing of the self.³¹

One could ask (as others, like recently Émilie Tardivel, have certainly done), just where this approach to the world as possibility must lead: maybe several steps beyond what Patočka said—namely, to think the world not only as an event, but as event-like. It is possible that the *event-like* character of the world, from the outset and on principle, would follow from substituting possibility in it by actuality. And, in turn, just where does this event-like character lead? To the *Ereignis*, if not to say to givenness? The question should at least be raised here.

There is more. For only this turn of the world from actuality to possibility allows [one] to measure the significance of a different turn, that of the ego toward a-subjectivity. And one must be careful not to follow the reverse order, which leads to reducing a-subjectivity to a banal anti-Cartesian polemic, in a perfunctory and thus insignificant fashion. Actually, not only does the *epoché* without reduction place into doubt the non-existence of the world as opposed to the apodicticity of the ego's existence, but it especially raises questions about the being of the ego in contrast to the unfalsifiability of the world as possible. Within this problematic, in contrast to the reduction, the *epoché* does not *revert* from the absence of the world to the presence of the ego, but in contrast to the possibility of the world it leads to the absence if not the ontic nullity of the ego. For the *cogito* can still perfectly offer a beginning to thought (a point of departure, a first point, first also because one quits it in order to continue to think) without for all that laying claim to the status of the first, that is to say, actually of the *final* principle. The certainty of the ego does not exclude but possibly requires the void of the ego. One could show that without doubt such was Kant's real intention, who took it up from Descartes and above all from St. Augustine without assessing or maybe even knowing it. This a-subjectivity can be articulated in three theses. First, close to Kant, the statement of vacuity: "The subject to which all appears is empty."³² Or rather: "In the ego as such there is nothing to see."³³ Then, close to St. Augustine and possibly to Descartes' Second Meditation, existence without essence: "The certainty of the ego in the ego cogito [. . .] is a simple certainty of existence, devoid of any

content.”³⁴ Finally, this time close to the devoted [*l’adonné*] in a phenomenology of givenness, the ontological extra-territoriality of the ego: “The ego of the cogito is not a being.”³⁵ In reality, this a-subjective ego becomes radically non-transcendental: thus it massively anticipates the devoted [*l’adonné*], inasmuch as it not only receives the phenomenal given [*donné*] before or even *without* constituting whatever it might be, but it certainly receives itself at the same time that it receives the given and in order to be able to receive it.

A final thesis follows from the fact that the *epoché* does not lead back to the least region-consciousness, because it neither turns nor in general leads back (via *reduction*) to any hidden but always already acquired point of departure—suspension of the self without renewal of the self, suspension without return: the *epoché* without reduction suspends not only transcendence in general, but the transcendence of the ego (in this way Sartre’s unhappy formulation finds a *contrario* a belated legitimacy) and recognizes the transcendence of the world. The radical nature and the power of this reversal of Kant’s and Husserl’s positions should not be underestimated: Transcendence belongs to the world as totality of possibles, abandoning the ego as condition for the totality of actual objects to be thought: “The existing subject is not the transcendental and the transcendental subject does not exist.”³⁶ As we have seen, “[. . .] the unfalsifiable thesis of the world [. . .]” in turn attests its transcendental character.³⁷ Henceforth, via exile and transfer of the transcendental function, the world appears as the ego’s a priori condition:

[. . .] just as much as the *self* is the condition of possibility of the appearing of the mundane, so the world as originary horizon (and not as the whole of realities) represents the condition of possibility for the appearing of the self. [. . .] The self is what it is only in its explication with the world.³⁸

Beyond the reversal of priority in the bi-lateral relation of the world and of the ego, this also implies the ego’s inclusion in the world and thus the end of the illusion of two regions and of their frontal cold war: “The a priori world is not *my world*, but the all-encompassing world in which I, by constituting it, cause all the rest to enter—myself, as much as others and things.”³⁹ The world as “possible” therefore frees the horizon for *givenness*: “The world is *given* to us in its entirety.”⁴⁰

In this way Patočka supplies us, even if only in outline, with the elements of a response to the three initial questions: (a) Of *what* is the totality of the world, or rather the world as totality, constituted? From now on, the response says: It is constituted by the possibility of what comes (the world as event) and not by the actuality of objects. (b) *How* is this totality constituted? The answer is: It is constituted according to the a-subjective *epoché*, which does not lead back (via reduction) to an ego in a transcendental position, but to the “unfalsifiable noema” of the world always already given. (c) For *whom* is this totality constituted? Answer: For the a-subjective ego that receives itself from it to the very extent to which it receives it, that is to say that it is devoted to it.

V. What Gives Itself and What Shows Itself

By intentionally insinuating the devoted [*l’adonné*] into the hermeneutic of Patočka’s theses, we have already approached the other side of our inquiry: Can one think the

world, especially the decisive insights Patočka brings to it, within the frame of a phenomenology of givenness?

One must first set out from one of the fundamental results of such a phenomenology of givenness: Not only has the given nothing immediate (it is even less a matter of an immediate object or something constituted without constitution, which is a contradiction in terms), but all phenomenality is situated within the fold of givenness with self-showing [*monstration*]⁴¹—in other words, if any phenomenon *shows itself* (Heidegger), it is necessary that all that shows itself *gives itself*, yet without this implying that all that gives itself also shows itself. There are givens that no longer show themselves or that will never show themselves, for that is the case for the *world*. In other words, this time in Patočka's own: "The world is originally given, but not *everything* in it is given in the same manner."⁴¹ Or also: "What is the *thing of philosophy*? Not only the given thing, but the *justified givenness of things, the legitimation*, the legitimacy of consciousness, not the fact but the legitimacy of fact."⁴² It is certainly not by accident that Patočka's first public text, his 1936 dissertation, opens with the originary determination of the world in totality as *given* and *clarification*: "This representation [i.e., of the world] encloses two components: we can call the first *the given* and the second *the explanatory*."⁴³ And he states that what causes idealism to fail (Fichte, in Patočka's opinion) always comes down to the fact that it finds itself confronted by "the defect" of the manifested.⁴⁴ The given can always hold itself back, keep the unseen in its possession, withdraw from what shows itself; the reserve of the unseen attests to the excess of the given over any manifestation of what shows itself. The *possible* phenomenality of the given surpasses in principle the visibility of actualized phenomena. Thus the world is opened by also restraining itself. The world *exempts itself* [*se dispense*].

Patočka's advance stresses the impossibility of reducing the given to the manifest, albeit in various at times imprecise formulations, which can often be rephrased in terms of a phenomenology of givenness:

[. . .] a non-immanent beyond, an awareness of the *fact* of a global and in that sense worldly givenness. This givenness is inseparable from the meaning of our experience, but we cannot say that it is throughout its achievement; it [i.e., the givenness as a whole of the world] is nothing constituted but rather a presupposition of all constitution. Thus we cannot say that any meaning of the world is coextensive with meaning constituted by subjectivity.⁴⁵

Or even: "[. . .] the impossibility that the meaning 'world' in the most basic sense would be 'constituted' in some manner of whatever sort."⁴⁶ Or also: "It is impossible to lead back all being to the objective givenness (*předmětné dánosti*)"⁴⁷ for the givenness of being as that of *the world* comes from the possible, and hence never from any objectivation. It must hence be admitted as "dissatisfaction with the given [. . .]"⁴⁸

Between the two moments of phenomenization, the given and the shown, *which* must intervene, which player must enter into the game? Which operator of the transition comes to be devoted to "the concrete analyses of the given"⁴⁹ to "the emergence of the things themselves" starting from their "symptoms"?⁵⁰ I call him the devoted [*l'adonné*], the one who receives himself from the very thing he receives—namely, the given allowed to show itself. In Patočka, this operator has a precise name, the one who realizes [*le réalisateur*]:

[. . .] this ego is that to whom the appearing appears; appearing, the phenomenal field is its appearing. There is nothing there which would be seized “objectively” but only a realizability of characters of exigency which, in the phenomenal field, are addressed to the ego, reclaim it and make it appear egologically as agent.⁵¹

Or finally: “This foundation [i.e. the ego in its temporal becoming] is not a *mere substrate*, a mere bearer, but rather an agent—therein it is fundamentally different from other ‘unities in plurality.’”⁵²

How does the “one who realizes” play between what gives itself and what shows itself? In the phenomenology of givenness, this play is defined as that of the appeal of the given, which finds a response in the reception by the devoted permitting it to show itself. Yet, just as givenness functions as an appeal for the devoted, so according to Patočka does the world provoke an appeal for the a-subjective *ego*. “The subject at the origin is uniquely the one to whom [the whole] appears.”⁵³

One first finds the confirmation of this structure of the appeal in the Patočkian analysis of space. It is really a matter of an appeal where the *I* undergoes the test of what comes from somewhere else and not, as for Husserl, from a zero-point:

The center is not a geometrical center, but an *I*, a living being, an organism called by something and who responds to this appeal [. . .] The center comprises two persons: the one who is called and the one who calls, the *I* and the *you*. [. . .] The *I* is no longer internal: it is always there as the active center to which the other addresses himself. All the replies are made in my center or, rather, my center, what is most internal to me, is the *I* who responds, who acts, who moves.⁵⁴

Here, it is “[. . .] the non-*I* [who] calls” and “myself, as the one called.”⁵⁵ I find myself from the outset already decentered, second and interlocuted, in short, with the status of the devoted [*l’adonné*]. This call, which has the status of “an event of calling,” comes from elsewhere “often in a rather distressing fashion,” hence witnessing to the originary exteriority of a-subjectivity, in other words, of the devoted.⁵⁶

Next, running counter to the possibility that according to Heidegger always comes from *Dasein*’s decisiveness (*Entschlossenheit*), it here comes down to the phenomenon *and to it alone* to make the appeal and hence to call out the one appealed. What’s more, in this way the devoted, by a possibility that he does not decide and that comes to him from elsewhere, truly becomes “the one who realizes,” devoted to the given in order to make it manifest: “The consciousness of fact that the one who realizes remains, in the realization, the same who has conceived, who has been called by a possibility, has said *yes* to it, has decided [. . .]”⁵⁷ The appealed one becomes, in a body, the only legitimate phenomenological face of the ego: “The body proper [*corps propre*], inasmuch as egological, responds to a phenomenal appeal, satisfied or attempting to satisfy a requirement posed by the appearing thing, which opens itself before me.”⁵⁸ The appeal of the given hence validates only phenomenologically the Patočkian ego as a devoted: “The call is not a mere metaphor, but the very essence of experience.”⁵⁹ Like the devoted, the *I* finds itself made possible by the world, which hence makes visible, far from pretending to be able to make the world certain in actuality:

The calling of subjectivity to the world may imply the incompleteness of that clarity, but also the “call of the world” to subjectivity, call to clarity [. . .] Thus

human incarnation and worldliness are accompanied by a call to what is not *given* [if, to what is not manifest, although given] but must be uncovered, discovered, revealed in a deeper mode. [. . .] For the *epoché* is nothing other than the discovery of the freedom of the subject.⁶⁰

In this way, the world *appeals* to the devoted, so that what gives itself manages to show itself via the response of this devoted. The devoted, this other name of the a-subjective ego, appeals in its response to the given in order to grant it its visibility. The unfolding of the given and the shown becomes the place and the moment, if not to say the event, where *the world dispenses itself*. According to the unfolding of this fold, the conversion of the world into an event *is realized* by the intervention of freedom, which makes of a certain area of the given the appearing of a phenomenon: “[. . .] the world is not a mere generality, a structure of essence, but rather the unity of the structure of essence and of *facticity*.”⁶¹ In other words, the world results from the structure by excess of the possible given, always in reserve of the unseen, such that the measure of its reception as appeal by the devoted permits this latter to convert it (or to *realize* it) into a phenomenon which hence shows itself, although only and always partially.

One can then understand my conclusion, this time in Patočka’s terms:

Nevertheless, even abandoned, a gift remains perfectly given. I am therefore obsessed by what I cannot or don’t want to let show itself. A night of the unseen, given but without kind, envelops the immense day of what already shows itself. And in this way the devoted remains in the end the sole master and servant of the given.⁶²

What is here called *given* also holds for the world.

Accordingly one shall distinguish the *advance* of what gives itself and what shows itself; the event of what gives itself inasmuch as it comes to show itself; and exempt it [*la dispense*] from what gives itself without any longer or ever showing itself (the world). The world dispenses us the given (the world or the reserve of the unseen, which reserves itself there—the world remains very reserved in the matter of manifestation), but dispenses itself from showing it; it demands of us to exempt it [*le dispenser*] from manifestation, which all the same we alone would have to dispense [for] it.

Notes

- 1 **Translator’s Note:** The French term *dispenser*, which this essay employs heavily, can mean both to exempt or excuse someone (i.e., granting a “dispensation”) and to dispense or administer (and hence has the connotation of “giving”). Marion draws heavily on both of these meanings throughout the article and one always has to be heard in the other.
- 2 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (German with facing English translation), trans. C. K. Ogden, (London: Routledge, 1995), prop. 1.
- 3 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, prop. 1.1.
- 4 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, prop. 2.
- 5 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, prop. 2.01.
- 6 Immanuel Kant, “De mundi sensibilis atque intelligibilis forma et principiis,” in *Kants Gesammelte Schriften (Akademie Ausgabe)*, vol. 2: *Vorkritische Schriften II* (Berlin, Reimer, 1905, 1912), 387.

- 7 Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, ed. Louis Lafuma (Bussière: Éditions du Seuil Saint-Amand, 1962), §113.
- 8 René Descartes, *Meditatio III*, in *Oeuvres de Descartes*, vol. 7: *Meditationes de prima philosophia*, ed. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (Paris: Cerf, 1897–1909), 42, l. 22. Hereafter AT VII.
- 9 Descartes: “totus hic mundus ens rationis divinae, hoc est ens per simplicem actum mentis divinae creatum, dici potest” (*Secundae Responsiones*, AT VII, 134, l. 25). See Suarez: “[. . .] Scotus dixit creaturas ex aeternitate esse productas a Deo in esse cognito” (*Opera Omnia*, vol. 26: *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, ed. Michel André and Charles Berton (apud Ludovicum Vivès, 1856), LIV, s. 2, n. 7, 1020); and, finally, Friedrich Nietzsche: “Traum schien mir da die Welt, und Dichtung eines Gottes” (*Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, vol. 4: *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (München: de Gruyter, 1980), 35. [English translation: “A dream the world then seemed to me, and the fiction of a god.” *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Viking Penguin, 1966), 30.]
- 10 Ms. 2E/5, in Jan Patočka, *Papiers Phénoménologiques*, ed. and trans. Erika Abrams (Grenoble, Millon, 1995), 211n. [Henceforth, all references to Patočka’s texts will be to English translations, if available. For texts not yet translated into English, the author’s references to the French translations from the original Czech or German have been retained.—Eds.]
- 11 See, for example: “The reference to the world is rather absent in Jean-Luc Marion’s work.” Claudia Serban, “La méthode phénoménologique, entre réduction et herméneutique,” in *Les Etudes philosophiques* 1 (2012), 87. And Shane Mackinlay, “Phenomenality in the Middle: Marion, Romano and the Hermeneutics of the Event,” in *Givenness and God: Questions of Jean-Luc Marion*, ed. Ian Leask and Eoan Cassidy (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 167–81.
- 12 Jean-Luc Marion, *Le Visible et le révélé* (Paris: Cerf, 2005), 92. [English translation: *The Visible and the Revealed*, trans. Christina Gschwandtner (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 60–61.]
- 13 Edmund Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen*, Zweiter Band: *Untersuchungen zur Phänomenologie und Theorie der Erkenntnis*, *Husserliana* XIX, ed. Ursula Panzer (Hague: Nijhoff, 1984), *Untersuchungen V*, §14, vol. 1, 386ff. [English translation: *Logical Investigations*, vol. 2, trans. J.N. Findlay and ed. Dermot Moran (London: Routledge, 2001).]
- 14 “[. . .] also diese ganze natürliche Welt, die beständig ‘für uns da,’ ‘vorhanden’ ist, und die immerfort dableiben wird als bewußtseinsmäßige ‘Wirklichkeit,’ wenn es uns auch beliebt, sie einzuklammern.” (Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*. Erstes Buch: *Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie*, *Husserliana* III, ed. Karl Schumann (Hague: Nijhoff, 1976), §32, 65. [English translation: *Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy*. First Book: *General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. Daniel Dahlstrom (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2014), §32, 55.] [Hereafter *Hua* III with German and English page references.] Émilie Tardivel insists on this in *La liberté au principe. Essai sur la philosophie de Patočka* (Paris: Vrin, 2011), 142ff.
- 15 Respectively, *Hua* III, §47, 99/85; *Hua* III, §76, 160/137; *Hua* III, §49, 103/88.
- 16 Patočka, *An Introduction to Husserl’s Phenomenology*, trans. Erazim Kohák (Chicago: Open Court, 1996), 104. [Czech: *Úvod do Husserlovy fenomenologie*, in *Filosofický časopis* 13 (1965), 5:693–701; 6:821–849; *Filosofický časopis* 14 (1966), 1:1–21; 3:289–305; 5:569–589.]
- 17 Patočka, “La phénoménologie, la philosophie phénoménologique et les *Méditations Cartésiennes* de Husserl,” in *Qu’est-ce que la phénoménologie?* trans. Erika Abrams, (Grenoble: Millon), 153. [Czech: “Husserlova fenomenologie, fenomenologická filosofie a ‘Karteziánské meditace,’” postface to Edmund Husserl, *Karteziánské meditace*, trans. Marie Bayerová (Prague: Svoboda, 1968).] Also: “We might still object that the world, upon verification, might cease to be an *ordered world*, could dissolve into chaos. A chaos, though, is something different than *no world at all*; it is precisely an *un-ordered world*. An un-ordered world does not mean the nonexistence of the whole, only the nonexistence of the whole of a *certain type*.” Jan Patočka, *An Introduction*, 105; see also Tardivel, *La liberté au principe*, 113ff.

- 18 “Welt ist ontologisch keine Bestimmung des Seienden, das wesentlich das Dasein nicht ist, sondern ein Charakter des Daseins selbst.” Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1979), §14, 64. [English translation: *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: SUNY, 1996), §14, 60.] [Hereafter *SuZ* with German and English page references.]
- 19 Respectively, “Welt ist selbst nicht ein innerweltliches Seiendes” and “Zum Dasein gehört aber wesentlich: Sein in einer Welt.” *SuZ*, §16, 72/67 and §4, 13/11. See also: “[. . .] ‘Welt’ selbst ein Konstitutivum des Daseins ist.” *SuZ*, §11, 52/48; and “Welt ist auch Dasein.” *SuZ*, §26, 118/111.
- 20 *SuZ*, §43, 207/192; see §69, 366/334–335 and §75, 388/354–355.
- 21 Respectively, *SuZ*, §63, 316/291; §43, 211/195; §64, 321/295–296.
- 22 See margins of Husserl, *Phänomenologische Psychologie*, *Husserliana* IX, ed. Walter Biemel (Hague: Nijhoff, 1968), 321.
- 23 *SuZ*, §41, 192/180 (emphasis added).
- 24 *SuZ*, §69, 366/335.
- 25 *SuZ*, §40, 186–187/174–175.
- 26 Patočka, “*Epoché et réduction*,” in *Qu’est-ce que la phénoménologie?* 227. See 225: “The self is only what it is in its explication with the world.” [German original: “Epoché und Reduktion. Einige Bemerkungen,” in *Bewusst-sein. Gerhard Funke zu eigen*, ed. A. J. Bucher, H. Drüe & T. M. Seebohm (Bonn: Bouvier, 1975), 76–85.]
- 27 Patočka, *An Introduction*, 105. See 130: “A given world would be a real world even if nothing were verified within it, even if, for imagination, it were a chaos. Just as a given order is no proof of its own reality, so chaos is no proof to the contrary.”
- 28 *Ms. 10D/40*, in Patočka, *Papiers Phénoménologiques*, 267. Also on 267: “The possibility of falsification always concerns only singularities, there is always the world, the whole of objective unities, unfalsifiable totality” (*Ms. 10D/42*) and on 268: “The verification, which is continued infinitely, *discloses the unfalsifiable*. [. . .] Constitution is not a creation, it is the meaning of the unfalsifiable. [. . .] falsification discloses the unfalsifiable thesis of the world.”
- 29 “Mundus est series (multitudo, totum) *actualium* finitorum, quae non est pars alterius.” Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Metaphysica* (Halle: Hemmerden, 1779), §354, 111.
- 30 Patočka, *An Introduction*, 162; see also: “The world as *whole of any objectivity* and the world as *the condition of possibility of all experience* are not identical.” Patočka, “La phénoménologie,” 151.
- 31 Patočka, “*Epoché et réduction*,” 225. Maurice Merleau-Ponty speaks of this proposal rightly as the “significance of possibles” in *Le visible et l’invisible* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 304. [English translation: *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, ed. Claude Lefort (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968).]
- 32 *Ms. 3G/17*, in Patočka, *Papiers Phénoménologiques*, 172.
- 33 “Le subjectivisme de la phénoménologie husserlienne et la possibilité d’une phénoménologie ‘asubjective’,” in Patočka, *Qu’est-ce que la phénoménologie?*, 186. [Originally in German: “Der Subjektivismus der Husserlschen und die Möglichkeit einer »asubjektiven« Phänomenologie,” in *Die Bewegung der menschlichen Existenz*, ed. Klaus Nellen, Jiří Němec and Ilya Šrubař (Stuttgart (Klett-Cotta, 1991), 267–285.)]
- 34 Patočka, “Le subjectivisme,” 208.
- 35 *Ms. 3G/17*, in Patočka, *Papiers Phénoménologiques*, 166. One could underline that this thesis goes back to Husserl or even to Meinong. See my analyses in *Réduction et donation. Recherches sur Husserl, Heidegger et la phénoménologie*, ch. V, §7 (Paris: PUF, 1989), 240ff. [English translation: *Reduction and Givenness. Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty* (Evanston: Northwestern, 1998)] and *Figures de phénoménologie*, II, §5 (Paris: Vrin, 2012), 37.
- 36 This magnificent formula is found in the *Ms. 6D/1* in Patočka, *Papiers Phénoménologiques*, 264.
- 37 *Ms. 10D/42*, in Patočka, *Papiers Phénoménologiques*, 267. See also 268: “The constitution of the world is not a creation, it is the meaning of the unfalsifiable” and *Ms 10D/40*, 268: “The world, unfalsifiable noema.”
- 38 Patočka, “*Epoché et réduction*,” 225. See: “Nothing would authorize us to say that the evidence of the existence of the world (in the sense of the most general

- anticipation) presupposes the evidence of the existence of the subject.” Patočka, “La phénoménologie,” 153.
- 39 Patočka, “La phénoménologie,” 159.
- 40 Patočka, *Plato and Europe*, trans. Petr Lom (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 72 (emphasis added). [Czech: *Platón a Evropa*, in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 2: *Péče o duši II*, ed. Ivan Chvatík and Pavel Kouba, (Prague: Oikumene, 2002).]
- 41 Ms. 3G/17, in Patočka, *Papiers Phénoménologiques*, 176. See Patočka, “Le subjectivisme,” 206: “The proper tasks of phenomenology reside in the description of these processes, of this emergence of the things themselves.” For the still subjective lived experience of the given only begins, as a “symptom,” the process of manifestation of the thing itself.
- 42 Patočka, “La philosophie transcendantale de Husserl après révision,” in *Introduction à la phénoménologie de Husserl*, trans. Erika Abrams (Grenoble: Millon, 1993), 232. [Czech: “Husserlova transcendentální filosofie po revizi,” in *Úvod do fenomenologické filosofie*, ed. J. Polívka and Ivan Chvatík (Prague: Archivní soubor, 1989).]
- 43 Patočka, *Le monde naturel comme problème philosophique* (The Hague: Springer, 1976), 7 (original emphasis). [Czech: “Přirozený Svět Jako Filosofický Problém,” in *Sebrané Spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 6: *Fenomenologické Spisy I: Přirozený Svět*, ed. Ivan Chvatík (Prague: Oikumene, 2008 [1936]).]
- 44 Patočka, *An Introduction*, 131. [The English translation says that Idealism’s conception of being is “devoid of evidence.”—Trans.] See 132: “This eidetic necessity, however, means nothing more than the possibility that clarity will erupt in the world, it contains no *total* clarity about it nor the possibility of a contemporaneous and uniform penetrability of its totality. Precisely the dependence of clarity on the constitution of a presentation of beings in the world is not only a proof that such total clarity is not a reality but is also a presumption that it is hardly possible.” And also 132: “our greatest insight is at the same time *a vision of what is escaping us*”; “An obscure point [. . .] the dark place” (133, 134); “an inevitable darkness [. . .] incompleteness of that uncovering of the world” (134).
- 45 Patočka, *An Introduction*, 169.
- 46 Patočka, “La phénoménologie,” 158.
- 47 Patočka, *Eternité et historicité*, trans. Erika Abrams (Lagrasse: Verdier, 2011), 132. [Czech: *Věčnost a dějinnost* (1950), in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 1: *Péče o duši I*, ed. Ivan Chvatík and Pavel Kouba (Prague: Oikumene, 1996).] See Tardivel, *La liberté au principe*, 105, who underlines heavily the excess of the appearing over the conditions of its reception (104).
- 48 Patočka, “Negative Platonism,” in *Jan Patočka: Philosophy and Selected Writings*, trans. and ed. Erazim Kohák (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 193. [Czech: “Negativní platonismus,” in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 1: *Péče o duši I*, ed. Ivan Chvatík and Pavel Kouba (Prague: Oikumene, 1996), 303–336.]
- 49 Patočka, *An Introduction*, 128.
- 50 Patočka, “Le subjectivisme,” 206.
- 51 Patočka, “Le subjectivisme,” 208. See: “Humans are not conscious of being in the world as realisers in the service of an idea.” Patočka, “L’homme et le monde,” in *Qu’est-ce que la phénoménologie?*, 120. [This is a French translation of the last chapter of *Úvod do Husserlovy fenomenologie*, in *Filosofický časopis* 14/5 (1965–1966), 569–589; in English see Patočka, *An Introduction*, chapter 8. The quote appears on page 166.] See Patočka, *Plato and Europe*, 34. See Tardivel, *La liberté au principe*, 95ff.
- 52 Patočka, *An Introduction*, 127. [What is translated as *réalisateur* into French, is translated as “agent” in the English. This seems too strong for Marion’s point here, so the term has been translated as “the one who realizes” except in direct quotations from existing English translations.—Trans.] One might think here of Merleau-Ponty evoking “the Operator or him to whom everything happens.” *Le visible et l’invisible*, 299.
- 53 Ms. 3G/17 in Patočka, *Papiers Phénoménologiques*, 176. See 171–72: “The subject is originally only the one to whom the world appears.”
- 54 Patočka, “L’espace et sa problématique,” in *Qu’est-ce que la phénoménologie?* 48. [Czech: “Prostor a jeho problematika,” *Estetika* 28/1 (1991): 1–37.] Clearly here the *I* of the call no longer occupies the role of center but is decentered: “To the contrary, the *I* is *originally* ‘inside’; it is the one who, called, responds not to him who makes the appeal and is

manifested. The one called is determined by the call: the inverse is not the case. [. . .] It is from the other, from the milieu, from the partner that one receives the definition of the place where one is; one is not oneself the point of fixation.” Patočka, “L’espace,” 48–49.

55 Patočka, “L’espace,” 51.

56 Patočka, “L’espace,” 50, 52.

57 Patočka, “Corps, possibilités, monde, champ d’apparition,” *Ms. 5E/15* [1972], in *Papiers Phénoménologiques*, 118. A crucial text that adds (among other important notes) that “it is therefore not myself who creates the possibilities, but the possibilities create me.” Patočka, “Corps, possibilités,” 120.

58 Patočka, “Le subjectivisme,” 213–214.

59 Patočka, “L’espace,” 51.

60 Patočka, *An Introduction*, 135.

61 Patočka, “La philosophie transcendentale de Husserl après révision,” 223.

62 Jean-Luc Marion, *Etant donné. Essai d’une phénoménologie de la donation* (Paris: PUF, 1998), 438. [English translation: *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 319.] Translation modified—Trans.

14 Specters of the Sacred

Jan Patočka, or: The Hidden Source of Jacques Derrida's "Phenomenology of Religion"

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Jacques Derrida's thoughts on religion wielded a persistent influence on the so-called "phenomenology of religion." Derrida's hyper-referential text *Faith and Knowledge* functions as a pivotal study, where many different thinkers such as Kant, Hegel, Bergson and Heidegger enter into dialogue. At the same time, there is one name that is conspicuously absent in Derrida's essay: that of Jan Patočka. In this article, I seek to show that Patočka's thoughts on religion, especially in the *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History* turn out to be of central importance to Derrida's "phenomenology of religion."

Keywords: Derrida; Patočka; phenomenology of religion; auto-immunity

Religion is not the sacred [. . .]; rather, it is where the sacred qua demonic is being explicitly overcome.¹

—Jan Patočka, *Heretical Essays*

These comprise two distinct sources or foci. "Religion" figures their ellipse because it both comprehends the two foci but also sometimes shrouds their irreducible duality in silence, in a manner precisely that is secret and reticent.²

—Jacques Derrida, *Faith and Knowledge*

Introduction

Jacques Derrida's thoughts on religion wielded a persistent influence on the manifold discourses in the so-called "phenomenology of religion." Derrida's complex and hyper-referential text, *Faith and Knowledge* (1994), functions as a pivotal study, where many different thinkers such as Kant, Hegel, Bergson and Heidegger enter into dialogue. At the same time, there seems to be one name that is conspicuous precisely in its absence and which, as I will show, turns out to be of central importance to Derrida's phenomenology of religion: that of Jan Patočka. I would argue that Patočka's *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History* gave

Derrida the most important impulses that he then developed further through the aforementioned thinkers.

This claim may come as a surprise, since Derrida most prominently engaged with Patočka in *The Gift of Death* (1992). But if one takes a closer look at the very beginning of the text, it becomes quite clear what precisely Derrida's interest was in his engagement with Patočka's *Heretical Essays*. He focuses almost exclusively on the fifth Heretical Essay, wherein Patočka poses the following question: is technological civilization doomed to decadence, and why? The analysis of religion (or religiosity) presented therein serves as a pivotal study for Derrida, which he even deems to be "a thesis on the origin and essence of the religious."³

Two years later in *Faith and Knowledge* (1994), Derrida is interested precisely in this origin and essence of the religious or religion as such; however, he eschews every reference to Patočka, even though the very structure of the arguments is a strong reminder of Patočka's own analyses. Even Michael Naas' dense and thorough study *Miracle and Machine*,⁴ which serves as an in-depth study of this single text and its manifold references, does not seem to give this further "resource" (besides Kant, Hegel, Bergson and Heidegger) of Derrida's phenomenology of religion any recognition. However—and this is what I wish to show in the following observations—the thematic lineaments that traverse Derrida's text seem to be spectral reverberations of Patočka's initial question.

The following observations are an attempt to show this influence of Patočka's thoughts on Derrida and in doing so they seek to add a missing "observation"⁵ to the ones Michael Naas' study *Miracle and Machine* has already provided. Furthermore, I wish to raise the question of what it is that is so particularly intriguing in these two analyses of religion and of why we can see in those thoughts a specific power for further analyses of religious phenomena.

1. Jan Patočka—The Sacred in the Sphere of Responsibility

In his works, Patočka never dealt with the question of religion explicitly or even in a systematic way.⁶ As a scholar of Husserl and Heidegger, a long-time friend of Eugen Fink and Ludwig Landgrebe, his interests were, besides Greek Antiquity, mainly rooted in phenomenology. For phenomenologists, it is particularly interesting that Patočka's thinking moves between the trenches of his great teachers, Husserl and Heidegger, in such a strange but very elaborate way.⁷ One of the many guiding threads running throughout his work is the philosophical problem of the natural world,⁸ or to be more precise: how the natural world can be understood adequately without falling into a naturalistic objectivism on the one hand or being reduced to a transcendental-philosophical subjectivism on the other. Patočka seeks to phenomenologically rehabilitate the natural world that is in place 'before' the subject and in which human beings have to situate themselves through history, culture and language.

This is most distinctively developed in his concept of the movement of human existence,⁹ wherein he recognizes three main movements¹⁰: 1. The movement of acceptance, or anchoring, in which man is born into a world that he himself did not create. The human being is being accepted by a community of other human beings through history, culture, and tradition without any specific or conscious choice. 2. The movement of defense or self-surrender, wherein man fights for his continued existence through work. Here, work will figure as the most prominent motive through which

this movement is characterized. 3. The movement of truth or transcendence, in which man transcends the immediate influence of constraints. This movement, although connected with the two other movements, is characterized by its openness for truth, or, put differently: it is the relation of man to the revelation itself, for whom mainly non-mundane transcendence is the primary guideline. Motives such as the divine, the eternal, etc. are of special relevance here.

These movements of human existence are analogous to the movements or levels of historical existence that Patočka develops in his *Heretical Essays*¹¹: 1. A non-history, in which the acceptance takes place without any specific relation to history as such. 2. A pre-history, in which man relates to history in the form of tradition or a collective memory. 3. History proper (or authentic history), in which man relates to history as such from a distance to his own historical situation and seizes or grasps it in a conscious and active way.

These concepts are embedded in a larger thought, which Patočka designates as the “care for the soul.”¹² In his opinion, man as a self-relational being has to care for himself and his existence. It is his choice to deny himself, to indulge himself in estrangement, or to take hold of himself in an authentic way.¹³ Patočka suspects this care for the soul to be inherent in Greek Antiquity, although it has undergone decisive transformations in the course of history. Greek Antiquity and Neoplatonically inspired Christianity are decisive milestones in a complex history that faces grave dangers in modernity. In a way, Patočka shares Husserl’s and Heidegger’s concerns when he interprets the progressive objectification and mathematization of the world (partly through technology) as a danger for the care for the soul.

As Patočka shows in his essay “Negative Platonism,”¹⁴ decisive intellectual/spiritual transformations have been taking place starting from Aristotle up to modernity. Up until this point, philosophy has pursued its task of the care for the soul insofar as it raised the question about “being in its completeness.” However, Plato seems to have set the direction for philosophy into the spheres of ideas. Whereas philosophy as a genuinely spiritual endeavor engages itself in the sphere of ideas, this shifting of directions prepared the stage for the specialized sciences to take over the spheres of the natural in a progressive (and ever more effective) way. Primarily in modernity, technology grows into a planetary dominance that no longer manifests itself as the care for the soul, but rather “manages” it. The ancient—and for Patočka genuinely “human”—relation to the soul has been unraveled. The “Krisis,”¹⁵ as Husserl saw it, consists for Patočka in the replacement of the care for the soul with a planetary management.

In what is seen to be his principal work, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, Patočka interweaves all these previous thoughts in a remarkable and an encompassing way. In this work, the thought of responsibility towards existence and history is given the utmost attention. Responsibility towards existence and his historical situation occurs when man does not indulge himself in decadence through self-consuming work that distances and alienates him from his authentic being. A life in responsibility is a life led in constant striving for truth and which in all rationality is held responsible before the community and history.

This life in responsibility or in truth is *sui generis* a philosophical project that originated in Greek Antiquity. It is interesting to see, however, that Patočka does not limit this active struggle of life against decadence to philosophy or a life led in philosophical praxis. First and foremost, it is also Christianity and its spiritual kinship

with Greek Antiquity (through Neo-platonism) that is given attention by Patočka. For him it is precisely Christianity that “remains thus far the greatest, unsurpassed but also un-thought-through human outreach that enabled humans to struggle against decadence.”¹⁶

In his fifth Heretical Essay, Patočka deals explicitly with the question of religion. For Patočka, religion is characterized by the very way in which the “demonic”—which he also refers to as the “orgiastic” and the “sacred” and which he deems to be an originary part of every religion—is placed into an explicit relation with responsibility. Indulgence in the demonic would thus be just another form of deep alienation, and therefore precisely not a responsible relation to the sacred. Instead of seeking a critical distance, one would instead seek an intimacy with the demonic and in this move even subordinate oneself to its inscrutable cause. Patočka writes: “This bringing into relation to responsibility, that is, to the domain of human authenticity and truth, is probably the kernel of the history of all religions.”¹⁷ In this respect, Patočka emphasizes that specific religions are not so much shaped by their individual revelations of the divine, but even more by their specific handling or processing of their sacred core.

For Patočka’s analysis it is therefore decisive that religion is connected to a specific dimension of responsibility. The purely sacred, which gives itself only as revelation in a self-serving way, is not sufficient to constitute or establish a religion. A religion is established only through the shepherding, the taming and the communalization of the sacred, which by definition rejects any relation and responsibility. We now read the key passage of Patočka’s characterization of religion in its entirety:

Religion is not the sacred, nor does it arise directly from the experience of sacral orgies and rites; rather, it is where the sacred qua demonic is being explicitly overcome. Sacral experiences pass over religious as soon as there is an attempt to introduce responsibility into the sacred or to regulate the sacred thereby.¹⁸

As we see in the quote above, there is a distinction between religion and the sacred, religion being in a sense the shepherding or in the worst case the management of the sacred. It is precisely this shepherding of the sacred that constitutes the decisive and responsible relation to the sacred on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the relation to the other human being, who is included by this covenant of the sacred. What is so interesting in this characterization of religion or the religious is that it avoids the usual extremes of interpretation: religion is neither the pure revelation to a group of selected or even elite individuals, nor—as it is understood predominantly today—the cold institution that has distanced itself from the originary sacred, so that not seldom does one get the feeling of religion as a simple office of service and management. Patočka is able to show that religion is precisely characterized through this relational tension, or, differently put, the character of its appearance is structured by the way it maintains this inherent tension.

In an earlier essay “Time, Myth, Faith,”¹⁹ Patočka elaborates on another aspect inherent in religion or religious belief. For Patočka, myth as well as belief is tied to different conceptions of time. While myth stems from the past and man can only incorporate it into the passivity of a fate, belief reaches out into a relation towards an active future. Myth stems from a time in which one can scarcely be responsible for anything at all. Man cannot take responsibility for a time in which he himself has not

lived and in whose coordinates he had no influence. On the other hand, belief is tied to a responsible relation, because it is tied to the future and man can clearly be held responsible for his relation to the future.²⁰ The community of believers, who band together in a religion through the shepherding of the sacred, reinforce their bindings precisely through the future, which in Christianity is the covenant of eternal life. Regardless of whether it is about future or even eternal life, it is belief as a form of future that urges man to bear responsibility. Viewed against the background of Patočka's thinking, one could even go further and claim that belief as such is a guardian of the future itself.

To concretize and sum up Patočka's thoughts: religion is not dealt with by Patočka explicitly or in a systematic way. It rather appears in a dense mesh of human existence and its history, which is tied to the dimension of the care for the soul and responsibility. Religion is therefore not an isolated topic in Patočka, but is rather connected to the entirety of human existence and its historical-cultural situation. Patočka's brief characterization of religion is remarkable in many ways, not least because it avoids reducing the inherent tension of arbitrary forces that are at play and have to be maintained in every religion. Religion is neither pure revelation, nor cold institution, but rather the passing over of the *mysterium* of the sacred into responsibility. In addition to this, Patočka engages in the very complex and far-reaching question of the future of religion by clearly differentiating the various conceptions of time that are at play in religious phenomena such as myth and belief. The hallmark of Patočka's analyses in all their density is his highly elaborate definition of religion, which seeks clear differentiations to related areas such as myth, belief, *mysterium*, sacrality, etc.

Derrida's interest in Patočka's analyses must stem from the clarity and vast complexity with which Patočka engages in the question of religion and that are also prevalent in Derrida's own approach. All of these questions about culture, history, technology, future, belief, etc. are already at play here. Patočka's analyses are extremely helpful when, in *Faith and Knowledge*, Derrida raises the question about the return of religions, or the return of the religious. Derrida is able to take up these thoughts to investigate more closely what is understood by religion and what presents itself under its name in these specific phenomena. A phenomenological analysis of religion is extremely helpful when it comes to analyzing its possible return. The other elements of Patočka's analysis tie together all the areas which are so important for Derrida's work: philosophy, politics, ethics, etc., all being areas which intersect in Derrida's "phenomenology of religion" in such a fundamental way.

Jacques Derrida—The Ellipse of Religion and Auto-immunization

The question of religion in Derrida is quite different. Derrida frequently engaged himself with religion or religious themes, mainly in the course of his later period. In Derrida, these studies are also not isolated interests solely in religion. The main part of his works which explicitly deal with religious issues are to be found in the late 1980s and the 1990s, where he increasingly turns to political and ethical issues and topics. His thoughts on religion are also marked by this ethical and political signature, and as Michael Naas emphasizes, this allows us to interpret these works as a pivotal point for the many different texts of this late phase in Derrida's work.²¹ References to other of those later texts like *Spectres of Marx*²² and also the much later written *Rogues*²³ are more obvious. Since the references and specific questions on religion are so diverse and

numerous in his work, I would like to focus solely on two texts in which he addresses the question on religion in the most direct and distinct manner: *The Gift of Death* and “Faith and Knowledge.”

It is generally not known that the text *The Gift of Death* goes back to the 6th Patočka Memorial Lecture, which Derrida presented at the invitation of the Institute for Human Sciences (IWM) in Vienna in 1992. The respective lecture “Ketzertum, Geheimnis und die Verantwortung: Patočkas Europa”²⁴ figures as the first of the four parts of the later completed work, *The Gift of Death*, which deals in immediate connection to Patočka’s *Heretical Essays* with a variety of thoughts on the essence of a person, on democracy, on Christianity and the future of Europe. This is important to mention in two respects: 1. The Institute for Human Sciences is home to the Jan Patočka Archives and is therefore, besides Prague, the most important center of research in Patočka studies. Derrida kept close contact with the institute during those years and it seems to be obvious that this might be a reason for his special relationship to Patočka’s thinking. His relation to Patočka of course goes back further than this and dates back to his activities for the Jan Hus Educational Foundation, in whose framework he also held a lecture in the famous so called “Samizdat in Prague” where he was arrested afterwards by the Czech customs authorities who framed him for illegal drug trafficking.²⁵ 2. It would not be very far off to assume that the lecture “Faith and Knowledge,” which was held two years later in 1994 and which also dealt with the question of religion, has to be, all differences aside, read in close connection with the lecture that he gave in Vienna 1992. Since the thematic reverberations of this earlier lecture are obvious, I want to read—justly or unjustly—this [first part](#) of *The Gift of Death* as a pretext to “Faith and Knowledge.”

In his reference to Patočka’s *Heretical Essays*, Derrida chooses a very specific and, in light of Patočka’s work, unusual approach, i.e. the question of religion. As mentioned above, this approach is unusual insofar as Patočka did not give the question of religion any specific or systematic place in his thought as a whole.²⁶ Nevertheless, Patočka’s characterization of religion must have wielded such strong fascination that Derrida choose to approach the further question of Europe from this point on. This is important to mention since one could have easily approached this question from much more direct and distinctive texts, such as *Europa—Anfang und Ende der Geschichte?* or *Plato and Europe*. Without any reserve, Derrida introduces his investigation into Patočka by stating that in his fifth Heretical Essay Patočka seeks to connect the *mysterium* of the sacred with responsibility under the name of religion. I want to cite Derrida’s characterization of these two foci in its entirety:

[Patočka] warns against an experience of the sacred as an enthusiasm or fervor for fusion, cautioning in particular against a form of demonic rapture that has as its effect, and often as its first intention, the removal of responsibility. At the same time Patočka wants to distinguish religion from the demonic form of sacralization. What is religion? Religion presumes access to the responsibility of a free self. It thus implies breaking with this type of secrecy [. . .], that associated with sacred mystery and with what Patočka regularly calls the demonic. A distinction is to be made between the demonic on the one hand [. . .] and responsibility on the other.²⁷

Derrida closes this characterization of Patočka’s thought with the comment: “This therefore amounts to a thesis on the origin and essence of the religious.”²⁸ Interestingly

he inscribes his investigations in a horizon of thought that is analogous to Patočka's (Christianity and Europe, responsibility, etc.), even though in his *Heretical Essays* Patočka follows a completely different train of thought. Of particular importance are those passages in which he emphasizes the passing over of the sacred to responsibility and where he makes clear that religion can only be understood from its history as responsibility. Viewed against this background, the history of religion—particularly the history of Christianity as a “religion par excellence”²⁹—appears to be crucial for Derrida's thoughts on Europe's responsibility, in whose horizon he inscribes Patočka's analyses.

Without joining the pathways of Derrida for too long, it's important to say that he emphasizes Patočka's opinion that this history of responsibility knows no terminal solution.³⁰ On the contrary: he emphasizes that history is and has to stay problematic. History is not naively conveyed and therefore unproblematic history; rather it breaks open over and over again and thereby protests against any totalizing closure. One could easily hear a distant echo from Derrida's future analyses of Europe, for example in *The Other Heading*,³¹ where he tries to encapsulate this interminable problematicity in the messianic figure of the future (*avénir*). It is not known whether Derrida knew Patočka's short essay “Time, Myth, Faith.” Nevertheless, it is interesting to see that he also connects the figure of belief with the idea of futurity. Hence it is obvious that the question of religion is understood as a historical question. Religion or a specific form of religion is taken over as a heritage, but at the same time it still rests on a form of the future through the act of faith, by which the self is being tied to itself, to history and to other fellow human beings.

The lecture “Faith and Knowledge,” which was given two years later, continues the train of thought of these “preliminaria” from the [first part](#) of *The Gift of Death* in a very distinctive way. This text also originated from a lecture, one given as an opening lecture for a conference on the island of Capri in 1994.³² Derrida was asked by the Italian publisher of the *Annuaire philosophiques européen*, which year after year would bring together European philosophers to discuss a particular theme, to choose a word and discussion topic. Derrida suggested to begin with the topic of religion, which in his view is “the clearest and the most obscure.”³³ At the center of his investigation are questions of an ultimately political shape: how can we understand and interpret the so-called “return of the religions” or “the return of the religious”? What appears under this common name of religion in such a manifold manner, which reaches from a newborn spiritism to politico-religious terrorism? Or in Derrida's own words:

What is going on today with it, with what is designated thus? What is going on there? What is happening and so badly? What is happening under this old name? What in the world is suddenly emerging or re-emerging under this appellation? Of course, this form of question cannot be separated from the more fundamental one (on the essence, the concept and the history of religion *itself*, and of what is called “religion”). But its approach, first of all, should have been, according to me, more direct, global, massive and immediate, spontaneous, without defence, almost in the style of a philosopher obliged to issue a brief press release.³⁴

Derrida emphasizes that the question of religion in all its complexity and its spaciousness is almost impossible to master, but maybe only through the utmost abstraction and

with the help of a multi-layered *epoché*. In my opinion, Derrida's method turns out to have a phenomenological character for the following reasons: 1. It is an analysis of the essence of religion, which appears to be covered under manifold appearances. Besides the obvious appeal, the specific choice of terminology also reminds one of Heidegger's characterization of the "phenomenon" in *Being in Time*.³⁵ 2. Derrida refers more than once in relation to his applied method to the notion of *epoché*, which in this case means to bracket naive assumptions and preconceptions. In this specific case, the *epoché* has two distinct shapes: a) The retreat onto an island points to a very quirky but crafty form of a "geographical *epoché*," that seeks to bracket the influence of historical locations of the history of religion (the proximity to Rome, etc.). This bracketing is of a cultural-geographical nature, but Derrida also includes a reflection on the language used.³⁶ b) Derrida points towards a distance which is both thematic and in relation to the specific attitude: none of the participants are "priests bound by a ministry, nor theologians, nor qualified, competent representatives of religion, nor enemies of religion as such," through which the phenomenon under question would be predetermined in a specific religious or even a-religious way.³⁷

Derrida addresses the question of religion through 52 paragraphs, which he calls "crypts." These crypts are inclusions of religion, which could be opened and entered by these 52 paragraphs.³⁸ The most central paragraph, in my opinion,³⁹ is paragraph 32, in which Derrida, after all the preliminary orbiting, raises the question of what is designated by the name of religion or what experiences are gathered under this name. In close proximity to Patočka, Derrida comes to the following characterization: religion appears to "mark the convergence of two experiences that are generally held to be equally religious: 1. the experience of *belief*, on the one hand (believing or credit, the fiduciary or the trustworthy in the act of faith, fidelity, the appeal to blind confidence, the testimonial that is always beyond proof, demonstrative reason, intuition); and 2. the experience of the unscathed, of *sacredness* or of *holiness*, on the other."⁴⁰

Also for Derrida, religion consists not of one but two experiences, which if not contradictory, at least seem to be in tension with one another. In close proximity to Patočka, Derrida also thinks that religion can only be thought as this inherent tension of two seemingly opposed poles or foci: "These comprise two distinct sources or foci. 'Religion' figures their *ellipse* because it both comprehends the two foci but also sometimes shrouds their irreducible duality in silence, in a manner precisely that is secret and *reticent*."⁴¹ Interestingly, Derrida at this point describes religion as the connection between the sacred, which immediately rejects every form of responsibility, with that of trust, which per definition is inscribed into the notion of responsibility. Also in his view, the experience of religion consists of this passing over from the *mysterium* of the sacred into the sphere of responsibility, without which religion cannot be thought. In Derrida too, there seems to be the idea that every extreme form—institutions on the one hand, orgiastics on the other—does not deserve the name of religion, even though at times these experiences might be encountered under this name.

Derrida expands this conceptualization of religion, which can also be found in Patočka, with another concept, which figures under the name of "auto-immunity."⁴² In contrast to immunity, which protects the organism against dangerous alien particles, auto-immunity designates a process by which the organism turns against its own immune systems which are designed to protect the organism. This over-sensitivity is

mostly known from the various allergies, in which the body attacks itself under the belief to protect itself from the dangerous allergens. Derrida sees this process at work in every system, which, in pursuit of its own purity, seeks to consolidate itself and to silence the inherent arbitrary tension of the system—as is the case with religion. As Derrida emphasizes later in *Rogues*, this rather unusual and mostly biological trope is wisely chosen: it seeks to designate a danger which is to be found *a priori* in every system and that is already at work, even before any conscious relation to it.⁴³ This characterization bears a striking resemblance to the concept of deconstruction, which only emphasizes what is already at work in a seemingly sound and autonomous system. Thus Michel Naas is right in stating: “[I]t today appears that *autoimmunity* was to have been the last iteration of what for more than forty years Derrida called *deconstruction*.”⁴⁴

This general logic of auto-immunity is even more strikingly at work in religion. In its striving for the protection of the holy, the unscathed, it drives itself into the hyperbole of immunization. The countless examples of religions, which divide themselves in themselves, that turn against themselves and each other to enforce or reinforce the purification of their teachings, all for the sake of the protection of the holy, might stand as examples of a history of the auto-immunization of religion. Paradoxically, in all of those endeavors the utmost purity, the utmost holy figures as the leitmotif. Even the alliance with the enemy⁴⁵ seems to be welcome, as long as it increases the strength of its own protection: “Allying itself with the enemy, hospitable to the antigens, bearing away the other with itself, this resurgence grows and *swells* with the power of the adversary.”⁴⁶ Auto-immunity or the process of auto-immunization therefore appears to be the suicidal self-destruction of a system, which in its striving for purity turns against itself and in this move even perishes itself.

At this point, it is interesting to see that Derrida bridges his analysis of religion with the political dimension of the “return of religions” or “the return of the religious.” He provides a very plausible model to explain how and why religions in their striving for the indivisible purity of their dogmas—willingly/consciously or not—expose themselves to the danger of their own self-destruction. What is held to be the chance for their own preservation appears to be also the danger of their own extinction. In their striving for the purity and the protection of the holy, self-destruction is always and already at work in a tacit manner. Hence, one could raise the question: why not relinquish the purity of the holy? The problem seems to be that religion is not a pure and self-sustaining presence but a “history of religion.” It has to preserve itself, share itself, and pass itself on, all for the sake of its own survival, the preservation of its sacred core. This seems to be the course of religion as such: the *mysterium* of the sacred cannot be shared; but it has to be shared for the sake of its own survival, simply because of the fact that the sacred itself is no form of mediation. It is this iteration of the *mysterium*, where the seed of (self-)destruction lies dormant.

Open Religiosity?—An Attempt

In an all too short path through Patočka and Derrida, I hope to have shown compelling reasons for a close thematic connection between the thinking of Jan Patočka and Jacques Derrida on the question of religion.⁴⁷ Patočka and Derrida not only share similar opinions, but expand on one another. Moreover, it has become clear that Patočka’s analysis of religion, even though not named, was an important resource for

Derrida's analysis of religion in "Faith and Knowledge." Viewed against this background, one must contemplate in a few closing remarks what can be gained from this observation and the respective analysis or their interplay.

It is an important observation that religion has not one but two sources which maintain a conflictual tension. Religion therefore is neither the pure cult of an experience beyond mediation, which dismisses every form of responsibility towards the other human being; nor is it the dogmatically hardened institution which merely 'manages' the sacred core of its teaching instead of experiencing and sharing it. Viewed against this background, it is very important to emphasize that religion is precisely the history of this strained relation, or in other words: the specific way that the *mysterium* of the sacred is dealt with. From this viewpoint, one could get a wholly different perspective on the history of (perhaps even every) religion, which then consists of the specific figures and figurations in dealing with the sacred, instead of re-interpreting these figures from mere sociological, political and cultural interplays.

At the same time, one could argue that the thoughts of Patočka and Derrida are of special use to analyze all the radicalizations that seem to rule our daily events in such a tragic form—from frightening extremisms and fundamentalisms to political-religious terrorisms. Starting from Patočka's and Derrida's thoughts, one could make a general claim or formulate a general thesis on radicalization as such: *the stronger a religion concentrates on the purity of its sacred core and the more it forces its protection, the more it will force its own (self-)destructive potential. Whenever the tension, which is inherent at the core of every religion, is unraveled to one side or the other, there is a danger that this religion will radicalize and fall prey to irresponsibility.* In every religion, one can observe these tendencies that reach from an overdetermined cult of god, the bureaucracy of the 'system' religion, up to the violent orgies in the purported service of the sacred. In all these tendencies, the inherent tension is unraveled into one or the other direction and therefore religion is brought into the sphere of irresponsibility.

Although, as Derrida has emphasized, one has to deal with a process that is at work even before our conscious relation towards religion, this does not mean that we are blind passengers in this process. On the contrary: it is precisely because religion, following Patočka, is this passing over from the *mysterium* of the sacred to the sphere of responsibility that the specific figure of every religion falls into the sphere of responsibility, be it the responsibility of the individual subject or the whole community of believers. The specific and yet concrete form of religion is in the responsibility of those who in their individual acts of faith shape the very form of religion or in this manner are the guardians/custodians of the *mysterium*. As such, there seems to be no possibility to hide behind the purportedly unmercifulness and volatility of the sacred, since the very form of the shepherding the sacred is situated in the sphere of responsibility.

On a side note: this auto-destructive process, as Derrida was able to show, is not only restricted to religion but can be extended and applied to every system in its striving for the purity of its own preservation. Hence, even seemingly religious forms of cult, although they appear to be interpreted as very worldly phenomena, could tend to adopt the same suicidal logic. The cult of a specific form of politics or ideology, the dogmatism of contemporary capitalism, the unlimited (partly violent) rationalization of every single aspect of life could be exposed as applying the same logic, as is often the case in designated religious movements.

If we carry these thoughts to the limit, a certain form of an *open religiosity* seems to be within reach: it would be a religion which constantly makes available the means of self-evaluation which allow it to question and thus develop the manner in which its sacred core is shepherded. In every situation, at every point in time, it would be open for the community of believers to prove whether this sacred core is being shepherded or relinquished by the very way in which it is being shared. In other words: a responsible community is ready, at every point in its history, to critically reassess the ways and means by which it mediates its sacred core. This is by no means a secularization of religion or even a subordination of the *mysterium* to the realms of reason. Instead of fearing the danger of a ‘worldly’ leveling off of the sacred, one should interpret it as an act of an active and responsible community of believers, who, in their permanently negotiated representation of the sacred and *per definition* untouchable core, design and shape the very future of a religion, which is precisely not the rigid, violent and therefore irresponsible protection of a-historical dogmas.

Notes

- 1 Jan Patočka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, trans. Erazim Kohák, ed. James Dodd (Chicago: Open Court, 1996), 101. [Czech: *Kacířské eseje o filosofii dějin*, in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 3: *Pěče o duši III*, ed. Ivan Chvatík and Pavel Kouba (Prague: Oikumene, 2002).]
- 2 Jacques Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of ‘Religion’ at the Limits of Reason Alone,” in *Acts of Religion* (New York: Routledge 2002), 40–101, here 72. [French: “Foi et savoir: Les deux sources de la ‘religion’ aux limites de la simple raison,” in *La Religion*, ed. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (Paris: Seuil, 1996).]
- 3 Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 2. [French: *Donner la mort* (Paris: Galilée, 1999).]
- 4 Michael Naas, *Miracle and Machine, Jacques Derrida and the Two Sources of Religion, Science, and the Media* (New York: Fordham, 2012).
- 5 Naas, *Miracle and Machine*, 287–330.
- 6 Ludger Hagedorn, “Beyond Myth and Enlightenment: On Religion in Patočka’s Thought,” in *Jan Patočka and the Heritage of Phenomenology*, ed. Ivan Chvatík and Erika Abrams (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 245–261, here 245. See also the excellent but out-of-print biography by Milan Walter, *Jan Patočka. Sein Leben und sein Werk. Eine monographische Betrachtung seiner frühen und mittleren Entwicklungsphase. 1907–1965* (Münster Universitätsbibliothek, 1984); also Erazim Kohák, “Jan Patočka: A Philosophical Biography, in *Jan Patočka. Philosophy and Selected Writings* ed. and trans. Erazim Kohák, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).
- 7 It seems that Husserl was malcontented with Patočka’s hovering between his teachers. In his biography, Milan Walter tells the story of Husserl trying to force Patočka into a decision between the two forms of phenomenology since, according to Husserl, they seem to be incompatible. See Milan Walter, *Jan Patočka*, 31.
- 8 Patočka, *Die natürliche Welt als philosophisches Problem. Ausgewählte Schriften III: Phänomenologische Schriften I*, ed. Klaus Nellen and Jiří Němec (Stuttgart: Klett Cotta, 1990). [Czech: Patočka, *Přirozený Svět Jako Filosofický Problém*, in *Sebrané Spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 6: *Fenomenologické Spisy I: Přirozený Svět. Texty z Let 1931–1949*, ed. Ivan Chvatík (Prague: Oikoumene, 2008 [1936]).]
- 9 Cf. texts collected in Patočka, *Die Bewegung der menschlichen Existenz. Ausgewählte Schriften IV: Phänomenologische Schriften II*, ed. Klaus Nellen, Jiří Němec, and Ilja Srubar (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1991).
- 10 See also Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 29–33.
- 11 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 35–36.

- 12 Patočka, “Europa—Anfang und Ende der Geschichte?” in *Ketzerische Essays zur Philosophie der Geschichte und ergänzende Schriften, Ausgewählte Schriften II*, ed. Klaus Nellen and Jiří Němec (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1988).
- 13 The connection to Heidegger’s “authenticity” and “inauthenticity” is obvious: Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit. Heidegger Gesamtausgabe* vol. 2 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1977), § 9. [English: *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: SUNY, 1996).]
- 14 Patočka, “Negativer Platonismus,” in *Ketzerische Essays*, 389–431. [Czech: “Negativní platonismus,” in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 1: *Péče o duši I*, ed. Ivan Chvatík and Pavel Kouba (Prague: Oikumene, 1996), 303–336.]
- 15 Edmund Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie, Husserliana VI*, ed. Walter Biemel (Hague: Nijhoff, 1962); English translation: *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern, 1970).
- 16 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 108.
- 17 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 101.
- 18 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 101.
- 19 Patočka, “Time, Myth, Faith” (“Čas, mythus, víra”), in this volume, 3–12.
- 20 Although with a slight difference in emphasis, Patočka also describes this difference in *Plato and Europe*: “Myth is a grand passive fantasy—a fantasy that is not aware that it is a fantasy and that answers to certain deep affective needs of man. Myth is wholly practical. Religion, on the other hand, is something that requires a personal act of faith; it is something actively carried out by us.” Patočka, *Plato and Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 122. [Czech: *Platón a Evropa*, in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 2: *Péče o duši II*, ed. Ivan Chvatík and Pavel Kouba (Prague: Oikumene, 2002).]
- 21 Naas, *Miracle and Machine*, 4.
- 22 Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx. The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (New York: Routledge, 1994). [French: *Spectres de Marx: l’état de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale* (Paris: Galilée, 1993).]
- 23 Jacques Derrida, *Rogues. Two Essays on Reason* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005). [French: *Voyous* (Paris: Galilée, 2003).]
- 24 Jacques Derrida, “Ketzertum, Geheimnis und Verantwortung: Patočka’s Europa,” in Patočka, *Ketzerische Essays zur Philosophie der Geschichte*, trans. Sandra Lehmann (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2010), 181–211.
- 25 Benoît Peeters, *Derrida. A Biography* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), 332–341.
- 26 Hagedorn, “Beyond Myth and Enlightenment,” 245.
- 27 Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 1–2.
- 28 Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 2.
- 29 Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 2.
- 30 The care for the soul is an activity that knows no ‘satisfying’ end. The care for the soul is never fully taken care of and therefore always rests incomplete and incompleteable. But it is precisely its incompleteness that functions as the motor of human existence and its movement. Again, one can sense the close proximity to Heidegger and his ontological meaning of the care (*Sorge*) for the very being of Dasein. See Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, §§39–43.
- 31 Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today’s Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992). [French: *L’autre cap* (Paris: Minuit, 1991).]
- 32 Peeters, *Derrida*, 470–472.
- 33 Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 44.
- 34 Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 72.
- 35 Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, § 7.
- 36 Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 66.
- 37 Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge,” 46. This by the way suggests the very interesting thought of whether the question of a phenomenology of religion could be posed from a principally a-religious or non-religious attitude. Every form of religious belief, according to Husserl’s “principle of all principles,” would already figure as an attitude-relational and therefore naive form of investigation. See Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie*

und phänomenologischen Philosophie, Erstes Buch. *Husserliana* III/1, ed. Karl Schuhmann (Hague: Nijhoff, 1976), § 24.

- 38 Derrida's allusion seems quite apt if one bears in mind that the "crypts" in early Christian times designated the underground pathways and tombs at the gates of Rome, above which later churches were built.
- 39 Interestingly, the majority of analyses seem to take the later mentioned "auto-immunity" as the core of the argument, or auto-immunity in relation to religion and reason. In my opinion, this is only reasonable when one already presupposes the "ellipse of religion." Maybe this shift in perspective is due to the mutual reading with Patočka.
- 40 Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," 70.
- 41 Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," 72.
- 42 Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," 72.
- 43 Derrida, *Rogues*, 109–110.
- 44 Michel Naas, "'One Nation . . . Indivisible': Jacques Derrida on the Autoimmunity of Democracy and the Sovereignty of God," in *Research in Phenomenology* 36 (2006), 15.
- 45 This is obviously the pivotal point where all the texts in relation to terrorism, especially on 9/11, connect with the works on religion. I am especially thinking about *Rogues* and *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*. See Derrida, "Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides—A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida," in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror. Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*, ed. Jürgen Habermas, Jacques Derrida, and Giovanna Borradori (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 85–136.
- 46 Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," 82.
- 47 Although the connection between Jan Patočka and Jacques Derrida seems obvious, there are almost no studies on this matter. The articles by Ludger Hagedorn seem to be an exception: Ludger Hagedorn, "Auto-Immunity or Transcendence: A Phenomenological Re-consideration of Religion with Derrida and Patočka," in *Phenomenology and Religion: New Frontiers*, ed. Jonna Bornemark and Hans Ruin (Stockholm: Södertörn University, 2010), 131–148; Hagedorn, "Beyond Myth and Enlightenment."

15 Patočka's Critique of Existentialism¹

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The present article discusses Jan Patočka's critique of existentialism and of existential philosophy in connection with his theory of the movement of existence. Discussing the main points of his criticism of Jaspers, Heidegger and Sartre, the article aims to contribute to linking together Patočka's own phenomenology of human existence and the tradition of existential philosophy.

Keywords: Existentialism; existential philosophy; movement of existence; ontological movement

With the investigations on "The Natural World as Philosophical Problem" from 1936, Jan Patočka opened a path for the renewal of phenomenological research that would culminate in his drafts for his so called "a-subjective phenomenology."² Already in this early work, the necessity of reformulating the ontological presuppositions operating in the philosophical tradition was clear to Patočka. The tradition is thus reformulated to depart from a "radicalization of the Aristotelian conception of movement as original life."³ It will be a continuous thread in Patočka's thought to show how movement precedes the substratum of being or, even more precisely, being as substratum. This view, what he will later call "ontological movement," is the main concern not only in his book on Aristotle, *Aristote, ses devanciers, ses successeurs*,⁴ published in 1964 and presented to The Czech Academy of Science 1966, but also in his now well-known theory on the three movements of existence. It is indeed from this "radicalization" of the Aristotelian concept of movement in which being is understood as movement that Patočka's concept of existence can be understood. Existence is, for Patočka, nothing but movement, a movement within the movement of the world and of being.

Patočka's theory on the three movements of existence was presented for the first time in 1965, in a short text entitled "On the Prehistory of the Science of Movement: World, Earth, Heaven, and the Movement of Human Life," which has recently been translated into English,⁵ and is further developed in his *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*.⁶ Several studies have been published discussing, on the one hand, the theory of the three movements and existence as movement and, on the other, Patočka's readings and radicalization of Aristotle's concept of movement.⁷ A more detailed study of how the radicalization of Aristotle's concept of movement proposed by Patočka is connected to his theory of the movements of existence is, however, still to be done. Following the first presentation in the above mentioned text from 1965, it is clear that the need for a radicalization of the meaning of existence as movement derives not only from a phenomenological critique of the "natural world," both the

naturally perceived world and the world explained by natural sciences, but as much from a critique of established phenomenological critical positions. In this sense, it is quite “natural” to engage with Patočka’s theory of the movements of existence departing from his criticism of both Husserl’s and Heidegger’s phenomenological views, a criticism that is undoubtedly important for understanding the whole of Patočka’s own thought. If the attempt to bring together Patočka’s reading of Aristotle’s view on movement with his own theory of existence as movement must depart from the phenomenological perspective proposed by Patočka on the basis of his critique of both Husserl and Heidegger, it should however not forget the impact of the so-called philosophies of existence on Patočka’s thought. Indeed, for a more complete view on Patočka’s concept of existence as movement, a discussion about his critique of the philosophy of existence and existentialism should be considered. The scope of the present article is to contribute to a comprehension of Patočka’s concept of existence as movement, bringing to view the fundamental lines of his critique of philosophies of existence and existentialism.

In the early 1930s, Patočka wrote a very short review of Hans Reiner’s Habilitation lecture, *Phänomenologische und menschliche Existenz* given in Halle in 1931.⁸ The review describes Reiner’s efforts to describe for a broad audience the main motives of Husserl’s and Heidegger’s philosophies and how their methodological and formal concerns are engaged in the search for a better understanding of human existence. Patočka considers Reiner’s attempt more misleading than helpful insofar as he generalizes too much and thereby simplifies Husserl’s phenomenology. In regard to Heidegger, Reiner ends much like the Czech biologist and philosopher Emanuel Rádl, not really knowing what to do with his philosophy.⁹ In these few lines, Patočka recognizes how phenomenology is not only a path “back to things themselves” but also back to human existence itself. Phenomenology is co-extensively the phenomenology of human existence, something that Heidegger and his fundamental ontology in *Being and Time* made clear. This recognition is kept present in the whole work of Patočka.

It was, however, in the work of Karl Jaspers that Patočka encounters the guiding lines of what was called in German *Existenzphilosophie* (philosophy of existence) and later, under the influence of French philosophy, “existentialism.”¹⁰ In a short text written in 1937 about Karl Jaspers we find some indications about the presence of Jaspers’s philosophy of existence in Patočka’s own work and some critical lines of philosophy of existence that will be developed in later texts.¹¹ In this early text, Patočka acknowledges the importance of Jaspers’s philosophy of existence as a necessary reaction to the political situation in Germany. The text was written after Jaspers was forced by the Nazis to leave his position as Professor at the University of Heidelberg because of his marriage to a “non-Arian” wife. For Patočka, Jaspers’s philosophical position, far from “agitation” or “prophecy,” presents a view against “the consequent naturalism in which the German spirit has been submerged”¹² and the “violence” and “corporeal rudeness” that took over the German spirit when its forces had been extinguished—expressions that Patočka borrows from a letter written by Dostoevsky in 1871.¹³ Jaspers’s biography appears thus as a testimony of his philosophy of existence, what guarantees for his thought an integrity toward which Patočka confesses true sympathy. He acknowledges Jaspers as a philosopher of situatedness engaged with the political-historical situation of his time. He recognizes in the philosophy of existence a true concern with practical life and with existence as movement of self-realization. Testimony for this is not only Jaspers’s own biography but also his engaged

text *Die Idee der Universität* (*The Idea of the University*) from 1932¹⁴ and the series he edited with the title *Philosophische Forschungen* [Philosophical Research].¹⁵ Even in his later writings after the War, where problematic political views about the atom bomb and the destiny of the German Republic are expressed, it is still a virtue of Jaspers's philosophy of existence to show how the historical situatedness of existence compels existence to engage in its own situation and thereby act for its transformation. And even if Patočka in a later text questions to what extent Jaspers has really created a philosophy of existence, he insists that Jaspers's factual philosophical existence cannot be set in doubt.¹⁶

Patočka sees in Jaspers “an illustrated individualist” and the one who “meditated and experienced the most profoundly the problem of human freedom.”¹⁷ He considers Jaspers's *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* [Psychology of World Views]¹⁸ from 1919, his first work in the philosophy of existence, a “phenomenology of the subjective.”¹⁹ This “phenomenology of the subjective” is engaged with the “deep psychology” of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard—Jaspers was the one who brought Kierkegaard to the German philosophical scene—through a double dialogue with Wilhelm Dilthey on the one hand and Max Weber on the other. With Dilthey, Jaspers discovered that structural contexts are not real objective facts but experience (*Erlebnis*). With Weber, he discovered the non-absolute value of science, which can never solve the risk of human decision and non-decision and that obliges a principle distinction between values due to worldviews and scientific observation. Indeed, the sphere of values appears, for Jaspers, as both objective and subjective, a difficult realm of experience that cannot be described by either strictly objective or by strictly subjective criteria. It demands a deeper insight into the human soul, an “orography of inward life,” as Gabriel Marcel called it and, as Patočka points out, is something that for Jaspers can only be understood from our “limit situations.” It is from this Kierkegaardian concept of “limit situations” that Karl Jaspers reaches, according to Patočka, a deeper insight into the core of subjectivity and individuality, of what can never be seized by means of general and objective categories. Patočka describes Jaspers's “phenomenology of the subjective” as a development, strongly influenced by Dilthey, of Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, which presents a fundamental description of the “movement of subjectivity.”²⁰ Jaspers develops his views on this movement through his doctrine of types that emerge from within limit situations. Jaspers sees the “*movement* of the soul,” adds Patočka, underlining the word movement in the domain of life becoming aware of its own situation and taking position in regard of this situation. In this sense, “Jaspers does not come to a rigid typology but to a determination of the directions of the movement of life itself, and this movement is, for him, not a pure logical movement of the idea but a really existing movement or an existence in movement.”²¹ Here we can find what is, probably, Patočka's first discussion of the movement of existence. In order to clarify this meaning of movement of existence in Jaspers, Patočka discusses the concept of existence, recalling the difference between Hegel's and Kierkegaard's determinations of existence. For Hegel, existence means the appearing of the essence as a basis or ground. The idea appears as an idea within existence. Existence is the phenomenal sphere of ideas, and hence only a stage in the process through which the spirit realizes itself as spirit. Contrary to Hegel, Kierkegaard defines existence as what can never abandon the sphere of reflection, what will never coincide with the essence or the ground, and hence what neither the concept of process nor that of development is capable to grasp. The singular is what is realized in existence, as a relation to the

basis or ground. Jaspers apprehends this relation that the singular is as movement. To describe, however, the concreteness of this movement, he uses the concept of "situation." Empirical being, what in traditional ontology and metaphysics has been called *existentia*, Jaspers calls *Dasein*. Human existence will be distinguished from *Dasein* through the concept of situation.²² Human existence is life in situations, or more precisely life aware of situations and in virtue of this awareness, life taking positions in situations and as such capable of changing given situations.

Jaspers's concept of situation is a key concept in different philosophies of existence and existentialist philosophies—it plays a well-known and central role in Heidegger's *Being and Time* and Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*—but it can only be thoroughly understood from his description of limit situations, whose antinomic and painful structure appear in the extreme of a face-to-face confrontation with death (*Tod*), in struggle (*Kampf*), in guilt (*Schuld*), and in chance (*Zufall*).²³ Patočka's descriptions of the transformation suffered by someone confronted face-to-face with the other on the front line—descriptions from which his famous phrase the "solidarity of the shaken" was coined many years later²⁴—show how he remained in a certain debt to Jaspers's concept of limit situations, even in his late writings. Patočka not only acknowledges that "the concept of limit situation configures the central core of this philosophy," that is Jaspers's, but he also underlines the methodological character of this concept insofar as it shows not a theoretical path to psychology or to human sciences but "a path to oneself," *a mea ac tua res agitur* (the concern of mine and yours), a path that has to do with each one. It shows, indeed, that every attempt to reach an absolute sphere by means of a conceptual schematism that strives to appear as the only legitimate instance to speak about the whole of beings covers up its own bond to the situatedness of human existence, and as such it is insufficient and untrue. And if in some spheres of existence it is possible to transcend the finitude of empirical human existence, this transcendence can only draw us to the "layer of a possible existence" and never to the absolute. "We cannot be God, but we can be *free*,"²⁵ Patočka insists. In this discussion, another key concept for understanding Patočka's conception of existence can be found, namely the concept of "layer" (*Ebene*) of existence,²⁶ which will be discussed in a later text from 1969 called "Was ist Existenz?" The painful and antinomic experience of limit in the so-called limit situation of death, struggle, guilt, and chance obliges not only a taking position, but it also exposes human existence to its absolute finitude. In limit situations human existence appears exposed to its own exposure to finitude. Thus it appears as existence in uncertainty and hovering on one hand, and in the demand for decision on the other, and this in its most intensive way. Here, life itself appears as conflictive and polemic and never as harmonious, another important motive of Patočka's own philosophy. If limit situations present the movement of subjectivity in the most intensive way, it is because subjectivity, what in Jaspers's thought (at least in Patočka's readings) cannot be distinguished from individuality, is subjectivity precisely insofar as it is both bounded to *communication* with others, and confronted with transcendence.²⁷ Jaspers keeps a separation between reason and existence, grounding existence in the realm of passion, impulses, and intensity, and as such, in opposition to reason. Patočka considers "passion" (*Leidenschaft*) a "typical existentialist concept."²⁸ It is found, he argues, in Kierkegaard's "paradox," in Jaspers's concept of "leap," as well as in Heidegger's claim for "authentic existence." The critical point about the fundamental role of passion in existential philosophy is, according to Patočka, that what is a moment in

existence and a part of it becomes the ground and primordial source of existence. The existential critique of rationalism and of modern “pathos for substance” is, Patočka insists, moved from the center of philosophy appearing as peripheral.²⁹ Existentialism equals therefore subjectivity with “intensity.” In its attempts to bring together the transcendental and the passionate, the external and the internal world, and further the infinite and the finite, existentialism can no longer differentiate subjectivity from non-reflexivity.³⁰ Separating reason and existence, Jaspers remains, on the one hand, a Kantian without any new contribution to Kantianism³¹ and, on the other, does not provide philosophy with “any positive criteria for the distinction between existential arbitrariness and existential obligation.”³²

Patočka’s critique differs from the one made by Hannah Arendt in her article “What is *Existenz* Philosophy?”³³ For Arendt, *Existenz* philosophy, despite its great contributions to the fundamental philosophical question about the unity of being and thought, remains a philosophy of egoism and isolation.³⁴ *Existenz* philosophy—which Arendt, at least in this article, clearly contrasts to existentialism—is too subjectivist in her view. In this respect, she advances the current Marxist critique of existentialism, that it is a bourgeois philosophy of individualism and isolation. Even if Patočka has also developed a crucial criticism of Husserl’s and Heidegger’s notion of subjectivity³⁵ that plays a central role in his own concept of existence, in his critique of philosophies of existence and existentialism he stresses what he sees as an internal contradiction. For him, the problem is not that philosophy of existence is too subjectivistic but that it does not seize with phenomenological vigor and rigor the question of subjectivity. On the one hand, philosophies of existence define existence as passion, intensity, and impulse and draw reflexivity and the critique to modern rationality to a peripheral position. On the other, they develop a concept of existence that is both too formal and too labile; sometimes even more rational than the critique of rationality they are committed with.

This contradiction appears, for Patočka, most clearly in Sartre’s existentialism that receives critical attention in Patočka’s writings between 1946 and 1948 and again in the late 1960s.³⁶ Between 1946 and 1948, Patočka develops a more extensive criticism of existentialism. He also teaches a course on Socrates³⁷ and is engaged in an overview of the humanist tradition from the Greeks until T. G. Masaryk³⁸ and Emanuel Rádl, two Czech philosophers he considers akin to existentialists. In these first years after the end of the war, significant texts on existentialism appeared on the philosophical scene. In 1946 Sartre publishes *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Heidegger’s *Letter on Humanism*, addressed to Jean-Beaufret, appears in 1947 and, in 1948, György Lukács’s *Existentialisme ou Marxisme?* In 1947, a big encounter between existentialists and Marxists, atheists, and Catholics took place in France, gathering, among others, Karl Jaspers, György Lukács, Georges Bernanos, Denis de Rougemont, Jean Wahl, Starobinsky, and Merleau-Ponty, whose records were published in 1947 in the Journal *La Nef*,³⁹ and were read by Patočka and discussed briefly with Campbell. In this period it is difficult to contradict the claim that “the two philosophies of Europe [are]: existentialism and Marxism.”⁴⁰ In this period, the German label *Existenzphilosophie* turns into another, existentialism, due to the French reception and transformation of Jaspers’s and Heidegger’s thought. Looking at the texts from this period, it is clear that Patočka sees a closer relation between Jaspers’s and Sartre’s versions of philosophies of existence than between these and Heidegger’s.

In the short essay “Doubt on existentialism” [Zweifel am Existentialismus]⁴¹ from 1947, Patočka situates the problem of philosophy of existence and existentialism in

relation to modern transcendental philosophy. It departs from the transcendental position, which is the one of a critical distance to the world in which the world as such can be seized in its totality. The title evokes the Cartesian *pathos of doubt* that marks modern transcendental philosophy. Descartes' formulation of the *ego cogito, ergo sum* as *fundamentum inconcussum veritatis* opens up the problem of how the I that encounters everything in the world and the world as a world of things can be itself encountered. The transcendence of the I proposed in modern philosophy is such that it is, on the one hand, super-ordinated to the world and, on the other, absent from the world, being where no one can find it. The cogito is the *primum principium*, following here Patočka's own line of reasoning, insofar as there is nothing behind the I and every search must necessarily depart from it. As the *primum principium*, Patočka compares the I to a "swim belt" that never really sinks, coming up again despite its immersion. In contrast to the transcendence of the I understood in these very general terms, Patočka opposes the existential meaning of transcendence. In his view, "for the existentialist the *cogito* and its transcendence is not sufficient; instead of *cogito sum* they say *cogito, ergo non sum* and understand subjectivity not as an external-worldly condition of mundane life but as mundane passion for the external world."⁴²

The claim, that the *cogito sum* becomes *cogito, ergo non sum* for the existentialist, is directed specifically at Sartre. If philosophies of existence cannot develop the meaning of a reflexivity anchored in existence, Sartre's cannot seize existence existentially for it is too reflexive, closed off within the circle of self-consciousness. Sartre is neither enough of a phenomenologist nor enough of an existentialist, in Patočka's view. In "Was ist Existenz?" from 1969, Patočka sums up his criticisms of Sartre, considering him the one to have taken over philosophical existentialist motives, but having "done it with radical simplification."⁴³ One of the crucial problems of Sartre's existentialism is the assumption that existence is clear and transparent, and as such what has no profundity.⁴⁴ Sartre's existence is not originally ruptured in itself so that it can and must search for itself, but is considered as originally free, a freedom understood as a condemnation insofar as the situatedness and historicity of existence, which shows it as movement, is conceived as the movement of an in-itself searching to become for itself. As such, Sartre's concept of existence does not overcome the Platonic idealization of existence, since the idea of the supreme Good is interjected into the human immanent sphere as the value of a being for itself. The errancy of existence, its untruth or inauthenticity appears in Sartre's existentialism as a consequence of the difficulty of reaching the identity between being in itself and being for itself. For Patočka, Sartre is more of a Hegelian phenomenologist than either an Husserlian phenomenologist or an *Existenz* philosopher. Because Sartre cannot separate existence from consciousness, he is not able to distinguish with enough sharpness consciousness, knowing, and knowledge; a critique in which Patočka agrees with Alfred de Waelels.⁴⁵ The only philosophical contribution of Sartre to existential philosophy acknowledged by Patočka is Sartre's attention to the question of the body. But even so, he sees a huge contradiction in Sartre's phenomenology of the body because, as he says, understood as facticity, the body is precisely what cannot be subsumed to the categories of the *en soi* and the *pour soi*.⁴⁶ Indeed, the determination of the body as facticity brings to the floor a large problem that Sartre's existentialism could never solve, namely the question of how "private facticity can be distinguished from the one produced by my public, natural-historical situation?"⁴⁷ Only Merleau-Ponty, Patočka says, was able to

address this problem and recognize the “layer of existence” (*Ebene der Existenz*) as profound “in-difference” or “ambiguity.”⁴⁸

Jaspers’s version of the philosophy of existence is, for Patočka, “too tender, too airy and too labile” to dominate the world.⁴⁹ It has opened a path that will be shared by other versions of philosophy of existence that “deal with subtleties, with the thought of existence rather than with the proper meaning of existence.” It at once lacks precision and scientificity and is also too formalistic and not existential enough. In the later text dedicated to Jaspers, written on the occasion of his death in 1969, Patočka claims that “Jaspers’s existentialism is a philosophizing and not a philosophy in the sense that it would have provided a new light and a new solution to the major and most fundamental problems of philosophy.”⁵⁰ The extreme consequence of this internal contradiction in Jaspers’s philosophy of existence and of its fundamental inability to give a new solution to the *aporias* of philosophical tradition appears in Sartre’s existentialism. One reason for it lies in the fact that the concept of existence in both Jaspers and Sartre refuses an ontological dimension to the meaning of existence. That is why for both the concept of existence is restricted in the sphere of duty. In the eyes of Patočka, only Heidegger was capable of throwing a completely new light on the question of ontology; the question about the meaning of being, departing from the meaning of human existence. Heidegger’s concept of existence leaves the realm of duty and is conceived from the realm of the appearing.⁵¹ Heidegger’s concept of existence could transform philosophy in a radical way; contrary to Sartre, who affirms the precedence of existence in relation to essence, Heidegger assumed that “the essence of *Dasein* lies in its existence.”⁵² For Heidegger, existence means a “way of being” entirely distinct from the other beings and conducts the problem of the emerging of subjectivity back to this way of being. In this manner, Heidegger transformed “philosophy of life” into existential ontology; and at the same time, he transformed the long sedimented belief of the gift of being into the insight of the praxis of being, of being as praxis of meaning. Insisting on how only Heidegger gave philosophical strength to the concept of existence and hence could be considered the only “philosopher of existence,” Patočka is quite close to Leo Strauss and Emmanuel Lévinas. When the former affirmed that “existentialism owes its overriding significance to a single man: Heidegger”⁵³ and the latter that “we would need to acknowledge that there exists only one existentialist or philosopher of existence [. . .] [This existentialist] is Heidegger himself, he who refuses the title.”⁵⁴ Summing up the significance of Heidegger’s concept of existence for philosophy in “Was ist Existenz?,” Patočka claims that it renewed the whole ontological problematic and hence the whole philosophical tradition insofar as it became a key for a philosophy of life and a self-understanding of life, a key for the problem of consciousness, of knowledge and science, a key for the renewal of the question about the meaning of being, a key for the renewal of the problem of truth, and a key for giving an ontological basis to the problem of praxis and action that places him in a deep connection to the tradition of practical philosophy from Kant to Marx.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, despite its revolutionary force, Heidegger’s concept of existence shows its limit when it “surpasses the realm of the ontology of human existence in the world and thereby also the realm of phenomenological controllability.”⁵⁶ The criticism of Heidegger’s philosophy and his understanding of *Dasein* and existence is a huge topic in Patočka’s own philosophy and would demand more than one article to address it more thoroughly. His critique focuses on the formalism of Heidegger’s concept of existence and *Dasein*, the absence of an existential thought on the body and being in

common. The core, however, of Patočka's criticism lies in Heidegger's precedence of being in relation to the appearing, or to formulate it in a short manner, the non-radicality of his thought on the appearing as such from which his concept of existence was developed. The crucial problem was that Heidegger understood the appearing from out a phenomenology of the temporal and not from a phenomenology of movement, which demands a more developed description of the spatiality of time and the temporality of space. The problem lies in the absence of an apprehension of the movement of existence as "ontological movement" and hence as how non-being and being are existentially connected.

In the late 1940s, Patočka is more engaged with the critique of existentialism, writing a book that would remain unfinished (or was, perhaps, quickly finished) and unpublished in his lifetime, *Éternité et Historicité* [Eternity and Historicity].⁵⁷ In this book, Patočka exposes humanist and existentialist motives in the last work of Emanuel Rádl, *Consolation from Philosophy*.⁵⁸ Here a more detailed critique of different philosophies of existence and existentialisms can also be found. The critique departs from the recognition that:

Existentialism is not an irruption of lyricism in philosophical search: in its root, it deals with one of the most serious philosophical problems, which is the crisis of the conception of the human, the crisis of philosophy itself, that follows the decline and fall of classic metaphysics.⁵⁹

From the viewpoint of the crisis of the conception of man and of philosophy itself, Patočka proposes a reading of the history of philosophy from Socrates to Rádl, considering the opposition between eternity and historicity, between the essence and the existence of man. Patočka defends as a main thread the thesis that a "Socratic Socrates" has, right at the beginning of philosophical tradition, been lost and turned into a Platonic Socrates, who will dominate Western metaphysics and humanism until Rádl. The Platonic Socrates defines human existence from out of the essence, the idea, and the concept of man, of existence and of being. On the contrary, the Socratic Socrates proposed by Patočka introduces the existing man, the historical being of man, thus appearing as the first existentialist in the history of philosophy or, to say it more coherently according to Patočka, grounding philosophy in the movement of existence. In this sense, Patočka indicates that philosophy begins in Greece as a conflict between "eternity and historicity," between essentialism and existentialism. Patočka sees the development of Platonic Socratism in Western philosophy as the source for the modern dichotomy between subjectivism and objectivism, a dichotomy that will pervade the phenomenological project of both Husserl and Scheler in their attempt to ground the objectivity of the subjective and the subjectivity of the objective and the moral responsibility involved in it. The existentialist way to face the dilemma of modern transcendental philosophy, inaugurated by Kierkegaard is to assume an essential negativity from the beginning. As Patočka explains, man is a non-present presence, a non-given givenness. The thread of the negative—of the *non*-substantiality of human existence—constitutes, according to Patočka, the fundamental line of continuity that binds together different philosophies of existence and existentialisms but that remains unthought insofar as the question of the movement of existence was not seized in its fully phenomenological rigor and ontological vigor.

Patočka considers the awareness of the negativity and non-substantial being of human existence, as the fundamental question moving different philosophies of existence and existentialism. Existentialist concepts of passion, intensity, impulse, becoming, and nothingness are, for him, however not enough and even misleading for the sake of seizing the negativity and non-substantiality of human existence. In “Was ist Existenz?,” he develops his own criticism departing from what is for him the most crucial existentialist problem, namely the impossibility to have an “objective concept of existence,”⁶⁰ and hence from the meaning of the non-being of human existence. The lack of an objective concept of existence does not only mean that neither science nor philosophy in its modern shape are able to think existence from existence but also that there is another existential thinking way, namely literature. Patočka proposes literature as an existential thinking path insofar as it is capable to account for the “phenomenon of different layers (*Ebenen*) (of existence) in which [. . .] things and events become visible.”⁶¹ Patočka suggests three literary examples in which existence is thought existentially, so to speak, insofar as they make visible existence as multiple layers: William Faulkner’s *The Wild Palms*; Thomas Mann’s *Doctor Faustus*; and Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *Brothers Karamazov*. This literary thought of existence does not prove anything. In it, existence becomes rather visible as existence, appears as phenomenon and not as a fact. A crucial problem of philosophies of existence and existentialism in general is that they assume existence as a fact rather than as phenomenon, that is, as what carries its meaning exclusively in itself. If it is possible to define a concept of existence, then it is the one of the “phenomenon of life in different layers (*Ebenen*).” According to Patočka, there are mainly three: the layer of self-loss, the layer of self-search and the layer of eventual self-finding. Indeed, what appears here is how the “self,” far from isolation and egoism as Arendt assumes in her critique of *Existenz* philosophy, is nothing but relational movement, itself the articulation of loss, search and eventual encounter. The layers of existence (*Ebene*) expose existence as a relational movement to the movement that existence self is. That explains why Patočka considers as the most urgent philosophical task the development of a critique of the understanding of movement and relation qua movement and relation of a substraction. At stake is not something—a self, an I—that moves or relates to something else, but the movement of a movement, a relation to relations in this sense of “layers of possible existence.” There is no “pre-given I, neither in the form nor in the content of its being-I,” Patočka insists.⁶² As such, movement is not the realization of an *essentia*, not the actualization of a possibility, but making possible the possibility of existence. In “Was ist Existenz?” Patočka relates his concept of “layers of existence” (*Existenzebenen*) to his theory of the three movements of existence, without however offering a clear explanation of how they belong together and how the movements of existence might be better described with the language of literature. After a summary of Jaspers’s, Heidegger’s and Sartre’s existentialistic positions that followed the introductory remarks on the layers of existence and of literature as exemplary existential thought in this text, Patočka presents his theory of the three movements of existence. A possible line of interpretation here is that the three layers of existence—self-loss, self-search, and eventual self-finding, the layers in which existence appears as movement and not as something that moves, whether it be a substraction, an essence, a self, or an I—correspond to the three movements: the first movement of setting anchorages [*Bewegung der Verankerung*], the second movement of self-expansion [*Bewegung der Selbstverlängerung*], and the third movement of irruption [*Bewegung des Durchbruchs*].⁶³

With the concept of layers of possible existence, Patočka indicates a fundamental sense of the movement of existence, of “ontological movement,” namely that the movement of existence is moving movement, an emotional motion, and that it is only from this that the possibility of existential freedom, of a life in amplitude that, for Patočka, means a reflexive, philosophical life, can become attuned to the vital force of one's own limits, to the force of finitude.

Acknowledgement

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Notes

- 2 For a philosophical overview of and discussion about the development of Patočka's phenomenology during this period, see Filip Karfík, *Unendlichwerden durch die Endlichkeit: eine Lektüre der Philosophie Jan Patočkas* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2008), 15–55.
- 3 Jan Patočka, *Le Monde naturel comme problème philosophique*, trans. Jaromír Daněk and Henri Declève (The Hague: Nijhof, 1976), 103. [Czech: *Přirozený svět jako filosofický problém* (1936), in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 6: *Fenomenologické spisy I* (Prague: Oikumene, 2008), 127–261.] English translation: *The Natural World as a Philosophical Problem*, trans. Erika Abrams (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, Forthcoming).
- 4 Patočka, *Aristote, ses devanciers, ses successeurs*, trans. Erika Abrams (Paris: Vrin, 2011). [Czech: *Aristoteles, jeho předchůdci a dědicové. Studie z dějin filosofie od Aristotela k Hegelovi* (Prague: CSAV, 1964).]
- 5 Patočka, “On the Prehistory of the Science of Movement: World, Earth, Heaven and the Movement of Human Life,” trans. Erika Abrams, in *Dis-orientations: Philosophical and Literary Inquiries into the Lost Grounds of Modernity*, ed. Tora Lane and Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015). [Czech: “K prehistorii vědy o pohybu: svět, země, nebe a pohyb lidského života,” in *Tvář* 2/10 (1965), 1–5.]
- 6 Patočka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, trans. Erazim Kohák, ed. James Dodd (Chicago: Open Court, 1996). [Czech: *Kacířské eseje o filosofii dějin*, in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 3: *Péče o duši III*, ed. Ivan Chvatík and Pavel Kouba (Prague: Oikumene, 2002).]
- 7 For a discussion of the movement of existence, see Renaud Barbaras, *Le mouvement de l'existence. Études sur la phénoménologie de Jan Patočka* (Chatou: Éditions de la Transparence, 2007); for a discussion of the three movements, see Pierre Rodrigo, “Le problème de la cohérence de la théorie du mouvement chez Patočka: enracinement, percée et ébranlement du sens dans les *Essais Hérétiques*,” in *Jan Patočka, liberté, existence et monde commun*, ed. Nathalie Frogneux (Argenteuil: Le Cercle Herméneutique Editeur, 2012), 161–177; and on Patočka's Aristotle lecture, see Mariana Larison, “Du mouvement chez Aristote d'après Patočka,” in *Jan Patočka. Liberté, existence et monde commun*, 179–195.
- 8 Patočka, “Rez. Hans Reiner, *Phänomenologische und menschliche Existenz* (Halle 1931),” in *Texte, Dokumente, Bibliographie*, ed. Ludger Hagedorn and Hans Rainer Sepp (Freiburg: Karl Alber, 1999), 420.
- 9 Patočka, “Rez. Hans Reiner,” 420.
- 10 See Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Existentialismus und Existenzphilosophie,” in *Gesamelte Werke*, vol. 3 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1987), 175–185; Jacques Colette, *Que sais-je?: L'Existentialisme* (Paris: PUF, 2007).
- 11 Patočka, “Karl Jaspers (1937),” in *Die Bewegung der menschlichen Existenz. Ausgewählte Schriften IV: Phänomenologische Schriften II*, ed. Klaus Nellen and Jiří Němec (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1990), 486–496.

- 12 Patočka, "Karl Jaspers," 486.
- 13 Patočka, "Karl Jaspers," 486.
- 14 Karl Jaspers, *Die Idee der Universität* (Berlin: Springer, 1980).
- 15 Karl Jaspers, *Philosophische Forschungen* (Berlin: Springer, 1925–1958).
- 16 Patočka, "Nachruf auf Karl Jaspers" (1969), in *Die Bewegung*, 500.
- 17 Patočka, "Karl Jaspers," 486.
- 18 Karl Jaspers, *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* (München: Piper Verlag, 1971).
- 19 Patočka, "Karl Jaspers," 489.
- 20 Patočka, "Karl Jaspers," 490.
- 21 Patočka, "Karl Jaspers," 490, translation mine.
- 22 In *Being and Time*, Heidegger challenges all these distinctions and reserves the word "Dasein" as "formal indication" for the way of being for which being is always a question at play. Indeed, for Heidegger, Dasein is Dasein precisely for being situated. In the thirties and in the *Black Notebooks*, Heidegger will criticize himself in *Being and Time* precisely for having misunderstood *Dasein* as situation. A controversy with Jaspers is indirectly presented in the writings from these years, as for instance in Martin Heidegger, *Der Anfang der abendländischen Philosophie (Anaximander und Parmenides)*, *Heidegger Gesamtausgabe* 35, ed. Heinrich Hüni (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1997).
- 23 Karl Jaspers, *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, 256–280.
- 24 See Patočka, "Wars of the Twentieth Century and the Twentieth Century as War," in *Heretical Essays*, 135.
- 25 Patočka, "Karl Jaspers," 493.
- 26 Patočka, "Karl Jaspers," 230–256.
- 27 For a discussion about transcendence in the philosophy of Patočka, see the dissertation by Jan Frei, "Problém transcendence u Jana Patočky [The Problem of Transcendence in Jan Patočka]," (PhD dissertation, Karls-Universität Prag, 2014).
- 28 Patočka, "Karl Jaspers," 493.
- 29 Patočka, "Karl Jaspers," 511.
- 30 Patočka, "Karl Jaspers," 511.
- 31 Patočka, "Was ist Existenz?," *Die Bewegung*, 243.
- 32 Patočka, "Was ist Existenz?," 243.
- 33 Hannah Arendt, "What is *Existenz* Philosophy?" in *The Phenomenology Reader*, ed. Dermot Moran and Timothy Mooney (London: Routledge, 2002), 345–361.
- 34 See Arendt, "What is *Existenz* Philosophy?"
- 35 See Patočka, "Le subjectivisme de la phenomenologie husserlienne et la possibilité d'une phénoménologie 'asubjective'; "Le subjectivisme de la phenomenologie husserlienne et l'exigence d'une phenomenologie a-subjective"; and "Epoche et reduction," all in *Qu'est-ce que la phenomenologie?* trans. Erika Abrams (Grenoble: Jérôme Millon, 1988), 189–261. [All texts were originally composed in German, and can be found in Patočka, *Die Bewegung*: "Der Subjektivismus der Husserlschen und die Möglichkeit einer 'asubjektiven' Phänomenologie," 267–285; "Der Subjektivismus der Husserlschen und die Forderung einer asubjektiven Phänomenologie," 286–309; and "Epoché und Reduktion," 415–423.]
- 36 Patočka also wrote a note about Jean Paul Sartre's visit to the Philosophical Institute of the Czech Academy of Science. See "Jean-Paul Sartre zu Besuch am Philosophischen Institut der Tschechoslowakischen Akademie der Wissenschaften," in Patočka, *Texte, Dokumente, Bibliographie*, 298–313.
- 37 Jan Patočka, *Socrate*, trans. Martin Cajthaml (Milano: Rusconi, 1999).
- 38 See Erika Abrams's introduction in Jan Patočka, *Éternité et Historicité* (Lagrasse: Verdier, 2007).
- 39 "L'esprit Européen," special issue of *La Nouvelle équipe française* 24 (Paris: Albin Michel, 1947).
- 40 See "L'esprit Européen," 87ff.
- 41 Patočka, "Zweifel am Existentialismus," in *Die Bewegung*, 509–514.
- 42 Patočka, "Zweifel am Existentialismus," 510.
- 43 Patočka, "Was ist Existenz?," 248.
- 44 Patočka, "Was ist Existenz?," 249.

- 45 See Alphonse de Waelhens, "Heidegger et Sartre," in *Deucalion, Cahiers de Philosophie* 1, ed. Jean Wahl (Editions de la Revue Fontaine, 1946), 15–40; "De la phénoménologie à l'existentialisme," in *Le choix, le monde, l'existence*, ed. Alphonse de Waelhens, Jean Wahl, Jeanne Hersch, and Emmanuel Levinas (Grenoble: B. Arthaud, 1947).
- 46 Patočka, "Was ist Existenz?," 250.
- 47 Patočka, "Was ist Existenz?," 250.
- 48 Patočka, "Was ist Existenz?," 250.
- 49 Patočka, "Karl Jaspers," 496.
- 50 Patočka, "Nachruf auf Karl Jaspers," 499.
- 51 Patočka, "Was ist Existenz?," 248.
- 52 Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit, Heidegger Gesamtausgabe* 2, ed. Friedrich von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977), §9, 56.
- 53 Leo Strauss, "An Introduction to Heideggerian Existentialism," in *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism: An Introduction to the Thought of Leo Strauss* (Chicago: Chicago University Press), 27–46.
- 54 Emmanuel Levinas, "L'existentialisme, l'angoisse et la mort," in *Exercices de la patience: Heidegger 3–4* (Paris: Obsidiane, 1982), 25.
- 55 Patočka, "Was ist Existenz?," 247.
- 56 Patočka, "Was ist Existenz?," 248.
- 57 Patočka, *Éternité et Historicité*, trans. Erika Abrams (Lagrasse: Verdier, 2007). [Czech: *Věčnost a dějinnost* (1950), in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 1: *Pěče o duši I*, ed. Ivan Chvatik and Pavel Kouba (Prague: Oikumene, 1996).]
- 58 See Erika Abrams's introduction in Patočka, *Éternité et Historicité*; and on Rádl in the context of Czech Philosophy in the twentieth century, see *Tschechische Philosophen im 20 Jahrhundert: Klíma, Rádl, Patočka, Havel, Kosík*, ed. Ludger Hagedorn (Munich: DVA, 2002).
- 59 Patočka, *Éternité et Historicité*, 117.
- 60 Patočka, "Was ist Existenz?," 230.
- 61 Patočka, "Was ist Existenz?," 231.
- 62 Patočka, "Was ist Existenz?," 239.
- 63 On Patočka's theory of the movements of existence as a theory on existence as practical engagement, see Sandra Lehmann, *Der Horizont der Freiheit. Zum Existenzdenken Jan Patočkas* (Königshausen & Neumann: Orbis Phaenomenologicus, 2004).

16 Human Existence and Vertical Life

A Study of Jan Patočka's Phenomenological Anthropology

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The article shows that Patočka's phenomenology harbors a yet unfathomed potential to elaborate a fecund notion of personal selfhood. While his a-subjective phenomenology thematizes the *horizontal* "transcendentality of the world," Patočka's philosophy of the "movements of human existence" also entails a *vertical* dimension. By entangling both dimensions, the author proposes to develop aspects of a new phenomenological anthropology that articulates human selfhood and individuality in a non-foundational way. Drawing on a number of fundamental phenomena such as human affectivity, struggle (*polemos*), and transcendence, the article challenges the foundational role of reason in our traditional accounts of selfhood.

Keywords: phenomenology; movement; selfhood; transcendence; verticality; reason

The following considerations propose a re-reading of Jan Patočka's conception of the "movement of human existence" in order to shed some light on his notion of personal selfhood and its foundational role for a phenomenological anthropology. Patočka's account is deeply rooted in the framework of his later a-subjective phenomenology. With this position he sought to pave the path for a rigorous exploration of what he termed "appearing as such." In his view, the analysis of the "appearing as such" not only aims at gaining insight into formal structures and laws of the appearing world, but also at uncovering the (inter)existential articulations of the worldly movement that we as concrete subjects, i.e., *persons*, inherently are.

According to Patočka:

[A]ctual human existence, however, as being in the world, can never be seized in itself and for itself, apart from the movement that situates it among things and places it in contact with them. Subjectivity is thus precisely our life-world in its concrete totality.¹

If, however, the anonymously functioning laws of "appearing as such" can only be studied in the concrete phenomenal unfolding of the life-world; if, in other words, only the "a priori of the world makes a self-relation and consequently the self in its ontological constitution possible,"² we need to ask about the status of this self. The basic question is whether the attempt to approach the realm of the "appearing as

such” by way of an “a-subjective phenomenology” does or does not exorcise the bugaboo of a pure and constituting subject to the extent that it “decapitates”³ phenomenology and leaves us without any phenomenologically sustainable sense of selfhood.

My answer to this question is “no.” Even if Patočka obviously has severe difficulties in elaborating a renewed concept of the subject that escapes both the pitfalls of Husserl’s “transcendental subjectivism” and Heidegger’s “existential heroism,”⁴ his later works offer important leading-clues for approaching a *non-foundational conception of the subject*.⁵ In this regard, a consideration of the close yet often-times underestimated interrelation between the two aforementioned, seemingly contradictory conceptions⁶ will be helpful. To be more precise, I contend that it will lead us to a strongly de-subjectivized notion of the self. Put differently, I will argue that we can productively use Patočka’s work to approach a phenomenological *concept of personal selfhood* that puts us in the position to rethink our individuality in a *non-foundational way*. To achieve this task, I will proceed in three steps. In a **first part**, I will outline Patočka’s conception of an “a-subjective phenomenology.” This account, to my understanding, proffers a viable non-subjectivist framework that allows us to address the “primacy of givenness” beyond the confines of both Husserl’s constitutive analysis and Heidegger’s excessively formal analytics of existence. In a second step, I will present the major contours of his theory of the “movement of human existence.” As I will demonstrate, this account can help us to complement the a-subjective elucidation of the horizontal “transcendentality of the world” with the insights into a co-originary *vertical* articulation of the “natural world” and its impact on the subject. In a third and final part, I will demonstrate how the integration of the a-subjective account with the theory of movement provides us with the necessary clues to rethink human selfhood and individuality in a truly non-foundational way, thus paving the way for envisaging a “phenomenological anthropology.”

The A-Subjective Stakes of Phenomenology: Acknowledging the “Primacy of Givenness”

Patočka’s doctrine of an a-subjective phenomenology revolves around the notion of the “appearing as such.” The major intention of this account consists in putting the focus of phenomenological description on the “a priori rules of appearing.” Its task is to describe a “functioning a priori”⁷ of the world, which, in the last analysis, enters into the rank of the transcendental in this account.⁸ Concretely viewed, Patočka seeks to demonstrate that the rules of appearing unfold in the dynamics of the so-called “phenomenal field,” a concept that had to some extent already been elaborated upon by, e.g., Merleau-Ponty and Gurwitsch. This turn to the field-character of appearing and its immanent laws is testament to his basic discontentment with Husserl’s “transcendental idealism” and its quest for absolute justification.

As Patočka realized as early as in his first book, *The Natural World as a Philosophical Problem*,⁹ this position betrayed the original idea of a pure phenomenological description that can be carried out in the field opened up by the phenomenological *epoché*. In Husserl’s transcendental idealism, which crystallized for the first time in his *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology*, Patočka hence sees a *foundational* project at work that revolves around the “transcendental subreption” (Kant) of the apodictic self-givenness of subjectivity. Even if this project has sometimes been questioned by his

own descriptive findings, Husserl in fact always sought to re-establish a pure ego as the *fundamentum inconcussum* of constitution, i.e., as its *foundational* layer. In other words, Patočka criticizes Husserl's transcendental idealism for substituting the reflectively obtained subjectivity of experiencing for the phenomenal sphere as it appears in this experiencing. To use the nomenclature of *Ideas*, Patočka suspects Husserl's approach to end up in a *foundational* project that links all given "[u]nities of sense" to a single "*sense-bestowing* consciousness."¹⁰

As for Patočka, this major implication of the phenomenological reduction to "pure immanence" seals Husserl's slipping into a *petitio principii* that substitutes an entity (and be it consciousness or subjectivity) for the autochthonous laws of the phenomenal field.¹¹ To counter the extensive consequences of this "crude metaphysical theory,"¹² Patočka ventured to unravel the inherently descriptive potential of phenomenological philosophy from the apparently Cartesian interdicts that had been exploited all too well by Husserl.¹³ As to his conviction, these interdicts led Husserl to finally miss the original features of the "appearing as such" and its inherent dynamism: they made him miss, in other words, the very "movement of meaning" that is the *world*, which at the same time both appeals to us to actively respond to it and thus opens the field of freedom and the realm of history.

According to Patočka, we need to become attentive to the *field-character* of appearance in order to (re)discover the full scope of the "principle of all principles" and to secure the original phenomenological sensibility to the *dative of manifestation* that is given up to the control of constitutive analysis. It is only in this regard that we will finally be able to address, as he wrote in his famous article "Der Subjektivismus der Husserlschen und die Forderung einer asubjektiven Phänomenologie," the "authentic tasks of phenomenology":

[H]ere we can find the authentic tasks of phenomenology in the description of these events [namely, of the things as they give themselves] and of this rising forth of the things themselves. How, on the other hand, the lived experience (*Erlebnis*) can account for being in itself the origin of the appearing of the transcendent—this is something not intelligible in principle and it is not given and cannot be given. Here lingers the danger that phenomenology abandon itself and its discoveries in the domain of appearance and the manners of givenness but drifts to the terrain of subjective construction.

[. . .]

For sure, the "*ego*" in "*ego cogito*" is something immediately certain. This certitude, however, is not a material certitude but only an ontological certitude *without* any content, except one: it is that to which the appearance appears; that which appears, the phenomenal field is *its* appearance. There is nothing that could "objectively" be seized but there is simply a realizability of the experiential claims [*Forderungscharaktere*] that appeal to the ego in the phenomenal field and let the egoic appear as the one who realizes [*Realisator*].¹⁴

Given that Patočka proposes to understand the phenomenal field or sphere in terms of Heidegger's concept of an original "understanding of Being" (*Seinsverständnis*), one might be tempted to see him taking sides here with Heidegger's fundamental ontology. Yet a closer look quickly shows that he does not simply adopt Heidegger's account in order to proffer this criticism of Husserl's transcendental concept of constitution.¹⁵ He

rather connects this criticism with a profound revision, also of Heidegger's all too narrow version of an "analytics of existence," thus paving the path for his own non-foundational way into a full-fledged phenomenology of the "natural world." This two-sided criticism becomes fully intelligible in the concluding passage of the aforementioned article; in this context he proposes to conceive of the phenomenal field in terms of a field of *possibilities* that can neither be conceived as the results of a constituting subjectivity nor as an original project of *Dasein's* transcendence:

The world, that is the possibilities of our own essentially ecstatic being, is not opened to us by our own freedom but by freedom as such and all other appearing worldly contents are opened to us by the understanding of being. [. . .] The transcendence of *Dasein* is no stepping-out-of-itself or projecting-forth, in this sense it is no "project" (*Entwurf*) but a fundamental being-outside-of-itself and receiving-itself.¹⁶

Patočka's related analyses underscore that these possibilities must not be understood as original projects of *Dasein* but rather as being given to it and thus as giving it to itself via their realization:

Thus I do not create these possibilities but these possibilities create me; they come to me from outside, from the world that is a framework for them where the things show themselves as means and I show myself as the one who realizes [*Realisator*] the ends served by such means.

[. . .]

Against Heidegger: there is no primary *projection* of possibilities—the world is not the project of freedom, but simply that which makes possible a finite freedom.¹⁷

It is, in other words, the selection among and realization of some of these pre-given possibilities that puts the self in the position to relate to itself *via* its encounter with the other.¹⁸ In the context of this critical reassessment of the concept of possibility Patočka also introduces the very motif of movement:

Since existence does not project its possibilities in the way that it would have them objectively before itself, i.e., that it would represent (*vorstellen*) them, but rather in the way that it realizes them (or does not realize them, abandons them, distances itself from them), existence can be defined as movement [. . .]¹⁹

Along with his appropriation of the concept of possibility as the key for understanding existence in terms of movement comes an affirmation of the paramount importance that *embodiment*, contrary to Heidegger, has for Patočka. For him Heidegger's existential analytics remained excessively formal since Heidegger did not acknowledge that embodiment has an ontological status. The following reflection is especially important in this context since it demonstrates how Patočka connects the two aforementioned critical strands:

The body and embodiment belong essentially not only to what is revealed, uncovered by the illuminated, disclosed being in its being-in-the-world, but [also]

to the ontological status of existence as such. [. . .] The body is existentially the totality of possibilities that we do not choose but into which we are inserted, those for which we are not free, and those *we have to be*. [. . .] But it is only on their basis that the “free” possibilities are opened.²⁰

Put differently, man is a “being of possibilities which is anchored in its situation.”²¹ The heroism Heidegger grants *Dasein* with regard to its ownmost capacity to resolutely anticipate its own death as its ultimate possibility, is thus dependent upon a “*fundamental* possibility” that assures the “ontological status of basis for all existence,” i.e., “embodiment as the possibility of movement.”²² Patočka thus conceives of man differently, i.e., as a basic openness to the possibilities that are offered to our embodied “I can,” possibilities which in fact *realize* it in its encounter with the phenomenal field. Put differently, it is their very *givenness* that is focused upon here:

Heidegger speaks as if the *possibilities* that lie in our “for-the-sake-of” [. . .] were uncovered to me directly by my “being for the sake of.” In actual fact, what I *want* to accomplish “for the sake of my being” is always codetermined by what I *have to* accomplish in order to be able to do or accomplish anything at all. My possibilities are possibilities of existing in the world, possibilities of moving about, of protecting myself, of dwelling, etc., possibilities of feeding, of providing for myself and my family, of reproducing. . ., and they all have a certain historically changing, yet *given* form, through which I first search for my own possibility and my own path.²³

Patočka thus rightly underscores the *ontological* significance of embodiment but also recognizes clearly that the “I can” is not an “autonomous phenomenon.”²⁴ Furthermore he states that “[o]ur body is originally present to us as a definite dynamism which does not originally appear to us—what appears are things”²⁵ in the world in its horizontal givenness. Given all this, we can see clearly that the lived body must neither be misunderstood as a “substantial substrate” (this would contradict the ontological status of existence) nor as a mythical entity that precedes signification, thus substituting the lived body for the transcendental ego. Since his focus is on the conditions of possibility of appearing as such, he rather contends “that the basic structures of experience—I, freedom, possibility, embodiment, perception, the other [. . .]—shall not at all be explicated in terms of a *foundation* [*Grund*] but as something which is *founded* [*gegründet*].”²⁶ According to Patočka they are in fact all founded “in the original event of temporal openness: as something to which this openness turns and that fulfills it.”²⁷ Patočka conceives of this openness to be embodied in the phenomenon of horizontality. A horizon for him is a framework for appearing; it designates “the self-presence of what is not itself present” and implies the “givenness of what is not [itself] given.”²⁸ Given that he conceives of intentionality in terms of embodiment, this involves a “definite dynamism,”²⁹ i.e. our ability to project, move in space, and gear into the world. Thus horizons are “synonyms of possibilities, projects of everything that cannot be considered a ready made reality”; they are “a phenomenon of our life in possibilities and [point to] the incapacity of introspective reflection to adequately grasp this life.”³⁰ Patočka’s notion of a “finite freedom” has to be understood with regard to this understanding of horizontality as that which opens our possibilities and thus addresses *me*:

I do not create these possibilities, they rather create me; they come to me from outside, from the world which is a framework for them in which things show themselves as means and I show myself as the one who realizes the ends served by these means.³¹

“Finite freedom,” for Patočka, hence is a freedom that is called to realize itself in correlation to the a-subjective movement or, as he also puts it, the *drama* of the world. This leads Patočka, as stated before, to conceive of our existence in terms of movement.

From the “Primacy of Givenness” to the “Movement of Human Existence”

Given the emphasis he puts on the unconditional appeal of the phenomena as they give themselves, Patočka seems to have been the first to fully acknowledge what Jean-Luc Marion recently termed the “primacy of givenness.”³² Long before Marion’s systematizing work, Patočka focused exactly upon what Marion calls the “vigor” (*élan, effet*) of givenness³³ in terms of the movement it implicates on the part of the one who is open to it. They have both similarly underscored its inaccessibility to introspection and reflection. Further, in their attempts to free the field of givenness from the interdicts of constitution, both thinkers propagate something like a “suspension of the principle of sufficient reason”³⁴: both see, in other words, that the phenomena must not be held hostage by a prior reason. In other words, neither a “constituting ego” nor a pre-given horizon (like objectivity in Husserl or Being in Heidegger) should determine their intrinsic intelligibility as it unfolds in their pure and simple givenness.

Viewed against this background and in the light of our findings in the last section, we should note another striking similarity between Patočka and Marion. In struggling with the “aporias of the ‘subject,’”³⁵ both understand that which comes “after the ‘subject’”³⁶ in very similar terms. Marion defines it as *l’adonné*, the “gifted,” the one who receives himself from the unfolding of givenness. As far as Patočka is concerned, he speaks about the “subject” being a “result” of the process of appearing as such, as the “addressee” of this process.³⁷ He understands it as being never originally given, but co-given, i.e., as receiving itself in the accusative from the appeal of the given that enthrones the self by calling upon it to respond.³⁸ In a nutshell, both share the general insight formulated as clearly as possible by Marion: “In giving itself, what shows itself also, necessarily, designates that to whom or to which it abandons itself and without which it could no longer appear.”³⁹

For Patočka, it follows from these insights that we need to understand our selfhood as being essentially tied to the realization of the possibilities that are revealed to us in our encounter with the phenomenal field. This denotes an aspect, which is not prominent in Marion’s work but which is of paramount importance for a philosophical approach that, in the last analysis, rethinks selfhood in terms of our *responsibility* vis-à-vis the given. Since Patočka, as we have seen, in a critical *volte* versus Heidegger, regards our being-in-the-world as an *inherently* embodied intentionality, he understands this realization as a matter of our *practice*. Our practice, however, does neither take place in a merely perceptual world that is conceived as a correlate of cognition nor in “the world as the freeing of beings for a totality of relevance”⁴⁰ but in the “natural world.” As Patočka explains, this is “the world of good and evil”⁴¹;

the world that thrusts us into the dramatic movement of our irrefutable implication in its becoming:

In this way a-subjective phenomenology rises to dimensions which have been inaccessible to subjective phenomenology, dimensions which do not close off but open [namely, the dimensions of original time]. On the other hand it is also capable to descend to an analysis of those movements of life that our *sum* performs and in whose course the phenomenal sphere gains its concrete articulation. The *ego sum* has to obtain a firm standing in between things and humans, it has to enroot itself in order to participate one day in the all-consuming defense of the crush of the world, it has to accept the loss of its own essence within this movement in order to possibly win it back one day.⁴²

This passage is telling and to my understanding it tells us even more than Patočka explicitly says. On the one hand, it deals with the innermost intention of a-subjective phenomenology, i.e., the task to describe the ways original time unfolds in the horizontal givenness of the world; but on the other hand it paves the path for an analysis of the motions of human existence that arise from these a-subjective grounds. Interestingly, Patočka's terminology resorts to a semantics of the vertical (descending, standing, lifting out, erection of life) in this context. I hypothesize that this does not happen on occasion: as far as I see the theory of movement not only thematizes the dynamism that is implied in the unfolding of horizontality, but also becomes sensitive to forms of what can be called *vertical* experience and, hence, to the *individualizing movement* it entails.

The concept of verticality draws on a variety of phenomenological resources ranging from Scheler to Merleau-Ponty, Lévinas, and Henry to Marion.⁴³ It has been Anthony Steinbock's merit to provide us with an exemplary account of verticality with regard to one specific form of experience, i.e., *religious* experience.⁴⁴ Steinbock, however, also shows clearly that we need to distinguish a *variety* of vertical modes of experience, religious experience being only one modality.⁴⁵ Vertical givenness, generally viewed, is distinguished by the very fact that it exceeds the traditional concept of experience, i.e., *presentation*. To put the emphasis on this mode of givenness is to oppose the idea that the intelligibility of the given can be secured by way of a recourse to the evidencing powers of an ego's accomplishments and the pre-givenness of signifying horizons. "Presentation" thus is Steinbock's critical term for that traditionally prevalent kind of givenness, which unfolds in correlation to a "general economy of concealment and appearance."⁴⁶ It is, as he holds, "peculiar to sensible and intellectual objects and is more or less dependent upon my power to usher things into appearance within a context of significance."⁴⁷

Against this conception (which also seems to be present in Patočka, especially in his pre-occupation with the things of the world that we deal with "initially and for the most part," the *pragmata*), Steinbock proposes to enact a "dis-position" (or *epoché*) that breaks with the fundamental preoccupation with perceptual and epistemic objects, which "has dominated a philosophical (and especially a phenomenological) way of seeing."⁴⁸ As to his understanding:

[S]uch a practice can lead us, perhaps beyond our own efforts, to the forgetfulness of the self as the openness to perceptual and epistemic objects, but also to whatever

gives itself in its own manner: to the *epiphany* of the Holy, to the *revelation* of human persons, to the *manifestation* of cultural products, to the *disclosure* of the Earth, and to the *display* of elemental beings.⁴⁹

Steinbock, too, acknowledges the “primacy of givenness” and understands the respective task of phenomenology as “a response to such an initiated givenness.”⁵⁰

As far as I see, we can find traces of such vertical givenness—especially cases of *moral* revelation, *cultural* manifestation, and *ecological* disclosure in Steinbock’s sense—in Patočka’s analyses of the movement of human existence. In order to demonstrate this, I will read these analyses now with an eye towards those “dynamic vectors of experience” that move us “*beyond* ourselves” and the horizontal securities of our world onto the “radical presence of ‘absolutes’ *within* the field of human experience.”⁵¹

In fact, this very idea concerning a “movement beyond” indeed epitomizes Patočka’s basic insight that the *movement* of human existence must not be conceived as a mere process *in* the world that does not affect the unchanging substratum of its underlying subject. Patočka rather understands it as both a world-opening and self-constituting event that has a tripartite structure. As to his understanding, the world-opening and self-constituting character of this movement has to be analyzed with regard to life’s fundamental modes of temporalization and being-with.⁵²

- 1) The first mode of this movement consists in a past-related, instinctive-affective moment of “anchoring” or “sinking roots” in the contingency of a given life-world. In this originally self-concealing, i.e., pre-reflexive movement, man, originally accepted by the other, takes possession of himself, his capacities, and the world, in such a way as to feel at home in it. Its inevitable referent, that to which the movement relates, is the *earth*, the referent of bodily movement as such, as that which is not in motion, which is firm.⁵³ In correlation to the earth, Patočka sees the *sky* as another basic referent of this motion, a referent that predelineates life’s general rhythms. The world, articulated by this movement on the earth along the lines of near and far, home and abroad, love and hatred, but also along the cosmic lines of cyclical reproduction, becomes a universal orientation space. With Lévinas, one could call the affective center of this space the “dwelling,”⁵⁴ i.e., the place where subject and world penetrate each other “under cover and in the shadow of what is always already found.”⁵⁵ According to Patočka, this movement “totally and continually co-determines life in all further spheres.”⁵⁶

Whereas the starting point of Patočka’s reflection undoubtedly is the lived body conceived in Husserl’s terms as the “center of orientation,” the “most originally mine,” and the incarnation of the “I can,” these analyses clearly demonstrate that the first movement does not at all exhaust itself in a teleological explication of the horizontal implications of lived spatiality. The emphasis that he puts on the affective dimension and its foundational importance for the genesis of the concrete “I can” rather points to the fact that both the encounter with the other as well as with the earth invest the self with a movement that *both* grounds the “I can” *and* confronts it with its irrefutable limits.⁵⁷ In this context, the affective “height” of the other and the elemental “depth of the world” appear as vertical limits of the becoming self. In a telling expression Patočka contends that the “vertical axis of life” is ruled by the interplay of heaven and earth.⁵⁸ To my understanding, all this

attests to the existence of a basic vertical dimension at the heart of the first movement. Put differently, the manifestation of generativity (first and foremost in terms of *love*) and the disclosure of the all-consuming power of the unmoving ground of the earth point at *two absolutes* that affect the self-constitution of subjectivity. In this context, however, the emphasis is not yet on the “unity of consequence” which, in Husserl’s sense, designates a person in the phenomenological sense.⁵⁹ Patočka rather stresses the original passivity that our affectivity entails, i.e., that primordially “nonindividuated component of the world” that makes up a “definite dimension of personal life.”⁶⁰ On this account, he also talks about a “non-autonomous autonomy of life, its bondage at once to the other and to itself.”⁶¹ By this he attests not only to the *social mediation* of our being but also to our *animality* as a foundational part of personal life, i.e., as something that needs to be incorporated in common life but will always escape its full social integration.

- 2) The second mode, which is called “self-extension,” “reproduction,” or even “insertion in the nexus of things” by Patočka, concerns the development and mastering of our capacities and, thereby, of the world and the others. It is rendered possible by the moment of anchoring and takes place in the horizon of our need-conditioned self-sustenance. This mode is related to the present and concerns the necessity of our “confrontation with things and other human beings in their coming to terms with things.”⁶² Without this mode, i.e., without the manifold reproduction of the vital process in this diversely articulated movement and without the deferral of the original instinctual gratification in the fabrics of the social world, “human life is not physically possible.”⁶³ Yet the essential traits of this movement consist in a fragmentation of life, an identification with a series of roles, and the reshaping of things. This mode thus puts forth an essentially instrumental understanding of the world and others that goes hand-in-hand with an absorption of bodily-needy existence in the world. Finally, it terminates in a reification of man that might eventually lead to his alienation,⁶⁴ a reification in which the original “with-one-another” tends to live itself out in the mode of “one-against-another” and of “self-control.” It is, however, important to emphasize that this movement must not only be understood negatively as a “blinding” of oneself and others and as the reign of anonymity and de-personalizing social roles. Put differently one could also say that it assures the reciprocal inauthenticity that is foundational for the functional articulation of a highly diversified social world. In Patočka’s words, it implies the constitution of an “inorganic body” and a “sphere of meaning”⁶⁵ in which we primarily live; put differently, it secures a “humanization of the world,” “where understanding begins.”⁶⁶

The emphasis of this analysis undoubtedly concerns the preoccupation of human life with things and their usefulness. Patočka here identifies *work* and *struggle* as the two fundamental categories that work together in this movement to bind humanity to the “fundamental situation in which this movement takes place, which it presupposes and in which it continuously remains, [that] is guilt, oppression and suffering.”⁶⁷ He clearly underlines the propensity of this life to comply with organizational necessities, social hierarchies, and, finally, ideological fallacies that may result in oppression and violence. But whereas he generally seems to critique the tendency to reduce everything to being a part within the horizontal “networks of instrumental references,”⁶⁸ there is some avowal of another, i.e., vertical meaning that it entails, too: its capacity to cultivate the world and to

endow it with a network of “symbolic institutions” that inaugurate a “vertical world”⁶⁹ where we can meet beyond the alienating exigencies of our instrumental horizons. In this context, Patočka insists on the seemingly contradictory nature of this movement: on the one hand he states that “nothing independently disinterested and dedicated, neither the authentic self nor an authentic undertaking, can develop in this sphere”; yet on the other, he also contends that “his [namely, man’s] community with things, his quest into the inside of things shows itself to be simultaneously a way toward his own modification and self-formation.”⁷⁰ This contradiction or ambiguity, like the contradiction that our animality entails in the framework of the first movement, is, as I will argue, constitutive for his understanding of human selfhood, too.

- 3) Finally, Patočka describes a third mode of life-movement, the so-called “authentically human movement” of “breakthrough” and self-achievement or transcendence. This movement is distinguished by the possibility to break through the “dispersion, . . . the ‘fall’ into things and their domination,”⁷¹ which results from the movement of insertion and which ultimately obfuscates our liberating finitude. Insofar as this movement toward a “beyond” leaves behind the fixed coordinates of our anchoring, it entails a traumatic loss of our previous ascriptions of meaning and habitual self-images. This results in a turn outwards that breaks through the circle of self-forgetfulness. According to Patočka, this turn, however, does not simply close in a new image of the self that would simply replicate its sovereignty. As an insight not into the horizontal strata of being but into that which “is essentially different from what is and which enables all encounters [namely, with being], the possibility *par excellence*, the world,”⁷² this movement rather implies a radical *self-surrender*. Patočka therefore describes it as “self-attainment through self-abandonment.”⁷³ He can do this since he sees that this “*acclaiming* [of] finitude”⁷⁴ avoids falling prey to the nihilistic power of a life that reassures its sovereignty by way of joining a both all-embracing and all-neutralizing “metaphysics of power.” In this case life rather finds itself only in order to give itself away, i.e., not to sacrifice itself for a relative, mundane task, but to devote itself to the other in order to make possible the freedom of others.⁷⁵ Its task consists in creating “a community of those who understand each other in surrender and devotion, and, through the negation of separate centers, cement a fellowship of dedication, a fellowship in devoted service, which transcends every individual”⁷⁶ as well as the power of reification which seemed to forever seal their separation. It is important to note that this movement, too, is endangered to fall into inauthenticity, namely by “being blinded by finitude” and thus to convert its power of giving into a force of nihilism. According to Patočka, it might thus only exist as a permanent *struggle* to “break through our earthliness” and to acclaim and “integrate finitude, situatedness, earthliness, mortality precisely into existence.”⁷⁷ This personal “conversion” might, finally, lead to a real “transubstantiation of life.”⁷⁸

It is not difficult to see that the third movement, especially if it is explicitly analyzed in terms of “transcendence,” indeed epitomizes the concept of an inherently vertical experience and its specific modes of givenness. Patočka’s reference, e.g., to the unconditional gift of a “self-abandoning love,” which implies the moments of an unfathomable alterity of the addressee that is beyond the reach of my “I can,” the critical moment of unconditionality, the excessive meaningfulness that arises in this situation, and the “transubstantiation” it entails, clearly testifies

to this reading.⁷⁹ On another occasion, his emphasis on the “spiritual infinity” or “infinitezation”⁸⁰ that the “commitment to finitude” may entail or the famous motif of the “solidarity of the shaken,” which transpierces the “deceptive motives” of the all-embracing “will to live and to have,”⁸¹ testifies to this reading, too.

Concluding Reflections on Verticality and Selfhood

Patočka’s conception of the “movement of human existence” is essential for elaborating a comprehensive “phenomenology of the natural world,” an account that strongly underscores the foundational importance of our embodiment and generativity. In the context of his later criticism of Husserl’s transcendental idealism, Patočka in fact provides a novel approach that outweighs the notorious underestimation of lived sociality and history that haunted the initial phenomenological project even in the later Husserl’s turn to the lifeworld. And in the context of his critical reception of Heidegger, he offers a solid reworking of his fundamental ontology that strongly emphasizes *Dasein*’s embodiment. With his respective reinterpretation of existence in terms of a “finite freedom” Patočka thus unambiguously dethrones the anonymous powers of the so-called history of Being that resulted in, as I quoted before, “the irrationalism of that preventive being” that leaves entirely aside “what man is and can be to man.”⁸²

Notwithstanding these achievements, we still need to confront the problematic indeterminacy that haunts the question of the *subject* of existence in his approach, an indeterminacy that has led some commentators to speak about a “decapitated phenomenology.” And in fact, in Patočka’s analyses the subject of the movement of human existence is indeed generally termed *man* (sometimes even the “man” steps in). Man, however, is understood by him as nothing but “merely a schema, the schema of the *problem* of humanity.”⁸³ This schema, as he contends, calls for its concrete unfolding:

In its chief dimension, human life is a seeking and a discovering of the other in oneself and of oneself in the other. The point of the entire drama of the human life is whether that which implicitly already contains that primordial, purely situational contact will or will not be discovered—the interior concealed behind all that manifests itself.⁸⁴

This insight entails that movement is, on one hand, without doubt a “self-constituting movement.” This is the case since, for Patočka, “existence is itself its own goal; it returns to itself through its own activity, it is a self-related act.”⁸⁵ On the other hand, however, he also acknowledges that it is irreducibly mediated by the “overall situation” (*Ganzheitssituation*) that comprises it, exceeds it, and, thus, constitutes it:

The world appears to it as the foundation of [all] meaning—it seeks to detail the fusing, overarching, transcendental role of the world in its analyses. At the basis of the world, however, it discovers something that traditional philosophy had always passed over and ignored—time and temporality, so that the meaning-bestowing ground of being itself in its nature becomes a temporal drama, a movement above which understanding cannot carry us since every understanding presupposes it; a movement which opens up the world as a genuinely open-ended drama, repeated ever anew in different ways.⁸⁶

Given this interpretation of a “world-movement” that repeats itself “ever anew in different ways” we face a question that must not be avoided: what or *who* is, in the last analysis, disclosed in Patočka’s analysis of movement as its *subject*? At a first glance, it does not seem to be my being but rather Being qua World as it discloses itself in the phenomenal field a-subjectively. Being or the whole thus seems to *require* Man to arrive at itself. Such a reading clearly points at a *speculative* position. Yet this is not at all Patočka’s position. His idea of “finite freedom” rather points at the fundamental capacity of man to arrive at a relationship to himself that escapes the teleology of immediate-practical comportment, of thrownness, or inauthenticity that always already defines human existence. As we have seen in the discussion of his theory of movement, such thrownness or self-abandonment in self-sustenance is not the irresolvable existential “antithesis” to a full disclosure of selfhood; it does not seal the loss of self in self-alienation.⁸⁷ Conceived in terms of our embodiment, it rather is the *condition of possibility* for a full discovery of the self, i.e., for a “*self-finding*” and becoming of individuality.⁸⁸

This idea of an inherently “self-transcending self” that the conception of movement seems to entail, is, however, easily covered over by Patočka’s focus on the *horizontal* constitution of the self that is endorsed by the a-subjective account. On various occasions he indeed interprets the self in terms of an ever-expanding *horizon*. Following the Husserlian account of the “I” in terms of an “I can,” he understands the “I” to be given to itself as the “center” of an embodied “experienter.”⁸⁹ It is, put differently, the “axis” of a “powerful centrifugal stream that governs our life—out of ourselves towards the world.”⁹⁰ Accordingly Patočka defines the “personal I” as a “seeing force thrusting towards objectivity” that “passes through a range of relations to the world.”⁹¹ The “personal I” thus consists of these “possibilities as something that can be unfolded.”⁹² Given that the horizon of the “I” is dependent upon the givenness of our embodiment and its dynamism, Patočka hence conceives of the manifestation of the “I” to take place in correlation to the “pragmatic disclosure” of the world. This is of course reminiscent of Heidegger’s account. Heidegger in his *Being and Time* understands such disclosure in terms of care. Yet according to Patočka, as we have seen before, Heidegger does not see the ontological status of embodiment and interprets the fallenness of *Dasein* into everydayness as a metaphysical aberration from Being that we need to overcome. In this regard Patočka, on the contrary, remains on strictly phenomenological terrain when he proposes to understand our embodiment, its movement, and its incorporation into a variety of “nonorganic bodies” as the opening up of new possibilities that impact on the horizontal quality of our self-givenness and can be used “to look back on our organic body.”⁹³ Selfhood, on this account, does not refer to any given nature, substance, or a static subject. In its primary sense, Patočka rather understands it with regard to the “primordial originality of the original dynamism—originality in the sense that only I can live myself, a singularity that cannot be transposed into the plural”⁹⁴; it rather has to be found in our embodiment, in our “taking flesh.”⁹⁵

Taking all this into account, Patočka seems to work with a coherent notion of selfhood that revolves around the acknowledgment of the facticity of the subject’s embodiment. Yet this analysis in some sense remains quite formal, too: in fact one might wonder if the understanding of selfhood in terms of a “pragmatic co-disclosure” already provides us with a strong concept of *personal* selfhood or if it does not only lead to the “lifeless infinity of an acquiring I.”⁹⁶ In fact Patočka’s account seems to me

to provide an adequate exemplification of Husserl's concept of the person, which includes the ideas that the subject qua "I can" is a substrate of habitualities that realizes a coherent unity of consequence in its freedom of exerting position-taking acts. However, all these determinations—and I say this with an eye to the indication of some *vertical* experiential relations in the preceding section—relate only to the *horizontal* nature or quality of the "I." According to my thesis, however, the focus on the horizontal life and determinability of the "I" does not suffice to develop a strong notion of personal selfhood. In other words, it does not sufficiently define the essence of a person "to exist and live *in the achievement of intentional acts*"⁹⁷ and be it those acts that would qualify the person as a subject of reason. According to Scheler and to Stein, too, the essence of personality rather revolves around the *responsibility* of the acting subject for its "psycho-physic indifference"⁹⁸ and, hence, its freedom to "break through"⁹⁹ the laws of both universal reason and the relativity of our embodied nature. This "breakthrough," however, is not in the power of the "I." It rather befalls the "I" when the horizontal qualities of the "I can" are confronted with a vertical givenness that addresses its innermost capacity to respond freely. In this individualizing experience of verticality the predominance of the horizontal unfolding of the world and its subjective correlate, i.e., the power of the "I can" to "usher things into appearance,"¹⁰⁰ is interrupted. Yet our abilities to intentionally project ourselves forward and to respectively realize the possibilities that are revealed to us within the phenomenal field are not simply put at a halt. Rather than being temporarily suspended, they are overwhelmed, exceeded, and possibly negated. This extraordinary experience¹⁰¹ further entails that the "I," by being affected or addressed in the *accusative*, is confronted with the breakdown of its "I can" and its correlative power to "usher things into appearance." Put differently, life here is shaken in its "transcendental forgetfulness"¹⁰² and its tendency to take itself as its own origin. In the wake of this experience, the possibility of a *conversion* firstly appears, i.e., the possibility to "become itself without maintaining the other in a self-alienation."¹⁰³

To my understanding, Patočka's theory of movement implies a description of this vertical "conversion" of the horizontally determined "I" into a full personal self. Yet this "conversion" is not only a result of a solitary movement of breakthrough or transcendence; it rather takes place in *all* movements inasmuch as they are co-movements, i.e., movements we irreducibly share with others. To become a person thus involves receiving the other as a *persona*, i.e., in the alterity that contradicts and possibly undermines the crystalline purity of my "I can."¹⁰⁴ As Patočka puts this in his *Heretical Essays*, rather than being my rival, opponent, or—to use Sartre's telling expression—an "anti-man," the other then becomes a "fellow participant in the same situation," a "fellow discoverer of absolute freedom,"¹⁰⁵ i.e., of freedom that is not any more bound to the preservation of the sovereignty of the "I can" but rather linked to "the power of the higher, primordial meaning."¹⁰⁶ In the confrontation with this "primordial meaning" and the related shaking of the self-forgetfulness of the "I," it recovers itself as the *gift* it is and as embodying, to use Levinas' formula, "the gift of the power of giving."¹⁰⁷

The confrontation with the unconditional givenness of vertical experiences ("transcendences," to use a more classical jargon) and the ways they, in abandoning us to our finitude, give us to ourselves, i.e., to our *selves*, thus paves the path for a phenomenology of the person. The personal quality of selfhood, to put this differently, resides in our inchoate capacities to respond to the exigencies of a "vertical life" that

transcends the horizontal quality of both our embodied “I can” and its reasonable articulations.

Patočka’s theory of the movement of human existence, as far as I see, offers us at least three examples for the both disfiguring and individualizing quality of vertical givenness that such a phenomenology would need to explore in order to arrive at a full-fledged concept of personality: firstly, it points at the unconditional confrontation with the other in the creativity of *love*, which, to paraphrase Plotinus, “gives what I do not have”¹⁰⁸—especially the “gift of the power of giving”; secondly, it makes us sensible for the imponderable ways we confront others in *politics*, which “gives what I cannot master”—the *polemos* or dissent; thirdly, it emphasizes the unfathomable responsibility of confronting the other in *transcendence*, which “gives what I cannot contain”—the ambiguous gift of making transcendence together.¹⁰⁹

Given all this, we need to understand the abyssal constitution of the person with regard to the intersection of transcendence and self-transcendence that pervades our experiential life. It is there that the adventurous movement of *becoming* a person starts always ever anew: “[. . .] Movement is that in which we can finally encounter both ourselves and the other not as a mere thing but as a living self-transcendence, reaching beyond, though not in a lifeless infinity of an acquiring I.”¹¹⁰ Patočka’s sometimes mentioned but unwritten “phenomenological anthropology” revolves around this notion of movement. For Patočka this is a movement that bears no given substratum but tears us apart between our animality and rationality, the orgiastic and responsibility, the quest for the authentic and our lived inauthenticity, the horizontal qualities of the “I” and the “vertical life” of the person; it is a movement that turns man into an inherently problematic being and keeps him from ever becoming more than “the schema of the *problem* of humanity.”

Notes

- 1 Jan Patočka, “Edmund Husserl’s Philosophy of the Crisis of the Sciences and his Conception of a Phenomenology of the ‘Life-World,’” in *Jan Patočka: Philosophy and Selected Writings*, ed. Erazim Kohák (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 223–38, here 235. [Originally a 1971 Warsaw lecture delivered in French, “La philosophie de la crise des sciences d’après E. Husserl et sa conception d’une phénoménologie du ‘monde de la vie’,” in *Archiwum historii, filozofii i myśli społecznej* 18 (1972), 3–18.]
- 2 Patočka, “Epoché und Reduktion,” in *Die Bewegung der menschlichen Existenz, Ausgewählte Schriften IV: Phänomenologische Schriften II*, ed. Klaus Nellen and Jiří Němec (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1991), 415–23, here 422. English translations by the author unless otherwise noted.
- 3 See for example the critique by Bruce Bégout, “La phénoménologie décapitée? Perspectives et difficultés de la phénoménologie asubjective de Jan Patočka,” in *Chiasmi international* 4 (2002), 377–409.
- 4 Patočka himself uses this term on several occasions. See “Cartesianism and Phenomenology,” in *Philosophy and Selected Writings*, 285–326, here 324. [In Czech: “Kartesiánství a fenomenologie,” circulated in 1976 as *samizdat*.]
- 5 In a similar vein, Ludger Hagedorn draws on Patočka’s earlier works to demonstrate that he attempted to rework the concept of subjectivity from his very philosophical beginnings. See Ludger Hagedorn, “*Quicquid cogitat*. On the Uses and Disadvantages of Subjectivity,” in *The Phenomenological Critique of Mathematization and the Question of Responsibility: Formalisation and the Life-World*, ed. Lúbia Učník, Ivan Chvatík, and Anita Williams (Dordrecht: Springer, 2015).
- 6 On the intersection of these two accounts see also James Mensch’s unpublished manuscript: “Patočka’s A-subjective Phenomenology: Towards a New Concept of Human Rights,”

- accessed September 9, 2014, http://www.academia.edu/4090881/Patočkas_Asubjective_Phenomenology.
- 7 Important materials concerning Patočka's a-subjective phenomenology have been collected in the volume *Vom Erscheinen als solchem: Texte aus dem Nachlaß*, ed. Helga Blaschek-Hahn and Karel Novotný (Freiburg and Munich: Alber, 2000), here 110. English translations by the author unless otherwise noted.
 - 8 See Karel Novotný, "Die Transzendentalität der Welt: Epoché und Reduktion bei Jan Patočka," in *Epoché und Reduktion: Formen und Praxis der Reduktion in der Phänomenologie*, ed. Rolf Kühn and Michael Staudigl (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2003), 153–75.
 - 9 Patočka, *The Natural World as a Philosophical Problem*, trans. Erika Abrams, ed. Ivan Chvatík and L'ubica Učník, with a foreword by Dermot Moran (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, forthcoming). [Czech: "Přirozený Svět Jako Filosofický Problém," in *Sebrané Spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 6: *Fenomenologické Spisy I: Přirozený Svět. Texty z Let 1931–1949*, ed. Ivan Chvatík (Prague: Oikoumene, 2008 [1936]).]
 - 10 Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy. First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, trans. Fred Kersten (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1983), 128–9. [In German: *Ideen zur einen reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologische Philosophie*, ed. Karl Schumann, *Husserliana* III (Hague: Nijhoff, 1976).]
 - 11 See Patočka, "Der Subjektivismus der Husserlschen und die Möglichkeit einer 'asubjektiven' Phänomenologie," in *Die Bewegung*, 267–85, here 278–9.
 - 12 Patočka, "Der Subjektivismus . . . Möglichkeit," 280.
 - 13 On these interdicts and how they shaped Husserl's conception of phenomenology see Patočka, "Cartesianism and Phenomenology."
 - 14 Patočka, "Der Subjektivismus der Husserlschen und die Forderung einer asubjektiven Phänomenologie," in *Die Bewegung*, 286–309, here 300–2.
 - 15 One might still get this impression in an earlier path-breaking article that was indeed much more affirmative of Heidegger's account. See Patočka, "Der Subjektivismus . . . Möglichkeit."
 - 16 Patočka, "Der Subjektivismus . . . Forderung," 309.
 - 17 Patočka, *Vom Erscheinen*, 91–2.
 - 18 See Patočka, *Vom Erscheinen*, 97.
 - 19 Patočka, "Was ist Existenz?" in *Die Bewegung*, 230–56, here 254. [Czech: "Co je existence?" in *Filosofický časopis* 17 (1969), 682–702.]
 - 20 Patočka, "Afterword to the Second Edition (1970): The 'Natural World' Reconsidered Thirty-three Years Later," in *The Natural World*, 164. [Czech: "Přirozený svět" v meditaci svého autora po třiatřiceti letech" (1969), in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 7: *Fenomenologické spisy II* (Prague: Oikoumene, 2008), 265–334.]
 - 21 Patočka, *Vom Erscheinen*, 94.
 - 22 Patočka, "Afterword," 166. Translation modified.
 - 23 Patočka, "Afterword," 165–6.
 - 24 Patočka, *Vom Erscheinen*, 91.
 - 25 Patočka, *Body, Community, Language, World*, trans. Erazim Kohák, ed. James Dodd (Chicago: Open Court, 1998), 40. [Czech: *Tělo, společenství, jazyk, svět*, ed. J. Polívka (Prague: Oikoumene, 1995).]
 - 26 Patočka, *Vom Erscheinen*, 52.
 - 27 Patočka, *Vom Erscheinen*, 52.
 - 28 Patočka, *Body, Community*, 34, 47.
 - 29 Patočka, *Body, Community*, 40.
 - 30 Patočka, *Vom Erscheinen*, 248.
 - 31 Patočka, *Vom Erscheinen*, 90–1.
 - 32 On this primacy see Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 1–29. [French: *De Surcroît: Études sur les phénomènes saturés* (Paris: PUF, 2001).]
 - 33 Marion, *In Excess*, 50. For a more comprehensive discussion see Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford

- University Press, 2002). [French: *Etant donné: Essai d'une phénoménologie de la donation* (Paris: PUF, 1997).]
- 34 Jean-Luc Marion, *The Visible and the Revealed*, trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner et al., (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 5: "Since it makes possible the return to the things themselves, the principle of all principles should perhaps be understood as a suspension of the principle of sufficient reason insofar as the phenomenon is not indebted to any reason, because its givenness itself justifies it." [French: *Le visible et le révélé* (Paris: Cerf, 2005).] Patočka, on his turn, even subjugates the concept of "intuition" to this radical *epoché*, thus postulating a "principle of originality" that should replace the Husserlian "principle of all principles." See Patočka, *Vom Erscheinen*, 248.
- 35 See Marion, *Being Given*, 248–62.
- 36 Marion, *Being Given*, 249.
- 37 Patočka, *Vom Erscheinen*, 92.
- 38 Patočka, *Vom Erscheinen*, 98–9. Let me note in passing that the correlation between appeal and response, which has been elaborated upon extensively in French phenomenology from Merleau-Ponty onwards, has also been a pertinent issue throughout Patočka's philosophical agenda.
- 39 Marion, *Being Given*, 248–9.
- 40 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: SUNY Press, 1996), 102. [German: *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1995).]
- 41 See Patočka, "Edmund Husserl's Philosophy of the Crisis," 235–237.
- 42 Patočka, "Der Subjektivismus . . . Möglichkeit," 284.
- 43 To indicate this briefly, let it suffice to mention Lévinas's concept of "height" (*hauteur*), Merleau-Ponty's notion of the "vertical world," and Marion's multi-faceted concept of "saturation."
- 44 See Anthony Steinbock, *Phenomenology and Mysticism: The Verticality of Religious Experience* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007). The specificity of another type of vertical givenness, i.e., *moral* experience, is the subject of his *Moral Emotions: Reclaiming the Evidence of the Heart* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2014).
- 45 Steinbock, *Phenomenology and Mysticism*, 13–17.
- 46 Steinbock, *Phenomenology and Mysticism*, 9.
- 47 Steinbock, *Phenomenology and Mysticism*, 7.
- 48 Steinbock, *Phenomenology and Mysticism*, 7.
- 49 Steinbock, *Phenomenology and Mysticism*, 5.
- 50 Steinbock, *Phenomenology and Mysticism*, 5. Cf. 14–17.
- 51 Steinbock, *Phenomenology and Mysticism*, 14–15.
- 52 The essential parts of Patočka's conception appear for the first time in an essay originally published in Czech in 1965. See Patočka, "Zur Vorgeschichte von der Wissenschaft der Bewegung: Welt, Erde, Himmel und die Bewegung des menschlichen Lebens," in *Die Bewegung*, 132–43. [Czech: "K prehistorii vědy o pohybu: svět, země, nebe a pohyb lidského života," in *Tvář* 2/10 (1965), 1–5; and in English translation: "On the Prehistory of the Science of Movement: World, Earth, Heaven and the Movement of Human Life," trans. Erika Abrams, in *Dis-orientations: Philosophical and Literary Inquiries into the Lost Grounds of Modernity*, ed. Tora Lane and Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).]
- 53 Patočka, "Zur Vorgeschichte," 136–37; "The 'Natural' World and Phenomenology," in *Philosophy and Selected Writings*, 255–57. [Czech: "Přirozený svět a fenomenologie," in *Přirozený svět a pohyb lidské existence*, vol. 1, ed. Ivan Chvatík (Prague: Archivní soubor, 1980).]
- 54 See Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1979), 152–68. [In French: *Totalité et infini: essai sur l'extériorité* (Hague: Nijhoff, 1961).] The parallels in their respective conceptions are strongly stressed by Mensch in his "Patočka's A-subjective Phenomenology."
- 55 Patočka, "Was ist Existenz?," 256.
- 56 Patočka, *Body, Community*, 148.
- 57 See Patočka, "The 'Natural' World . . .," 254–8.
- 58 Patočka, "The 'Natural' World . . .," 256.

- 59 On this concept of personality that relates the origin of the person to sociality, see Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass: Zweiter Teil: 1921–1928*, *Husserliana* XIV, ed. Iso Kern (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), especially 175–6. For a closer elaboration on this relationship see James G. Hart, *The Person and the Common Life: Studies in a Husserlian Social Ethics* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1992), especially chapter 2, 50–154.
- 60 Patočka, “The ‘Natural’ World . . .,” 264.
- 61 Patočka, “Afterword,” 177.
- 62 Patočka, “Was ist Existenz?,” 256.
- 63 Patočka, *Body, Community*, 150.
- 64 As Patočka further explains, we are dealing here not with a possibility opposed to that of an “authentic potentiality-for-Being,” but rather with a necessity founded in our bodily mode of existence.
- 65 Patočka, *Body, Community*, 150–1.
- 66 Patočka, *Body, Community*, 157–8.
- 67 Patočka, “Afterword,” 185.
- 68 Patočka, “Afterword,” 182.
- 69 Merleau-Ponty elaborated this concept in order to describe the field of culture as the functioning horizon of our situated and historic knowledge. See Merleau-Ponty, *Institution and Passivity: Course notes from the Collège de France (1954–55)*, trans. Leonard Lawlor and Heath Massey (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2010). [French: *L’institution, la passivité: Notes de cours au Collège de France, 1954–1955* (Paris: Belin, 2002).] The concept relates directly to the idea of a “vertical world” that concerns the articulations of an “intersubjectivity which is not perspectival but vertical, which is, extended into the past.” See Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, ed. Claude Lefort (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 175 and passim. [French: *Le Visible et l’invisible* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964).]
- 70 Patočka, “Afterword,” 184.
- 71 Patočka, “Zur Vorgeschichte,” 140.
- 72 Patočka, “Was ist Existenz?,” 256.
- 73 Patočka, “Was ist Existenz?,” 256.
- 74 Patočka, “The ‘Natural’ World . . .,” 267.
- 75 See Patočka, “Zur Vorgeschichte,” 141.
- 76 Patočka, “Afterword,” 190.
- 77 Patočka, *Body, Community*, 151.
- 78 Patočka, “The ‘Natural’ World . . .,” 267–9.
- 79 See Patočka, “The ‘Natural’ World . . .,” 224–5.
- 80 See Patočka, *Papiers phénoménologiques*, trans. Erika Abrams (Grenoble: Jérôme Millon, 1995), 113: “L’ouverture, l’infinitionisation à travers la finitude.” [Czech: “Koncept přednášky o tělesnosti,” unpublished manuscript (Ms 5/17).] On this motif see Filip Karfik, *Unendlichwerden durch die Endlichkeit: Eine Lektüre der Philosophie Jan Patočkas* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2008), 71–81, here 80. This motif is also taken up from a different perspective and with a different accent by Ludger Hagedorn. See “Philosophische Kenosis. Anverwandlung eines christlichen Motivs,” in *Figuren der Transzendenz: Transformationen eines phänomenologischen Grundbegriffs*, ed. Michael Staudigl and Christian Sternad (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2014), 349–66.
- 81 See Patočka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, trans. Erazim Kohák, ed. James Dodd (Chicago: Open Court, 1996), 133–5. [Czech: *Kacířské eseje o filosofii dějin*, in *Sebrané spisy Jana Patočky*, vol. 3: *Péče o duši* III, ed. Ivan Chvatík and Pavel Kouba (Prague: Oikumene, 2002).]
- 82 Patočka, “The ‘Natural’ World . . .,” 271.
- 83 Patočka, “The ‘Natural’ World . . .,” 250.
- 84 Patočka, “The ‘Natural’ World . . .,” 260.
- 85 Patočka, “Was ist Existenz?,” 239.
- 86 Patočka, *An Introduction to Husserl’s Phenomenology*, trans. Erazim Kohák, ed. James Dodd (Chicago: Open Court, 1996) 16–17. [Czech: *Úvod do Husserlovy fenomenologie*, in *Filosofický časopis* 13 (1965), 5:693–701; 6:821–849; *Filosofický časopis* 14 (1966), 1:1–21; 3:289–305; 5:569–589.]

- 87 See Patočka, “The ‘Natural’ World . . .,” 263–9. See also Mensch, “Patočka’s Asubjective Phenomenology,” chapter 5, 124.
- 88 Patočka, “The ‘Natural’ World . . .,” 268–9.
- 89 Patočka, *Body, Community*, 77.
- 90 Patočka, *Body, Community*, 36.
- 91 Patočka, *Body, Community*, 46.
- 92 Patočka, *Body, Community*, 46.
- 93 Patočka, *Body, Community*, 50.
- 94 Patočka, *Body, Community*, 59.
- 95 This points at another parallel with Marion, who also conceives of individuation in terms of “taking flesh.” See Marion, *In Excess*, 96–8.
- 96 Patočka, “The ‘Natural’ World . . .,” 269.
- 97 For this strong criticism of the conflation of reason with the essence of personality that results in a heteronomous conception of the person, see Max Scheler, *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik: Neuer Versuch der Grundlegung eines ethischen Personalismus* (Bern: Francke, 1966), 371 and passim, here 389. Cf. Edith Stein, *Welt und Person: Beitrag zum christlichen Wahrheitsstreben* (Louvain: Nauwelaerts, 1962), 148–9. English translations are by the author unless otherwise noted.
- 98 Scheler, *Der Formalismus*, 382 and passim.
- 99 Stein, *Welt und Person*, 149.
- 100 Steinbock, *Phenomenology and Mysticism*, 7.
- 101 The extraordinary quality of this “counter-experience” again points at a parallel to Marion, in this case with his concept of “saturation.” See Marion, *Being Given*, 199–233.
- 102 On the concept of the “transcendental forgetfulness” of the ego in terms of the “I can,” see Michel Henry, *I am the Truth: Toward a Philosophy of Christianity*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 133–51. [French: *C’est moi la vérité. Pour une philosophie du christianisme* (Paris: Broché, 1998).] A comparative analysis of Patočka and Henry that would need to focus on their partly shared concept of life in terms of affectivity and on its implications for their understanding of human culture and politics is still lacking.
- 103 Patočka, “The ‘Natural’ World . . .,” 268. In Henry’s terms, this conversion, as Patočka calls it on several occasions, is analyzed in terms of a “second birth.” Cf. *I am the Truth*, pp. 152–70.
- 104 On this correlation see also Richard Kearney, “Toward a Phenomenology of the Persona,” in *The God Who May Be: A Hermeneutics of Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 9–19.
- 105 Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 131.
- 106 Patočka, “The ‘Natural’ World . . .,” 267.
- 107 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 269
- 108 See the translations of Plotinus’ *Enneads* VI 7, 15, and 19 cited and interpreted by Lázló Tengelyi, “On the Border of Phenomenology and Theology,” in *Phenomenology and Religion: New Frontiers*, ed. Jonna Bornemark and Hans Ruin (Huddinge: Södertörn University Press, 2010), 17–34, here 26–7.
- 109 On the role of Patočka’s understanding of religion for this discussion of selfhood, see Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995). [French: *Donner la mort* (Paris: Galilée, 1999).]
- 110 Patočka, “The ‘Natural’ World . . .,” 269.

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Part V

Varia

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17 Direct Perception, Inter-subjectivity, and Social Cognition

Why Phenomenology is a Necessary But Not Sufficient Condition^{1, 2}

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There are two central aims to this paper: 1. to defend phenomenological treatments of inter-subjectivity via consideration of some remarks in Sartre and to argue that they also provide the basis for a better explanation of an array of empirical data than existing inferentialist or mindreading accounts of social cognition (notably Theory Theory, Simulation Theory, and hybrid versions); 2. to offer the methodological resources for renewing phenomenology in a manner that acknowledges ostensibly non-phenomenological moments in theory production—which involve inference to the best explanation, etc.—but does not abandon phenomenology for all that, allowing it to be absorbed into empirical explanation or other forms of philosophical analysis without remainder.

Keywords: perception; social cognition; phenomenology; intersubjectivity; Jean Paul Sartre; embodied intersubjectivity; methodology

Introduction

Phenomenology is sometimes reproached for being a theoretical trajectory with no agreed method and hence no agreed results; certainly nothing that might play a role in engagement with science. Other philosophers may be inclined to praise phenomenology for some related features, since it simply is not in the business of producing an empirical research program and should, by contrast, be praised for persisting with description, or questioning, rather than settling into some kind of normal science that, tacitly or otherwise, is invested in the natural attitude. There is something to recommend both of these quite commonly held views, which are compatible assessments about the status of phenomenology as a potential research program in interaction with empirical sciences, albeit incompatible normative judgments about how philosophy ought to be best conducted.³ In this paper, however, I am going to argue that these understandings of phenomenology should not be taken to be the final word, methodologically and meta-philosophically, since things are internally more complex within phenomenology than such a picture suggests, and there are significant resources within current phenomenological treatments of inter-subjectivity that open up the possibility of new research programs in interaction with the relevant empirical sciences regarding social

cognition. While phenomenology can and should challenge, for example, latent Cartesian presuppositions that continue to dominate at least some scientific practices, and in particular the conception of experience and nature at work in them,⁴ this does not entail there cannot (or should not) be a phenomenological research program in concert with relevant sciences.

It is appropriate to begin by fleetingly characterizing my position on the methodological issue, albeit with the subsequent paper being the substantive methodological justification. Although I may be accused of advocating a phenomenological psychology that remains ensconced within the natural attitude, on my view the best phenomenological work has always complicated any neat division between description and explanation, which is to say that it involves both description and transcendental analyses regarding the conditions of possibility of those variegated structures of experience that have been described, *and*, to at least some minimal extent, empirical explanation and inference. This need not entail that the distinction completely collapses, although it does entail that phenomenology cannot be pure, self-sufficient, or pre-suppositionless, but is always in a relationship with non-phenomenology (whether in regard to culture, the unconscious, art, science, etc.), the latter of which cannot be bracketed away without remainder. Perhaps more controversially, I also think that phenomenology cannot be practiced without some use—conscious or otherwise—of methods and modes of reasoning that are ostensibly non-phenomenological in nature. Although forms of reasoning characteristic of many parts of the sciences, like inference to the best explanation, are explicitly ruled out in the meta-philosophical reflections of most of the canonical phenomenological philosophers, often the motivation for phenomenological description involves (explicitly or otherwise) a form of inference, whether it be in regard to the alleged failures of empiricism and intellectualism in Merleau-Ponty's work, or the reef of solipsism that has brought idealism and realism (and the work of Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger) to grief, according to Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*.⁵ These trajectories are shown to be insufficient and incomplete on their own terms, but also to falsify the evidences of experience; the search is then on for an alternative theoretical framework that retains coherence, does better justice to the evidences of experience, and that does not have the allegedly untenable consequences that afflict existing theories. As such, I think that theoretical considerations—including inferences to the best explanation—are at least minimally involved in all philosophical enterprises that lay claim to inherit the title phenomenology and endeavor to “return to the things themselves.” I might have attempted to justify this kind of claim more hermeneutically, by engaging with this trajectory of contamination in the work of particular phenomenological philosophers who have become part of the canon of this tradition, whether this trajectory is explicitly countenanced (as in parts of Merleau-Ponty's work), or where it is implicitly presupposed in the movements of many pieces of phenomenological persuasion and argument.⁶

Instead, in this paper I want to show both how this is the case in contemporary phenomenological work on inter-subjectivity, and also why it ought to be so, and hence why many of the core phenomenological insights are a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for an adequate account of inter-subjectivity today. I take it that an adequate account of inter-subjectivity must involve substantial interaction with empirical studies, notwithstanding the putative methodological differences between phenomenological description and scientific explanation. Whatever we think of sub-personal neuronal analyses and their relationship to the typically person-level

descriptions of phenomenology, the fact remains that some of our best resources for coming to terms with social cognition are going to come from developmental psychology, and the cognitive sciences in general. If we do not pay attention to such resources we are, for example, highly likely to project sophisticated theoretical considerations and adult-like structures onto the child, and hence be unable to comprehend the possibility that more basic or “child-like” modes of understanding persist and condition our adult interaction with others. Yes, it is true that Piaget and many contemporary psychologists and neuroscientists—especially those associated with the trajectories that philosophers call Theory Theory and Simulation Theory—have continued to make this mistake, partly due to their inability to place in question the natural attitude. But we cannot just oppose a pure phenomenology of neonatal life to the naive and pre-critical psychologist and think that that trumps them, since it seems improbable to maintain that through eidetic variation we can recapture the phenomenological evidences of neonatal life. If we want to understand how it is that givenness presents itself, how it is that we can (impurely) perform the reduction and attend to the variegated structures of inter-subjective experience, we cannot ignore the genesis of such presentations. If no reduction will allow us to perform a direct phenomenology of early neonatal life, the relevant sciences are one of the best starting places we have, as piecemeal and ungrounded as they often are. As such, this paper will need to explicate what kind of phenomenology survives in a milieu that necessitates engagement with the relevant sciences, albeit not necessarily deference to them. So there will be two central aims to this paper:

1. to defend the centrality and viability of phenomenological treatments of inter-subjectivity—which I will argue possess a non-trivial unity amongst the various interlocutors—and the manner in which they also serve to provide the basis for a better explanation of an array of empirical data than existing inferentialist or mind-reading accounts of social cognition (notably Theory Theory, Simulation Theory, and hybrid versions);
2. to offer a methodological justification for renewing phenomenology in a manner that is consistent with the mode of reasoning engaged in by this paper, i.e. that acknowledges ostensibly non-phenomenological moments in theory production but does not abandon phenomenology for all that, allowing it to be simply absorbed into empirical explanation or other forms of philosophical analysis without remainder.

Phenomenology and Inter-Subjectivity: Some Core Insights

I want to begin by subjecting the idea that there is tremendous disparity in methods and results in the European phenomenological tradition to some pressure. Notwithstanding the significant philosophical differences between some of the canonical inheritors of the title of phenomenologist (e.g. Husserl, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, Levinas, etc.), which include disputes concerning central methodological dimensions of phenomenology—e.g. the epoché, the transcendental ego, etc.—there are also some important points in common between them, both substantively and also methodologically.

The case that I want to dwell on here concerns inter-subjectivity. Of course, even in this restricted domain significant disputes and differences are apparent.⁷ Nonetheless,

all is not quite as it appears here, and these are arguably variations within a given family resemblance. While they are often not sufficiently distinguished, we might specify at least the following three phenomenological commitments regarding inter-subjectivity that are quite pervasive:

- (1) We have direct perception of the mental states of another person without intermediary in some cases, esp. emotional expression in a context (not inferential, theoretical, or explicit simulations, explicit imaginings, etc.). Such experiences are also often argued to be the condition for our subsequent theoretical and inferential activities;
- (2) Self and other are in a relationship of co-constitution of meaning, the enacting of understanding of each other through second person interaction (e.g. structural coupling) or narrative;
- (3) The suggestion that the phenomenon of empathy, and other core inter-subjective experiences and emotions, cannot be adequately understood in the manner with which TT and ST typically treat them.⁸

This essay will focus on defending the first of these claims in particular, but it will also seek to establish that these sort of substantive claims that can be found in the work of all of the phenomenologists, albeit to greater and lesser extents, also reflect some enduring and non-trivial methodological commitments as they play out in regard to inter-subjectivity.

To realize both of these aims, I want to consider some dense and elliptical remarks of Sartre's that occur over just 2 or 3 pages in *Being and Nothingness*, immediately before he offers his own (in)famous (dis)solution of the problem of others' minds via his characterization of the Look. Here Sartre describes four "necessary and sufficient" conditions for an adequate theory of inter-subjectivity, which must both provide a new sort of justification for our belief in the existence of others (albeit not a traditional proof), and it must also descriptively capture the richness and complexity of our social life as we experience it.⁹ While we will have cause to dispute that they are sufficient,¹⁰ they do provide a nice way to illustrate some of the central phenomenological commitments. While Sartre is quite critical of dimensions of Husserl's and Heidegger's accounts of inter-subjectivity, even *if* one agrees with Sartre's criticisms of his phenomenological predecessors, I will suggest that his four conditions appear to be plausible unifying factors in regard to the work of all of the historically significant phenomenologists. They are certainly shared ambitions of all of these phenomenologists, even if their actual practices and conclusions sometimes betray these ambitions, or they more strongly emphasize one of these conditions to the detriment of the others.

Necessary Condition 1

A Theory of Intersubjectivity Cannot Offer a New Proof of the Existence of Others; It Cannot Be Probabilistic

The first of Sartre's necessary conditions is largely negative. Sartre maintains, with Heidegger, Scheler, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and various other phenomenologists, that the traditional problem of other minds is irresolvable if one begins with certain assumptions—e.g. that we have some epistemic privilege in regard to our knowledge

of our own minds and mental states, but lack any such privilege in regard to the minds and mental states of others. Such approaches to the problem will inevitably be “obstacle overcoming” in the contemporary parlance.¹¹ They concede that there is a fundamental epistemic problem—e.g. other minds are hidden—and, as such, inference, induction, and sophisticated modeling and hypothesis formation mechanisms are thought to be required in order to overcome this gap and explain why our knowledge of the other in general, or of particular mental states, is justified. Such approaches are, according to Sartre, at best probabilistic, but he maintains that “the Other’s existence cannot be a *probability*”¹² that is validated in this manner. For him, these sorts of inferential accounts based upon the hidden minds hypothesis will fail on both the descriptive and justificatory levels: they are descriptively misleading if they are meant to capture the phenomenology or psychology of our relations with others (at least at the conscious level); but they are also argued to fail as a justification of our claims to knowledge of other people.

Phenomenological responses, by contrast, tend to be “obstacle dissipating” responses to the problem of other minds, rather than “obstacle overcoming” ones.¹³ Of course, substantial philosophical work will need to be done for any such “dissipation” or dissolution to succeed. Otherwise, such a strategy may look like hand-waving or a skyhook type argument, in which a philosopher is in a sticky situation and suddenly manages to extricate themselves, with all and sundry confused as to how it happened. We will shortly consider Sartre’s famous description of the look, a subject-involving experience that he maintains is predicated upon the existence of other subjects. For now, let us stick with a simpler case. One epistemological (dis)solution advocated by Sartre and many other phenomenologists involves a form of expressivism that advocates the primacy of perception, and which hence denies the thesis that other minds are necessarily hidden at all times and in all cases. A few quotes should suffice to quickly illustrate the pervasiveness of this trajectory in the phenomenological tradition, notwithstanding that Husserl’s commitment to such a position is a little more equivocal:

I do not see anger or a threatening attitude as a psychic fact hidden behind the gesture, I read anger in it. The gesture *does not make me think* of anger, it is anger itself.¹⁴

We certainly believe ourselves to be directly acquainted with another person’s joy in his laughter, with his sorrow and pain in his tears, with his shame in his blushing [. . .] If anyone tells me that this is not “perception”, for it cannot be so, in view of the fact that [. . .] there is no sensation of another person’s mind nor any stimulus from such a source, I would beg him to turn aside from such questionable theories and address himself to the phenomenological facts.¹⁵

Of course there is a psychic cryptography; certain phenomena are “hidden”. But this certainly does not mean that the meanings refer to something “beyond the body” [. . .] These frowns, this redness, this stammering, this slight trembling of the hands, these downcast looks which seem at once timid and threatening—these do not express anger; they are the anger. But this point must be clearly understood. In itself a clenched fist is nothing and means nothing. But we also never perceive a clenched fist. We perceive a man who in a certain situation clenches his fist. This

meaningful act considered in connection with the past and with possibles and understood in terms of the synthetic totality “body in situation” is the anger. It refers to nothing other than to actions in the world (to strike, to insult, etc.).¹⁶

Many phenomenologists will maintain that we can be as sure in some cases of the perception of others (e.g. an expression of pain) as we are in regard to our own mental states (e.g. our feeling of pain), without this thereby jeopardizing the undeniable asymmetry of perspectives, or entailing that inference is required for me to understand another’s pain but not my own.¹⁷ While such views concerning direct perception may seem naive, and are undoubtedly not in the majority today, this paper will argue that they are not as easily dismissible as they may appear, on either epistemic grounds, or in the face of potential objections from cognitive science regarding sub-personal brain processes.

Necessary Condition 2

The Only Point of Departure Possible Is the Cogito; The For-Itself Must Give Us the For-Others

With his second condition, Sartre proposes something akin to a phenomenological rendering of Kant’s Copernican turn: we must look at how the other is immediately present to us “within” our own being, albeit as a disruption to or a modification of the main structures of the for-itself and which cannot be deduced from those structures of subjectivity. If we do so, Sartre argues, we will see that we are necessarily thrown outside of any immanent cogito towards what he calls “being-for-others,” which is not just a general a priori category but the “concrete, indubitable presence of a particular, concrete Other.”¹⁸ His account of direct perception arguably fulfills this condition, but according to Sartre himself the central experience of this kind is not looking at the other, but being looked at. His “obstacle dissipating” solution to the problem of other minds hence consists in his evocative descriptions of being subject to the look of another, and the manner in which in such an experience we become a “transcendence transcended.” On Sartre’s famous description, we are asked to imagine that we are peeping through a keyhole, pre-reflectively immersed and absorbed in the captivating scene on the other side of the door.¹⁹ Maybe we would be nervous engaging in such activities for a little, given the socio-cultural associations of being a “Peeping Tom,” but after a period of time we would be given over to the scene with self-reflection and self-awareness limited to merely the minimal (tacit or non-thetic) understanding that we are not what we are perceiving. Suddenly, though, we hear footsteps, and we have an involuntary apprehension of ourselves as an object in the eyes of another: a “pre-moral” experience of shame; a shudder of recognition that we are the object that the other sees, without (apparent) room for any sort of inferential theorizing or cognizing. This ontological shift, Sartre says, has another person as its condition, notwithstanding whether or not one is in error on a particular occasion of such an experience (for example, the floor creaks, but there is no-one actually literally present). There is much that might be said about this transcendental “proof.” Is it merely necessary that we believe there are others? Is it merely necessary that there *were* other subjects, rather than currently *are* other empirical people in the world (they may have all been suddenly deprived of life, somehow)?

We cannot address such questions here, which presuppose a different sort of metaphysics from Sartre's,²⁰ one that is more closely related to what Huw Price calls "object naturalism" in which all that exists is what our best sciences posit; "the object of each kind of talk is an aspect of the world-as-studied-by-science, or else nothing at all."²¹ In any case, aspects of Sartre's view of inter-subjectivity have also been subject to strong phenomenological contestation, for example by Merleau-Ponty.²² Indeed, Sartre's whole ontology in *Being and Nothingness* has been subject to strong contestation from within phenomenology, as well as outside of phenomenology. Nonetheless, if we abstract from the reference to the for-itself in the above summary of what I take to be his second condition for a viable theory of inter-subjectivity, as well as possible Cartesian residues in Sartre's work that Heidegger's and Merleau-Ponty's thought leaves behind, this second condition of his simply affirms that the philosopher must at least start from the first-person perspective (the lived experience, or lived body, rather than the body as *Körper*, for example), even if this is also a point of departure. As such, this is a view that is widely shared by the phenomenological tradition. On the other hand, this condition would have many psychologists and cognitive scientists around the world agog, who tend to assume that our normal, everyday stance towards the other person is a third-personal, observational stance, in which we observe their behavior but posit the existence of inner mental states (e.g. beliefs and desires) in order to explain and predict their actions. Sartre's problems with such a perspective derive from a claim to the effect that any such view begs the question and presupposes what it is being asked to explain (e.g. mindedness, other people), or that as a "view from nowhere" it is not, in the end, an account of subjects or persons at all. Moreover, any third-personal accounts of inter-subjectivity (perhaps including any neuronal or sub-personal analyses, for example) will presuppose at least a minimal phenomenological psychology for it to be clear just what is being explained and how this hangs together with, or differs from, other related experiences that one is attempting to explain in regard to inter-subjectivity.

Necessary Condition 3

*This Cogito Cannot Reveal to Us the Other as Object (or Representation),
But Must Reveal the Other as Subject*

Sartre's third condition insists that our access to the other, and their role in our own conscious lives, should not be understood representationally. While Sartre seems to be primarily attempting to distance himself from idealism here, in which the other is guaranteed in a priori fashion, any representational treatment of the other (whether linguistic or cognitive) threatens to return us to the situation rejected by condition 1, in which other subjects are more or less probable conjectures or hypotheses. This third condition also entails that the other person cannot be adequately conceived of as another object of an additive sort²³—e.g. I perceive my desk, my computer, plus an ontologically equivalent sort of object: another person. While this additive relationship is certainly true from a putative view from nowhere, such a view cannot give us subjects, and hence inter-subjectivity, at all. The Copernican revolution, such as it is transformed by Sartre, enables us to appreciate the paradoxical experience that we have of the other person as precisely a subject (not an object, or representation for our visual field). That this needs to be understood as paradoxical, rather than part of

mundane everyday experience within the natural attitude, is attested to by all of the phenomenologists. Again, it is at least arguable that the expressivity of perceptual life already entails that the other is not a mere object within our perceptual field as Merleau-Ponty and Levinas would differently maintain, and this is certainly so if we accept with some phenomenologists that in “empathic perception” we apprehend the other as a subject (sympathy apprehends them as an object). Sartre’s third condition also seems to rule out epistemic proofs of the other that argue by analogy, or that posit the existence of the other as best explanation, since these accounts begin from the assumption that others are hidden and thus treat the other as a hypothetical object (or representation) within our social and visual field.

Necessary Condition 4

Theory of Intersubjectivity Must Involve an Internal Relation to that Other

Sartre’s final condition seems to partly derive from condition 1 and condition 3. An external relation to the other, conceived of as a relation between two separate substances in space, leaves us stuck within the reef of solipsism. The bird’s eye or external view will not suffice, however, being unable to countenance the internal relation between perceiver and perceived, through which inter-subjective meaning emerges. Sartre often characterizes this “internal relation” as an “internal negation”: the other must directly appear to the cogito as not being me. This “internal negation” is said to be a synthetic active connection of the two terms, each one of which constitutes itself by denying that it is the other.²⁴ Here we get Sartre’s appropriation of some Hegelian sentiments regarding a relationship of co-constitution between self and other, the enacting of understanding of each other through second-person interaction. While it is arguable that Sartre thus emphasizes negation in a way that the other phenomenologists do not, the idea of ascertaining an “internal relation” is rather more ubiquitous, being what is at stake in Heidegger’s insistence on the inextricability of being-in-the-world, and the relation between Dasein and Mitsein. It is also something that is evocatively explored in phenomenological treatments of bodily motility from Husserl and Hans Jonas, to Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty, for example, uses the idea of an internal relation in explicating the connection between self and other: “Between the phenomenal body of mine and that of another as I see it from outside, there exists an internal relation which causes the other to appear as the completion of a system.”²⁵ Earlier in *Phenomenology of Perception*, he puts it as follows: “It is precisely my body which perceives the body of another, and discovers in that body a prolongation of my own intentions, a familiar way of dealing with the world”²⁶—this familiarity is not at the level of judgments, or explicit world views or opinions, but motor or operative intentionality. We are solicited to respond to gestures as with the biting baby²⁷; we are expressive and condemned to meaning. Our proprioceptive sense of our own limbs develops in conjunction with the perception of other bodies through the various senses. This “internal relation” must, no doubt, have external causes, perhaps with mirror resonance processes among them as we will see, but admitting this connection takes us beyond isolated subjects and leads towards an account of the relationship between self and other as involving structural coupling, and towards what Merleau-Ponty sometimes calls an embodied inter-corporeity. In affirming the necessity of what he calls an internal relation, Sartre also distinguishes his approach from behaviorism. The

view must be embodied, and emphasize direct perception, but without reducing to behaviorism that is preoccupied less with person-level meanings and more with a view from outside.²⁸

Much more needs to be said about each of these four putative conditions for a theory of inter-subjectivity, and perhaps other conditions might be added to Sartre's. Nonetheless, in this short treatment I hope to have done enough to motivate the view that related ideas can also be readily gleaned from the work of other phenomenological philosophers. Moreover, these four conditions are not at all trivial. On the contrary, if they are substantially correct in addressing both the epistemic and descriptive problem(s) of other minds (at least from the first-person perspective), they also carry significant implications for contemporary interdisciplinary debates concerning social cognition, despite the fact that these latter debates are primarily about capturing the psychological processes at play, rather than offering a solution to the epistemic issue. In what follows I will suggest that this work has tended to neglect other research possibilities on account of their (often tacit) commitment to some basic assumptions that Sartre and other phenomenologists aim to do without. In particular, research regarding social understanding in psychology and the cognitive sciences has been sympathetic to the "hidden minds" idea (if not based upon it), as well as the notion that something more than perception is required for inter-subjectivity (e.g. representations, inferences, simulations, etc.), leading to a focus upon mentalistic and cognitive tests (aka the false-belief tests) to the detriment of other sorts of empirical enquiry that might be more perceptual, interactive, gestural, and narrative-based. Indeed, in his recent book, Shaun Gallagher questions the following four assumptions that continue to dominate research in social cognition, and which stand in stark contrast to Sartre's necessary conditions for an adequate theory of inter-subjectivity:

1. **Hidden minds**
Since we cannot directly perceive the other's beliefs, desires, feelings, or intentions, we need some extra-perceptual cognitive process (inference or simulation) to understand their mental states.
2. **Mindreading as Default**
These mindreading processes constitute our primary, pervasive, or default way of understanding others.
3. **Observational Stance**
Our normal everyday stance towards the other person is a third personal, observational stance. We observe their behavior in order to explain and predict their actions.
4. **Methodological Individualism**
Our understanding of others depends primarily on cognitive capabilities or mechanisms located in an individual subject.²⁹

Together these assumptions constitute something like a Kuhnian paradigm that constrains empirical research on social cognition. That they fail as a response to the epistemic problem of other minds may be of no serious concern for researchers in the field. It would be rather more troubling for them, however, if they do not serve as the best explanation of the empirical data concerning descriptive dimensions of the processes through which we interact with others, and this is a position that I want to begin to motivate in what follows.

Social Cognition in Theory Theory, Simulation Theory, and Beyond

For some time in the 1980s and 1990s, there were only two games in town when it came to attempting to explain our ability to understand and predict the behavior of others: Theory Theory and Simulation Theory.³⁰ Both TT and ST are predominantly focused on addressing the descriptive problem of other minds, but their analyses are nonetheless based on some epistemological assumptions that have been challenged in the phenomenological account just described, notably their conviction that direct perception is not sufficient to give us access to the mental states of others, and hence that inference, simulation, representation, or some other sort of mechanism (whether conscious or unconscious), is required to explain our understanding of others. While many recent approaches create hybrid positions that draw on both TT and ST, and are able to overcome some of the deficiencies in each, most of these views continue to share a “mind-reading” perspective regarding how we understand others. One way of criticizing such views is to point this out, since from a phenomenological perspective such views are still too Cartesian, not acknowledging that transcendental subjectivity is always transcendental inter-subjectivity, as Merleau-Ponty says following, but also transforming, Husserl.³¹ But there is little indication that a transcendental critique of contemporary cognitive science will be successful in transforming these debates surrounding social cognition, and we also face the problem of looking for a theory that does justice to *both* the evidences of experience and other sorts of evidences that may subtend or condition such first-person level experiences. For both pragmatic and intellectual reasons, then, for the remainder of this paper I will suggest that the competing empirical data drawn upon to legitimate TT and ST should in fact incline us to infer that the best explanation of this data is an account of inter-subjectivity that is congruent with many of the core insights we have discussed above. Briefly put, I will argue that the kind of “body reading” and direct perception view associated with many phenomenological thinkers is better able to explain a range of data from developmental psychology (for example, new-born infants respond to facial expressions with humans in a manner that seems to indicate inter-subjective awareness, language acquisition, etc.) and the cognitive sciences (for example, mirror neurons), but where there is no folk psychological theory about other minds evident and no room for inferential processes.

Theory Theory

On the standard TT view it is because we have acquired an implicit theory—a folk psychology—that we are able to both identify other minds and competently predict their behavior. TT is hence inferential and quasi-scientific, in that the mental states of others are thought to be akin to theoretical entities that we use to explain observed behavior.³² While the mental states of others are posited to be strictly unobservable, for TT we can nonetheless say that, “a theory about unobservables can be belief worthy if it allows us to explain and to predict some domain of observable phenomena better than any competing theory.”³³ According to TT, the unobservable mental states of others are thought to be similarly theoretical entities, belief in which is justified by their position in a theoretical framework that allows us to explain and predict observable bodily behavior. While it is not entirely clear what might falsify our attribution of belief-desire psychology to another human (unlike with the positing of

other unobservables like electrons), on this view human understanding of others—as opposed to sociality in other mammals—is largely mentalistic, dependent on the acquisition of belief-desire psychology, and more particularly the ability to ascribe different mental states from one’s own to others, and to see those mental states as functionally motivating their action. It presupposes that social cognition and knowledge of others is primarily based on our capacity to attribute motives to others in order to explain and predict their behavior. This attitude seems to be evinced by Kim Sterelny and Gregory Currie, for example, when they note that:

Mind-reading and the capacity to negotiate the social world are not the same thing, but the former seems to be necessary for the latter . . . our basic grip on the social world depends on our being able to see our fellows as motivated by beliefs and desires we sometimes share and sometimes do not.³⁴

Much of the scientific evidence for these kinds of views derive from empirical testing in psychology, in particular the various versions of the so-called “false-belief” tests, which show that at around the age of 4 children can distinguish their own beliefs from the beliefs of others. To be more precise, the child can understand that another person may have a false-belief (and one that differs from their own) because this other person is not aware, as they are, that for example the chocolates that were in a box were replaced with pencils when that other party was not looking. The child of 4 or more years can typically employ a theoretical stance towards others and can explain and predict the other’s behavior: they apprehend that the agent they are observing will think (and act as if) there are chocolates inside the chocolate box when in fact there are not: they can hence decouple the concept of a mental state from the world by thinking of mental states as possibly false.³⁵ Prior to this, it is maintained that children are egocentrically stuck in their own present beliefs, or have a confused understanding of self and other, and in either case are unable to understand how others could think differently due to their different perspective on a given event.

Without wishing to dispute that something developmentally important happens at this age that these tests highlight, we should note that the false-belief tests involve asking the child to take a third-person stance in regard to some agent, but there is no direct interaction with that agent, other than through the intermediary of the questioner who is setting the test. In that sense, the child is asked to make a distanced prediction (to mind-read, and to infer), rather than to use their developing skills in gestural communicativity (to body-read, and to directly perceive). Indeed, if there is much gestural communication between the person who sets the test and the infant undertaking it, the test will fail since embodied expressions (a wry grin, say) will influence results. As with Alan Turing’s famous test for artificial intelligence, the false-belief tests rule out the possibility of such natural embodied responses, and by understanding social intelligence as the capacity to attribute beliefs and mental states to others they focus upon an individual’s capacity to theorise “about an absent non-participatory third party.”³⁶ But, as Shaun Gallagher points out, if second-person embodied and expressive interaction is primary, then Theory Theorists are faced with a significant question.³⁷ Why think that what is revealed by the false-belief test and the ability of the child to attain to a third-person perspective is the explanatory key to social life more generally?

Moreover, other empirical data from developmental psychology complicates this sort of picture in which metalizing, inferring, or theorizing, are said to be central to

social cognition, and, by contrast, arguably lends support to the core dimensions of the phenomenological accounts sketched above, especially as concerns the claims of direct perception. Very briefly, children selectively imitate and play with other human faces almost straight away from birth,³⁸ and can pick human faces out from a crowd of random objects and animal faces, thus differentiating humans from non-humans and being interested predominantly in the former. Other forms of expressive understanding are also evidenced well before the ability to ascribe false-beliefs to others, such as perceiving bodily movement and voices as expressive of emotions and intentions,³⁹ responding appropriately to the emotional expressions of others,⁴⁰ being able to understand complex activities like pointing, and from 9 months jointly attending (with another person) to a perceptual object.⁴¹ This involves looking back and forth to check if the parent's gaze is appropriately directed in relation to their own gaze, and hence is genuinely joint attention rather than separate but simultaneous looking. Likewise, young infants look to the eyes of the other person to apprehend the meaning of an ambiguous event. These sorts of data give some *prima facie* support for the direct perception view and for the fundamental role of one's body-schema in interacting with others, with inference and simulations seemingly not required.

What might the Theory Theorist say about this? They will need to engage with the data about early neonatal responsiveness and interaction with others, but they will certainly be quick to dismiss a straight phenomenological account, since while they are likely to concede that the phenomenological description is accurate enough on its own level, they will be committed to its epistemic insufficiency. For example, most will concede the basic phenomenological claim that we are not typically consciously aware of elaborate inferential reasoning processes when interacting with others in "normal" everyday situations (the experience of autism, and of complex political theorizing, are some obvious counter-examples), but will add that it may be that over a period of time our habits and skills have allowed conscious inferential processes to recede into the background but still be functionally efficacious, replaced by sophisticated cognitive processes that might be called off-line inferring. This cannot be ruled out *tout court*. As Overgaard puts it:

The phenomenologists' perceptual approach to other minds is inconsistent with *personal*-level inferentialism, if this is understood as the view that *we* (as opposed to some part of our cognitive machinery) always infer others' emotions. But the approach is consistent with sub-personal "inferentialism", and it would be unwise of phenomenologists to suggest otherwise.⁴²

Overgaard is certainly right in regard to adult life. Our phenomenological experiences are indeed compatible with the existence of processes that subtend or undergird it that we may want to call "inferential," or think of as involving theory production. However, whether inference is the essence of our (sometimes) skillful dealings with others, or they are reducible to such tacit inferential processes, is able to be doubted on at least three grounds, each of which is arguably insufficient on their own to cast aside such "mind-reading" models but taken together constitute a significant hurdle for such views: empirical data regarding skill acquisition; the cognitive impenetrability of our perception of core emotional expressions; and the proto understanding of others evinced from an early age.

The first sort of objection to an inferential hypothesis of the sort typically favored by TT comes from the various studies conducted by Hubert Dreyfus (sometimes with his brother Stuart), which place empirical pressure on the idea that expertise consists in the internalization of a series of more and more sophisticated rules and principles⁴³—and this is a view that is basically shared by the Theory Theorist in regard to our interactions with other people and our acquisition of “folk psychology,” at least where they were not invoking an innate mind-reading module. This is a long and hotly disputed story, but Dreyfus’ work suggests that if we think that intelligence and expertise is fundamentally the internalization of a series of if-then principles of an inferential nature, then we ought to expect AI to exceed human levels of expertise in skill domains that require significant flexibility and adaptability in real time. But AI has not yet achieved this and nor does it seem to be significantly closer to realizing this aim, as many of its practitioners concede, thus suggesting that while sub-personal mechanisms that we may want to call inferences may be involved, they are not the whole story or the essence of cognition, whether it be social cognition or otherwise.

A second sort of objection would be more conceptual. Overgaard, for example, points out that what we call inferences are standardly able to be revised and/or blocked, and this should also be true (albeit more difficult) for those inferences that are said to have become subconscious or habituated over a period of time.⁴⁴ This can be done through training and the acquisition of new habits, and sometimes even through reasoning and having something brought to one’s conscious attention. Perhaps, for example, the policeman who sees an indigenous Australian or an African-American, and makes the snap judgment that they are dangerous and draws a weapon and fires, is using subconscious and habituated inferences, rather more than perception. Even though it occurs instantaneously and without any explicit racist thoughts intruding into their consciousness, we might maintain that they are processing fast-tracked inferences here, and those inferences may be based on previous experiences and associations (with social and historical causes, like poverty and marginalization, as well, possibly, as latent racism). But these sorts of inferences, Overgaard plausibly maintains, are revisable under pressure, and with training, etc., in a way that perceptions of some core emotional expressions, in particular, do not seem to be. Someone simply looks angry *tout court*, even if we judge later or after the event it was feigned. Overgaard suggests that we might compare this to the perception of the well-known Müller-Lyer illusion. Our judgment that the lines are equal when we check with a ruler, or are told this by a teacher or psychologist, does not change the way it looks to us. Overgaard’s claim (borrowing the terms from Zenon Pylyshyn) is that if there is cognitive impenetrability of this sort in the perception of core emotional expressions like anger, as there seems to be, then we should be inclined to call it perception rather than inference.⁴⁵

Finally, the empirical data concerning early infant interaction with others (prior to them being able to pass the false-belief tests) seems to put the burden of proof on to those attributing inferences, or inferential processes all the way down. The neonatal capacities described above seem to indicate a proto or primary inter-subjectivity that functions via the perception of embodied intentionality, rather more than through inferences, theories, etc., and they hence pose an explanatory problem for TT.

Of course, the proponent of TT has various possible responses to such findings, including retreating to a hybrid position that incorporates ST, or drawing on recent (contested) data surrounding *non-verbal* false-belief tests in developmental psychology

and advocating the existence of an innate theory of mind module (or even two such modules).⁴⁶ The findings suggest that 15 month old infants will, given a scenario in which an agent is searching for an object that might be in one of two places, look for longer periods of time in the places that one would expect the agent to look if their behavior was guided by knowledge of the agent's true or false belief regarding the toy's hiding place.⁴⁷ It is the incongruent event, the violation of expectation when an agent searches in the place that is contrary to their own false-belief, which results in more sustained visual attention. And, unlike the more famous false-belief tests, there is no need for a reflective explanation or prediction in these experiments. The child simply responds to stimuli without the need to give a verbal report or explicitly predict anything, but some kind of false-belief understanding seems implicitly apparent in their intelligent behavior and practices. These tests are not theoretical and third-personal in the same way as the 4 year old false-belief tests, and yet they seem to have as their condition of possibility some responsiveness to the invisible (or at least not currently visible) beliefs of others.⁴⁸ Although this view has the advantage of not postulating any radical transition from egocentricity to inter-subjectivity without prior precursors at the age of 4, it arguably transfers the problem to an earlier stage where the notion of representations (given the minimal linguistic capacities of 15 month old infants) has less intuitive traction and the "promiscuity objection" might be leveled against it⁴⁹: the notion of a "representation" or a "theory of mind" or "inference" becomes so broad that it leaves behind ordinary linguistic meaning and it is difficult to see what is at stake in the debate. Moreover, the necessity for such a move has not been provided. It is true that one way to explain the empirical data would be to posit a theory of mind module that represents the beliefs and desires of others, which either develops at this point (around 15 months) or is innate, but this is a strong interpretation, and it is not one that is strictly forced upon us by the empirical data. Dan Hutto, for example, develops alternative accounts, and it might be disputed that these 15 month old non-verbal false belief tests require the postulation of representations or a tacit ascription of folk-psychological attitudes. We might simply be "biased" in favor of knowing where the object was last seen, and we might understand others as dispositionally inclined in this way too.⁵⁰ Or, perhaps there is some non-representationalist module doing the work here. In other words, there is an under-determination of observation by theory, and the data itself does not rule out other positions not so beholden to the representationalist view (including behaviorist construals). Carruthers is exaggerating when he claims that there is "simply no other way of explaining our competence in this domain."⁵¹ It is far from clear that the data concerning pre-verbal false belief tests suffice to rescue TT from the empirical and conceptual difficulties enumerated here.

Simulation Theory

Let us consider, however, the second and more recent account of our social understanding, ST. On this view, we represent the mental activities of others by mentally simulating them, or by simulating similar activities and processes (for some versions of ST this is said to happen at the subconscious level). The explicit version of ST remains within the "argument by analogy" paradigm of understanding others, although primarily concerned with the descriptive rather than justificatory dimension of our knowledge of others. Rather than maintaining that we have some general information (or theory) that makes it possible, we use our own mind (and behavioral

processes) as a model of what the other's mind might be like, mainly through imagination according to Alvin Goldman and others.⁵² For Goldman, we have a privileged understanding of our own mind through introspection, and using these resources we create "pretend states" that enable us to put ourselves in the other's shoes.⁵³

Such a view is beset by complications, at least if it is meant to genuinely be an all-encompassing theory of social cognition. First, neonates and infants are not able to consciously perform these sorts of simulations, but still seem to show a minimal understanding of others as we have seen. Moreover, to try and consciously put ourselves in the other's shoes presupposes that we already have some understanding that they are in fact others, and it thus begs the question about how this may have come about. Another problem is that there seems to be little phenomenological evidence of the indispensability of such introspective and imaginative simulations to our everyday dealings with others even in an average adult life. This sort of imaginative technique also presupposes that we have reliable and intimate knowledge concerning our own mental life. This may be challenged on many grounds, of course, but even if we concede that we do have such privileged self-knowledge, it is not clear that it suffices to provide a basis for knowledge of other people, especially in situations of significant cultural, historical, or temperamental diversity. Could Mother Teresa, for example, adequately imagine/simulate the mental states, beliefs and desires of Adolf Hitler?

Another solution to these kinds of problems with ST (entertained by Goldman himself) is to abandon any insistence upon the importance of conscious introspection and imagination, and to maintain that the simulations/inferences are subconscious or sub-personal, thus bypassing the phenomenological objection to ST. Phenomenology, after all, does not directly say anything about brain processes, and that level of analysis might be thought to reveal that phenomenological accounts are the victim of something like what Benjamin Libet famously calls a "user-illusion."⁵⁴ There are, however, some methodological problems associated with this potential move. Although some versions of TT and all versions of implicit ST argue that this inferential understanding of others happens subconsciously, they use terms like explanation and prediction, which are things we consciously do. They also invoke psychology tests like the (standard) false-belief test in which children are asked to consciously and reflectively perform a given task, thus again clearly invoking the first-person level.⁵⁵

But what of the developing evidence regarding a new class of visuo-motor neurons, mirror neurons, which might be claimed—unlike the false-belief tests—to indicate that we "explain" and "predict" at a sub-personal neurological level, and which might be thought to be the result of certain kinds of second-person interactions? Neuroscience shows that mirror neurons are activated in the brain both when a person acts and when the person observes similar actions performed by another person (particularly grasping activities). The very same neurons activate, as if they were themselves the agents of that action,⁵⁶ and proponents of implicit ST tend to draw connections between these findings and older data concerning the "motor contagion" of early infancy, such as the imitating of facial expressions (e.g. tongue protuberance), and the apparent transitivity of crying babies. These generally reliable and well-attested data⁵⁷ are often interpreted as neurologically reliant upon mirror resonance processes. While the relevant empirical studies are in a state of some infancy, they do seem to suggest that the human brain has systems that may be activated either "endogenously—for

example, by the output of one's own decision-making, emotion-formation, or pain perception systems—or exogenously, directly fed by the sight of other human faces and bodies.”⁵⁸ In fact, Robert Gordon's formulation here is quite neutral and probably one that various direct perception and phenomenological theorists may be able to accept. However, he and other implicit ST theories typically go further than this, adding some debatable philosophical assumptions into the mix when interpreting such empirical data. For them, such data suggests that one perceives the other and there is then a subconscious activation of mirror neurons that internally represent/replicate the experience that is being externally perceived. As such, on the view of many implicit Simulation Theorists, other minds remain fundamentally hidden and what is required to have knowledge of others' mental states is perception, plus this extra additional subconscious representation/replication stage that is dependent on mirror resonance processes.

Gallagher is well-known for raising some potentially telling objections to implicit ST's ascription of the centrality of “simulation” and “representations” to such imitative activities. First, these imitative activities do not seem to be merely reflexive or instinctive—children can emulate their parents' expressions after a time lag, but it is commonly accepted that reflexes do not jump temporal gaps.⁵⁹ Instead, infants adjust their expressions over periods of time and only gradually come to match their expressions with the target gesture. As such, they register the difference between self and other, and can perfect their gesture, arguably without consulting an internal plan or map, but simply by deploying their non-representational proprioceptive sense of their own body and reacting to the visual perception in front of them.⁶⁰ Second, it is worth noting that mirror neurons are activated only 30–100 ms after visual stimulation, which is a typical time-period for information to get from the sensory cortex to the premotor cortex and does not suggest that anything unusual is occurring that might require more time for modeling or a separate internal simulation.⁶¹ There hence seems to be no neurological evidence of a two-step, functionally distinct process. In fact, Gallagher suggests that implicit ST's account of mirror resonance processes would actually involve a four-step process: see an action; simulate it in our brain/motor system; attribute agency for the action; infer or understand the other's experience.⁶²

Again, there are also conceptual questions regarding why these sub-personal processes should be characterized as simulations (or as subconscious inferences for that matter), when “simulations” on the usual understanding involves reference to either pretense, with an agent who does the pretending/simulating, or to an instrumental model that we can use to understand some other thing? Neither of these definitions seems to be involved in the use that *implicit* ST makes of the term simulation.⁶³ It is difficult to know what to make of the notions of simulation, pretense, etc., when they are taken from their more typical first-personal uses and super-imposed on to third-person neurological processes. Without a clear answer to these kinds of conceptual issues, it at least seems that these neural resonance processes may be better understood as *part of* perception rather than something that comes *after* perception and is separate to it (involving subconscious inferences and/or simulations), as implicit ST standardly contends. Are there internal replicas or representations of the other involved here (an internal map, or representational plan), or are they directly part of the perceptual apprehension without intermediary in the manner that philosophers like Merleau-Ponty, Scheler, and other phenomenologists (as well as some direct realists) have maintained? The scientific findings and empirical data certainly do not rule out this

latter possibility. In fact, given the continuing applicability of our earlier discussion of the objections of Dreyfus and Overgaard in regard to attributing unconscious inferences and simulations all the way down, it is arguable that the most parsimonious explanation of an array of empirical data concerning social cognition derives from phenomenologists committed to the direct perception view. They are compatible with the neurological data that supports implicit ST, but most proponents of implicit ST often add some debatable philosophical assumptions into the mix that betray a residual commitment to the hidden minds hypothesis.

Conclusion: An Inferential Justification for the Non-Inferential Methods of Phenomenology?

What I hope to have begun to do in this paper, then, is firstly to combat the idea that there is such diversity and heterogeneity in phenomenology as to make the very idea of a research program obviously untenable (via a discussion of some principles in Sartre). Secondly, and more consequentially, I have also sought to offer an inferential justification at the meta-level (and engaging with the relevant empirical sciences) for some of the non-inferential commitments at the heart of phenomenological treatments of inter-subjectivity. This may sound paradoxical and even contradictory, but I do not think that it is. Consider two of the questions that we have been considering in this paper: do people standardly need to simulate/infer/theorize in order to understand others, whether consciously or unconsciously?; do we need inferences in order to be able to claim to have justified knowledge of others? Even if we answer no to both of the above questions, as many phenomenologists will, it is still the case that a philosopher must consider how their responses to such questions compare with other theories, and there are hence meta-level questions about any given theory that will involve inferential considerations. No philosopher exists in a theoretical vacuum, and although this theorization should be minimized when engaging in phenomenological description, it cannot, and should not, be bracketed away in meta-theoretical and meta-philosophical considerations. Such a view would seem to be poised precariously close to doxa or epistemic chauvinism. As such, it is time to acknowledge and confront what I take the implications of this sort of analysis to be for phenomenology itself.

While phenomenology may seem to be self-sufficient, and is standardly conceived of as not being concerned with explanation or inference,⁶⁴ or what is sometimes called the “best fit” approach to philosophical theorizing, I do not believe this ever was the whole story in practice, notwithstanding various methodological reminders and programmatic statements to that effect. While it is true that the kind of justification for certain conclusions that I have reached in the second half of this paper have (often) been extra-phenomenological, empirical rather more than transcendental (but not only empirical), and while it is true that this is not a route that Sartre, Husserl or Heidegger themselves took, they did not do without inference *tout court* whatever their methodological precepts may suggest. For me, this extra-phenomenological dimension is compatible with the preservation of “phenomenology,” and even with the preservation of *transcendental* phenomenology, understood as invoking temporalized and historicized conditions.⁶⁵ It is not simply an external supplement to the principle of all principles, but something that should be present in all phenomenological reflections concerned with issues that exist at the intersection of any transcendental/empirical distinction, and we have seen that this is manifestly the case in regard to

inter-subjectivity and the sciences of social cognition. That a distinction is not pure does not entail, however, that the first-person must be reduced to the third-person, for example, or that we must exclusively defer to scientific explanation on any and all matters.

A nice way of conceptualizing the kind of model of mutual constraint between phenomenology and empirical science that I have in mind was recently put forward by Michael Wheeler.⁶⁶ The structural claim that I find compelling in his work is that there ought to be something akin to a feedback loop between phenomenological reflections on what he calls constitutive conditions (inter-subjectivity), and scientific explanation and prediction concerning what he calls enabling conditions (social cognition). While only relatively rarely will the sort of claims from each domain overlap precisely enough that the one simply falsifies the other, nor is it that either domain can simply ignore the other and seek to preserve an autonomous and inviolable sphere. They should exercise mutual constraints upon each other, with phenomenological analyses of constitutive conditions opening up potential research programs,⁶⁷ and causal and scientific findings concerning enabling conditions likewise able to motivate a renewed turn and perspective upon the things themselves.

Even if one has reservations about this sort of meta-philosophical understanding of phenomenology that might be called dialectical, including whether or not it is a properly phenomenological position, my basic argument in this paper is framed such that it should be acceptable to those philosophers who are committed to a more autonomous conception of phenomenology as transcendental. At the very least, these inferential considerations from empirical data serve as what Gallagher calls the “empirical shadow” of transcendental accounts of inter-subjectivity,⁶⁸ and provide some indirect support for it. They also promise to transform the field of social cognition for the better, since some of the commitments at the heart of phenomenology help to provide the best explanation of an array of empirical data concerning social cognition, whether we are thinking of developmental psychology or some of the incipient neuroscience pertaining to the discovery of mirror neurons. Without thinking that it would be a matter of simple empirical confirmation of a philosophical view, and without thinking that this trajectory exhausts phenomenology in general, it hence seems that there is a coherent and viable phenomenological research program that rethinks central commitments of the inferentialist mind-reading paradigm, offering alternative explanations of the empirical data, and promising to induce something like a paradigm shift from predominantly inferential and mentalistic approaches to social cognition to alternative sorts of inquiry that focus on perception, gesture, narrativity, interaction, etc. Of course, the jury is still out in regard to just how fertile such a theoretical pairing might be, since it depends on the dialectical relationship between the given philosophical theory and what is revealed by new empirical investigations that have been shorn of some (arguably) faulty assumptions with which they have labored. Nonetheless, there are important resources within the phenomenological tradition for motivating and guiding more radical revisions within contemporary work on social cognition. Moreover, an adequate theory of inter-subjectivity must be able to work on all of these levels—the personal and the pre-personal, the description and justificatory problem of other minds, etc.—and I hope to have presented some reasons to think that empirically-minded phenomenology currently presents the best package deal, managing to show, to borrow from Wilfrid Sellars’ infamously opaque but nonetheless apposite metaphilosophical remark,

“how things, in the largest sense of the term, hang together, in the largest sense of the term.”

Notes

- 1 Jack Reynolds is Professor of Philosophy at Deakin University. He has a forthcoming book entitled *Phenomenology, Naturalism and Empirical Science: A Hybrid and Heretical Proposal* (Routledge, 2016/17) and is author of *Chronopathologies: The Politics of Time in Deleuze, Derrida, Analytic Philosophy and Phenomenology* (2012), *Analytic Versus Continental: Arguments on the Methods and Value of Philosophy* (2010, with James Chase), *Merleau-Ponty and Derrida: Intertwining Embodiment and Alterity* (2004), and *Understanding Existentialism*.
- 2 Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the Australasian Association of Philosophy conference in 2013, and the Merleau-Ponty Circle in New York in 2012, and I am indebted to the feedback I received at these forums. This essay was also inspired by some work done with Søren Overgaard, Shaun Gallagher and Edoardo Zamuner, as well as discussions with Peter Woelert and Ricky Sebold.
- 3 There have been, after all, innumerable reinventions and metamorphoses of phenomenology over the years, and central methodological ideas like the *epoché* remain contested. There is also something about phenomenology’s transcendental ambitions—which might be thought to secure a special subject domain, exclusive to phenomenology—and the impetus towards waking to wonder and perpetual beginnings, which may incline one to be suspicious of anything like the idea of a phenomenological research program in concert with empirical science. But for an interesting argument for the compatibility of what he calls a domesticated transcendental and empirical explanation, see Michael Wheeler, “Science Friction: Phenomenology, Naturalism and Cognitive Science,” *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 72 (2013): 135–167.
- 4 Cf. David Morris, “From the Nature of Meaning to a Phenomenological Refiguring of Nature” *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*, 72 (2013): 317–341.
- 5 Consider, for example, Merleau-Ponty’s famous discussions concerning bodily motility in *Phenomenology of Perception*, and the claim that grasping is a condition of possibility of pointing. For him, the ability to point to one’s nose (an abstract, reflective activity), depends on one’s ability to grasp one’s nose (a practical response to solicitation from the world, say a mosquito bite, or a need to scratch). This claim is made by Merleau-Ponty based on studies of the injuries that afflict a pathological patient (Schneider), phenomenological descriptions of what is involved in these two ways of inhabiting space, the alleged inabilities of empiricism and intellectualism to adequately describe or explain either the phenomenology or the empirical facts of the case (hence it involves inference to a better explanation), and also transcendental reflection about enabling conditions for our experience of the world (motor intentionality).
- 6 The latter of which is something like what Derrida’s engagement with this tradition shows, albeit without the recuperative move that I will make here that retains an essential place for a more modest conception of phenomenology.
- 7 To provide a few examples: Levinas criticizes Merleau-Ponty’s thesis of reversibility and instead emphasizes the asymmetry of the face of the other as necessarily outside of any such fleshly intertwining; in *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty distances himself from Sartre’s conflictual picture of inter-subjectivity, and he also dismisses Sartre’s “agnosticism in regard to the other” in *The Visible and the Invisible*; Sartre rejects Heidegger’s conception of *Mitsein* in *Being and Nothingness* and his assumption of a “crew” for presupposing the other in apriorist fashion rather than encountering the other qua other, e.g. as genuinely different and as a singular concrete other (Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, translated by Hazel Barnes, London: Routledge, 1995, 292); Heidegger distances himself from Husserl and Scheler in regard to their reliance upon empathy. Nonetheless, for a good summary of these family disputes which teases out four different approaches characteristic of the phenomenological tradition, but also seems to accord with my arguments regarding them having shared targets and shared minimal conditions for a

- satisfactory account of the other, see Dan Zahavi, "Beyond Empathy: Phenomenological Approaches to Intersubjectivity," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 8 (2001): 151–167.
- 8 This list comes from some collaborative work done with Søren Overgaard and Shaun Gallagher. My recollection is that it is primarily Overgaard's summary.
 - 9 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 250.
 - 10 I think that any such theory must engage with the relevant sciences and Sartre does not do this. He does, however, draw significantly on Gestalt psychology and discusses findings from empirical psychology concerning the imagination in his pre-*Being and Nothingness* work, as Gallagher emphasizes (cf. Shaun Gallagher, *Phenomenology*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, 74–75).
 - 11 Quassim Cassam, *The Possibility of Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 2.
 - 12 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 250.
 - 13 Cassam, *Possibility of Knowledge*, 2. Cf. Søren Overgaard, "Other People," In *Oxford Handbook of Phenomenology*, edited by Dan Zahavi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 462.
 - 14 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, translated by Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), 214.
 - 15 Max Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Press, 1954), 260.
 - 16 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 346. Basically, then, Sartre maintains there is direct perceptual access to others in emotions like anger, albeit of a different nature to our access to our own anger. This should not surprise us, unduly, given that Sartre maintains that the body is a synthetic totality of life and action (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 346), and that he holds that we can viscerally and directly perceive bad faith, it being nothing other than its expression. It might be thought that any such direct perception view fits uneasily with other aspects of Sartre's writings on inter-subjectivity. After all, it is Sartre for whom the perspective of the other eludes and frustrates us in our concrete relations with them, whether that be in regard to love, desire, etc. But perhaps there is no incompatibility here. For Sartre, our relations with other people are not conflictual because we are stuck with hypothesizing about others, inferring what it is they are up to in an intellectualist's horror scenario. While the other is given to us directly in their embodiment, for Sartre, their constitutive freedom also means that when we seize on this, or attempt to pin it down as a basis for our own self-knowledge, it is inevitably the other as they *were* rather than currently *are* that we grasp.
 - 17 Cf. Søren Overgaard, "Rethinking Other Minds: Wittgenstein and Levinas on Expression," *Inquiry* 48 (2005): 249–274.
 - 18 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 251.
 - 19 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 260.
 - 20 See Mark Sacks, "Sartre, Strawson and Others," *Inquiry* 48 (2005): 275–299.
 - 21 Huw Price, *Naturalism without Mirrors*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, 186.
 - 22 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*.
 - 23 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 254.
 - 24 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 252.
 - 25 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 410.
 - 26 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 354.
 - 27 Ibid.
 - 28 Overgaard helpfully puts this point in regard to the work of Merleau-Ponty:

When the other person is angry, this is what her wrinkled forehead, her glare, and her threatening gestures *are*: a way of coming to grips with some part of her environment as galling, say. By contrast, when a person merely pretends to be angry, those gestures, that glare, etc., are something altogether different. They are still not *mere* bodily movements – as they might perhaps be if a person had a series of ticks that happened to look exactly like a fit of anger. But they are not ways of coming to grips with the galling character of the world either. So when Merleau-Ponty says that the angry gesture "is" the anger, he is not identifying anger with mere bodily movement. On the contrary, he is *denying* that the gesture, in this sort of case, is a mere bodily movement. (Overgaard, "Other People," 476.)

- 29 Shaun Gallagher, *Phenomenology* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 194.
- 30 Shaun Nicholls and Stephen Stich, *Mindreading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 133.
- 31 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, xiii, 361.
- 32 David Lewis, "How to Define Theoretical Terms," *Journal of Philosophy* 67 (1970): 17–25.
- 33 Paul Churchland, *Matter and Consciousness*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), 71.
- 34 Gregory Currie and Kim Sterelny, "How to Think About the Modularity of Mind-Reading," *Philosophical Quarterly* 50 (200): 145–160.
- 35 Philip Gerrans, "Imitation and Theory of Mind," in *Handbook of Neuroscience for the Behavioural Sciences*, edited by John Caccioppo and Gary Bernston (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).
- 36 Beata Stawarska, *Between You and I: Dialogical Phenomenology* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009), 101.
- 37 Shaun Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 218.
- 38 Shaun Gallagher and Andrew Meltzoff, "The Earliest Sense of Self and Others," *Philosophical Psychology* 9 (1996): 213–236; Andrew Meltzoff, and M. Keith Moore, "Imitation, Memory, and the Representation of Persons," *Infant Behaviour and Development* 17 (1994): 83–99.
- 39 Alison Gopnik and Andrew Meltzoff, *Words, Thoughts and Theories* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997); Brian Scholl and Patrice Tremoulet, "Perceptual Causality and Animacy," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 4 (2000): 299–309.
- 40 Vasudevi Reddy, *How Infants Know Minds* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).
- 41 Michael Tomasello, *Constructing a Language* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).
- 42 Overgaard, "Other People," 468.
- 43 Hubert L. Dreyfus, "Intelligence Without Representation – Merleau-Ponty's Critique of Mental Representation the Relevance of Phenomenology to Scientific Explanation," *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 1 (2002): 367–383.
- 44 Overgaard, "Other People," 467.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 For a discussion of this, see Dan Hutto, "Basic Cognition without Mind-reading," *Synthese*, forthcoming
- 47 Kristine Onishi and Renée Baillargeon, "Do 15-month-old Infants Understand False Beliefs?" *Science* 308 (2005): 255–258; Victoria Southgate, Atsushi Senju, and Gergely Csibra, "Action Anticipation through Attribution of False Belief by Two-year-olds," *Psychological Science* 18 (2007): 587–592.
- 48 Mitchell Herschbach, "False-Belief Understanding and the Phenomenological Critics of Folk Psychology," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 15 (2008): 33–56.
- 49 Dan Zahavi, "Expression and Empathy," in *Folk Psychology Reassessed*, edited by Daniel Hutto and Mathew Ratcliffe (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007), 25–40.
- 50 Matthew Ratcliffe, *Rethinking Commonsense Psychology: A Critique of Folk Psychology, Theory of Mind and Simulation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 53–54.
- 51 P. Carruthers, "Mindreading Underlies Metacognition," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 32 (2009): 167.
- 52 See, e.g., Alvin Goldman, "Interpretation Psychologized," *Mind and Language* 4 (1989): 161–185.
- 53 Alvin Goldman, *Simulating Minds: The Philosophy, Psychology, and Neuroscience of Mindreading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 80–81.
- 54 Benjamin Libet, "Do We Have Free Will?" *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 6 (1999): 47–57. Libet's experiments seem to show that our conscious experience of making decisions is actually misleading. When we are conscious of having made a decision, in actual fact the decision was made (judging by neural activity) about 300 milliseconds earlier. What do such findings mean for phenomenology? Such data would be taken by most phenomenologists to support (rather than falsify) their view, in that embodied intentionality is shown to operate at a different level from conscious reflective decision-making (roughly the know-how/

know-that distinction), and the manner in which the former kind of pre-reflective motor intentionality is always-already at work.

- 55 Gallagher, *Body*, 215.
- 56 Christian Keysers and Valeria Gazzola, "Social Neuroscience: Mirror Neurons Recorded in Humans," *Current Biology* 20 (2010): 353–354.
- 57 But cf. Stawarska, *Between You and I*, 100.
- 58 Robert Gordon, "Folk Psychology as Mental Stimulation," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2009 Edition), edited by Edward Zalta.
- 59 Stawarska, *Between You and I*, 99.
- 60 Gallagher, *Body*, 226.
- 61 Shaun Gallagher, "Logical and Phenomenological Arguments Against Simulation Theory," in *Folk Psychology Re-Assessed*, edited by Daniel Hutto and Matthew Ratcliffe (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007), 71.
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 Shaun Gallagher, and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind* (London: Routledge, 2007), 179.
- 64 Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *Phenomenological Mind*.
- 65 Cf. Wheeler, "Science Friction."
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 See Gallagher, *Phenomenology*.
- 68 Shaun Gallagher, "The Shadow of the Transcendental: Social Cognition in Merleau-Ponty and Cognitive Science," in *Corporeity and Affectivity*, edited by Karel Novotny (Brill, 2007).

18 Max Scheler and the Stratification of the Emotional Life¹

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Although Scheler's stratification of the emotional life constitutes one of the most insightful phenomenological analyses of affectivity, its significance remains harshly underestimated. This article offers a detailed study of Scheler's stratification, paying close attention to the context that surrounds it as well as the motives and criteria that underlie it. I maintain that the straightforward interpretation of the stratification needs to be abandoned since it severely conflicts with experiential evidence. I further argue that Scheler's stratification lends itself to at least three different interpretations and I endorse that interpretation, which is supported best by the evidence of experience.

Keywords: Scheler; phenomenology; feelings; emotions; stratification of affectivity

In [Chapter 5](#) of Max Scheler's *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Value*,² we come across a brief section, significantly titled "The Stratification of the Emotional Life." Despite its brevity, this section contains some of the most profound insights in Scheler's works in general. The fact that numerous references to this stratification are scattered throughout Scheler's other works is indicative of the highly significant role this stratification plays in his writings. Moreover, this stratification is also of great importance for the phenomenological tradition as a whole, if only because to this day, Scheler has provided us with *the most elaborate stratification of affectivity in phenomenology in general*.

Nonetheless, despite all that is unprecedented, unrivaled and unsurpassed in Scheler's account of the different levels that constitute our emotional lives, his stratification appears to suffer from a disturbing deficiency. The problem is that *not just sometimes, but all-too-often* Scheler's stratification seems to conflict with the evidence of experience. I would contend that Scheler's contribution to the philosophy of emotions will remain underappreciated for as long as it is not shown that these alleged conflicts with experiential evidence derive from a flawed conception of Scheler's stratification. Such, then, is the goal of the following investigation: to readdress the question concerning the seemingly endless tensions that arise when Scheler's account of affectivity is subjected to the test of experience. To this end, it will prove necessary to draw a distinction between different interpretations of Scheler's stratification. But before turning to these interpretations, it is first necessary to reflect on the *context*, *motives*, and *criteria* that underlie Scheler's analysis of affectivity; moreover, it is also necessary to address Scheler's *stratification* in some detail. Only after taking these steps will we be able to turn to different *problems* that the stratification gives rise to as well as indicate their possible *resolution*.

The Context

Among the commentaries on Scheler's stratification of the emotional life, Quentin Smith's³ and, more recently, Robert Zaborowski's⁴ and Zhang Wei's⁵ analyses deserve a special notice.⁶ All three provide subtle and rich analyses that emphasize the unprecedented character of Scheler's stratification, its forgotten place in the history of ideas, its indebtedness to Husserl phenomenology, as well as its significance for contemporary philosophy of emotions. Yet arguably, despite their numerous strengths, the available accounts do not lay sufficient emphasis either on the *context*, or the *motive*, or the *criteria* that underlie Scheler's reflections.⁷ Yet the context, motive and criteria in question are of significance, for they reveal that Scheler did not conceive of his stratification as an end in itself, but rather as a means designed to serve a significantly larger purpose. As far as the context is concerned, three points call for a special emphasis.

1. Scheler's stratification of the emotional life is designed to support the central goals that lie at the heart of his *phenomenological ethics*. One of these goals is to show that *all values are correlated with feelings*; another goal is to establish a *hierarchy between different kinds of values*. Yet is it possible to accomplish such a twofold task without providing a corollary stratification of feelings? The answer is *No*. Therefore, with the aim of realizing the fundamental goals of Scheler's ethics, it becomes necessary to raise the hypothesis that our emotional lives are stratified.

2. One should not overlook Scheler's general goal to situate his phenomenological account of affectivity between two positions: (Kantian) formalism and (Wundtian) sensualism. The anti-Kantian strand in Scheler's ethical writings is plainly visible. For Scheler, feelings, considered in their sensible, vital, psychic and spiritual modalities, constitute the fundamental and irreplaceable basis that underlies the subject's intuitive exposure of the world of values, which in its own turn is comprised of sensible, vital, spiritual and holy values.⁸ To be sure, in the absence of feeling-intentionality, consciousness could still be *conceptually* exposed to the above-mentioned values. Nonetheless, if such exposure were *purely* conceptual, the consciousness of values would lack emotive intuitive support and fulfillment. And thus, to a consciousness capable only of cognitive intentionality, such values as enjoyable and non-enjoyable, noble and base, beautiful and ugly, holy and unholy would remain emotively meaningless.

Although the anti-sensualistic tendency is not as easy to discern, it is no less important. According to the sensualistic point of view (as defended, for instance, by Wilhelm Wundt), all feelings can be reduced to mere sensations, which means that they all have the same structure: *they all lack intentional reference to values*. Up to a large degree, Scheler's stratification of emotional life is a phenomenological argument precisely against such a view. This argument rests on the fundamental distinction that Scheler draws between feeling-states (*Gefühle*) and feelings (*Fühlen*). In Scheler's view, while such sensible feelings as bodily pain or bodily pleasure are non-intentional and bound to the body, higher feeling-strata (*Fühlen*) are marked by intentionality. If Scheler's arguments for such a distinction are found to be convincing, then the sensualistic assumption that all feelings lack intentional reference to values will have to be dismissed as illegitimate.

3. One should also bear in mind that Scheler's phenomenological account of affectivity is the foundation of his *ethics*, which is situated between two major ethical

standpoints: Kantian ethics and eudaemonism. As Scheler sees it, both approaches misconstrue the actual role that feelings play in the intuition of values. In contrast to Kantian ethics, Scheler insists that a phenomenological investigation can disclose an intentional correlation between different types of feelings and different values; in contrast to eudaemonism, he argues that feelings should not be conceived as end points, which the moral life aims to achieve, but as *points of departure*, i.e., as the *origins* of striving toward the values that feelings intend.

Such, then, is the context that underlies Scheler's stratification of emotional life. According to the position that we find articulated in *Formalism*, the significance of the stratification of affectivity pertains to the fact that it is correlated with the stratification of values.

The Motive

What underlies Scheler's claim that the life of feelings is stratified? The evidence Scheler provides echoes Plato's argument in the *Republic*, Book IV, for the tripartite conception of the soul. The renowned story of Leontius represents this argument most forcefully.⁹ Plato asks: how can Leontius be both drawn to look at the corpses and be drawn away from looking at them *at the same time*? The principle of non-contradiction seems to block such a possibility. If one is not to break this principle, one needs to postulate that there are different agents present in the soul that draw a human being in different directions. Such is the basis that underlies Plato's distinction between *reason*, *will* and *appetite*, conceived as the main agents in the human soul. Analogously, the argument that underlies Scheler's stratification of feelings is based on some *non-controversial* claims about feelings, which in their own turn give rise to a similar concern and call for a similar resolution. One can reconstruct the motive that underlies Scheler's stratification in the following way:

1. Among the numerous feelings that we have, some are *positive* (e.g., sensuous pleasure, comfort, happiness, bliss) while others are *negative* (e.g., sensuous pain, discomfort, misery, despair).

2. It is possible to have both positive and negative feelings *at the same time*: "a human being can be blissful while suffering from bodily pain."¹⁰ "In a state of 'deep despair in his soul' one can experience some sensuous pleasure and enjoy it."¹¹ "One can also drink a glass of wine while being unhappy and still enjoy the bouquet of the wine."¹² Or to refer to Scheler's more dramatic illustration, "when Luther's young daughter Magdalene died, he said: 'I am happy in my spirit, yet very sad in my flesh. It is a strange thing indeed to know that she rests in peace and that she is well, yet still to be so sad.'"¹³

3. Yet how are we to explain such a possibility in the face of the *principle of non-contradiction*? Clearly, if this experiential fact does not stand opposed to the founding logical law, *then the seemingly contradictory feelings must be experienced at a different depth*: my feelings must be positive *at one level* while also being negative *at another level*. We thereby come to face Scheler's profound insight, which is the basis of his most significant contribution to the philosophy of emotions: *feelings differ from each other not only in terms of quality and intensity, but also in terms of depth*. How is one to provide a philosophical account of this depth-dimension? One can do so by offering a stratification of the emotional life.¹⁴

Criteria

How many feeling-strata are there? According to Scheler's central thesis, all feelings unfold on four levels: the *sensible*, the *vital*, the *psychic* and the *spiritual*. How convincing is Scheler's claim that there are no fewer and no more than four levels? The answer to this question would have to be sought in the criteria used for distinguishing different strata of emotional life. Yet Scheler does not provide these criteria independently, to say nothing of arguments being used in their support. Nor does he present us with any kind of explicit phenomenological-eidetic defense of his claim that there are four strata. Such being the case, we are left with only one possibility: *the proof of Scheler's stratification must lie in its demonstration*. Arguably, everything stands or falls depending on the persuasive nature of the exposition of Scheler's argument. Scheler does not close off the possibility that this stratification needs to be expanded or contracted. But this is an *open*, not a *motivated* possibility, and its viability would also depend on available phenomenological evidence and its demonstration.

From Scheler's account, one can reconstruct *seven guiding questions* that he either explicitly or implicitly addresses to various feelings. I contend that *these seven questions constitute the criteria that underlie Scheler's stratification of emotional life*. Here are these questions, listed in the same haphazard order in which they appear in Scheler's analysis: (1.) How do feelings relate to the body? (2.) Are feelings intentional or non-intentional? (3.) How do feelings relate to the ego (the person)? (4.) Can a feeling be reproduced? (5.) Are feelings capable of duration and continuity of sense? (6.) How are feelings affected by consciousness transforming them into an intentional object? (7.) Are feelings subject to volitional control and the will? It *appears* to be Scheler's claim that by addressing these seven questions to different feelings, we can arrive at the realization that our emotional life is comprised of four different affective levels.

I say "appears" because the manner in which Scheler presents the four feeling-strata eclipses the fact that these seven questions are the criteria that underlie his stratification. Without providing the needed justification, Scheler refers to the four strata as "four well-delineated *levels* of feelings"¹⁵ still before offering their detailed description. He thereby leaves his readers puzzled why, in his view, there are no more, and no fewer, than four feeling-strata. So as to highlight what I argue are the criteria that underlie this stratification, in my subsequent analysis I will not follow the random order in which Scheler presents the four different feeling-strata. Rather, I will zero in on these seven questions and show how their analysis gives rise to the fourfold stratification. Yet as we will soon see, these seven questions perform different functions: some of them show that feelings unfold on two different planes; others point to three levels; finally, a third group indicates that there are four feeling-strata. With the aim of shedding some clarity on this exceptionally confusing issue, I will address these seven questions in a different order from the one that we find in Scheler's own investigation.

The Four Strata

1. Out of the seven questions, there are only *two* that provide support to Scheler's claim that there are "four well-delineated *levels* of feeling." Out of these two questions, only one generates clear, compelling and independent reasons to support

Scheler's stratification. This is the question concerning the *relation between feelings and the ego*.

(a) Let us begin with such emotions as bliss and despair, which Scheler identifies as *spiritual feelings*. Feelings that belong to this group have two essential characteristics: (i) they relate to the ego in a *direct way* and (ii) they are *absolute*. To claim that they relate to the ego *directly* is to suggest that their experience is not mediated by the body. To argue that they are *absolute* is to point to the fact that they permeate the ego-person entirely. Indeed, as we will soon see, *feelings that belong to all other strata are relative* in that they are either reducible to particular bodily states or they are provoked by particular circumstances, events, or phenomena. The qualification of spiritual feelings as absolute designates the fact that these feelings lie beyond the above-mentioned relativity.

(b) Scheler calls such feelings as sorrow, serenity and happiness *psychic feelings*. There is one characteristic that these feelings share with spiritual feelings: both feeling-strata relate to the ego in a *direct way*. Put otherwise, the ego is the immediate subject of these feelings in the absence of any bodily mediation. However, unlike bliss and despair, sorrow and serenity are not absolute: such is the reason that underlies the distinction between psychic feelings and spiritual feelings. Psychic feelings are *relative* to particular circumstances, events, or phenomena as their intentional correlates. Due to their intentional direction, psychic feelings do not fill the ego completely. Given this difference, it becomes understandable how one can *suffer blissfully*, or be *desperate yet happy* about some particular news that concerns those close to us.

(c) Such feelings as fatigue or vigor, health or illness, bodily appetite or bodily aversion, bodily sympathy or bodily disgust belong to a third feeling-stratum, which Scheler labels *vital feelings*. Unlike spiritual feelings and partly (un)like psychic feelings, vital feelings neither relate to the ego in a direct way, nor are they absolute. On the one hand, their relation to the ego is mediated through the body. So as not to overlook this fact, Scheler qualifies the subject of these feelings as the *body-ego*. On the other hand, their relativity is to be explained on the same grounds as the relativity of psychic feelings: they do not fill the ego completely. However, precisely because they are mediated by the body, the relativity of vital feelings is further-reaching than the relativity of psychic feelings (such is the case because the former, in contrast to the latter, are relative with regard to the body), and thus, one can be *happy but ill*, just as one can be *miserable but healthy*.

(d) We are also familiar with such feelings as bodily pain and bodily pleasure. Following Carl Stumpf,¹⁶ Scheler calls such feelings *sensible feelings*. These feelings, just as vital feelings, neither relate to the ego in a direct way, nor are they absolute. Nonetheless, the evidence of experience suggests that we draw a further distinction between sensible and vital feelings: after all, we can be *healthy while we are in pain*, just as we can *experience pleasure while we are sick*. Yet how are we to account conceptually for the possibility of such a distinction? Scheler's answer suggests that unlike vital feelings, sensible feelings relate to the person-ego in a *doubly indirect way*. So as to make sense of this claim, one could point to a peculiarity that belongs to all feeling-strata with the exception of sensible feelings. As we saw, psychic feelings are relative in that they do not fill the person ego entirely. Nonetheless, one could argue that they are absolute with regard to the psychic ego. So also, vital feelings are relative with regard to the psychic ego and the person-ego. Nonetheless, they fill the body-ego entirely and thus are absolute with regard to the body-ego. By contrast, even though

sensible feelings belong to the body-ego, they do not fill the body-ego entirely. One could therefore say: *by contrast to all other types of feelings, sensible feelings are not absolute in any sense; put otherwise, sensible feelings are absolutely relative.*

2. The question concerning the relation between feelings and the will provides further support to Scheler's fourfold stratification of feelings. This time, let us proceed not "downwards" but "upwards" and begin with sensible feelings. According to Scheler, they are most easily subject to practical control. (i) Unlike other feeling-strata, sensible feelings can be produced or extinguished by the application of appropriate stimuli. And so, sensible pain can be diminished or even eradicated by anesthetics; sensible pleasure can be intensified or even manufactured by sedatives. (ii) *Vital feelings* are not controllable so easily: being feelings that spread over the whole body, they derive from a whole way of life and therefore their artificial production entails a further complexity. (iii) *Psychic feelings* are even less subject to practical control than vital feelings: being bound to particular circumstances, events, and phenomena, their recreation would in effect require a recreation of these very circumstances, events, or phenomena. (iv) Finally, in Scheler's view, spiritual feelings are beyond any kind of arbitrary production and volitional control. According to the perspective that Scheler endorses in his account of affective strata, spiritual feelings cannot be conceived as states in principle: they can only issue from the depth of our person and therefore cannot be produced arbitrarily.¹⁷

How strongly does Scheler's analysis of this issue support his claim that all feelings unfold on four different levels? I would argue that unlike the first criterion, the question concerning the relation between feelings and the will can provide *additional* support *at best* and cannot be conceived as an independent reason that justifies the "four well-delineated levels of feelings." Such is the case because according to Scheler, the difference between how sensible, vital, and psychic feelings relate to the will is only a difference in degree. Yet obviously, different feelings that belong to one and the same level also have a variable relation to the will. Taking this into account, one would be right to maintain that differences of such a nature do not provide sufficient *independent* grounds to support the fourfold stratification thesis. And thus, Scheler's analysis of this issue is in place only as an *additional* source of evidence.

3. Out of the remaining five questions, one provides further reasons to maintain that feelings are subject to at least a threefold stratification. I have in mind the question concerning the relation between *feelings and the body*.

(a) Let us once again proceed "upwards" and begin with *sensible feelings*. As we already saw, they do not fill the body in its entirety but rather are located within particular parts of the body. Thus the headache lies in my head, while the abdominal pain lies in my stomach. Moreover, the location of sensible-feelings is not static. These bodily feelings can spread over different parts of the body, which means: besides being *localized* in the body, sensible-feelings also *extend* over the body, *spreading* from one part to another.

(b) *Vital feelings* are like sensible feelings in that they are also inseparable from the body. However, unlike sensible feelings, vital feelings are not located or extended in particular parts of the body. One could thus say that *even though vital feelings are bodily feelings, they have no "in," they have no place*. These feelings participate in the *total extension of the body*, filling the body in its entirety. Thus discomfort or fatigue do not lie in my head or my stomach but extend over my body, filling it completely.

(c) From sensible and vital feelings, we need to distinguish a third group—feelings that have *no relation to the body*. Sorrow, sadness, despair, serenity, and peace of mind are neither located in a particular part of the body, nor do they fill the body in its entirety. *These feelings are unrelated to the body at all*. As we already know, this “third group” of feelings entails a further differentiation between the *psychic* and *spiritual* feelings. However, the question concerning the relation of feelings to the body does not provide us with the resources needed to draw this further distinction.

Thus the question concerning the relation of feelings to the body invites one to distinguish between three different feeling-strata. The already mentioned possible co-existence of positive and negative feelings corroborates the need to introduce such a threefold distinction. And so, *I can feel fatigued without experiencing pain*, just as *I can be “fresh” and “strong” while experiencing pain*. So also, *I can be in pain and be ill while at the same time having a blissful peace of mind*, just as *I can experience pleasure and comfort while being sorrowful and sad*.

4. Scheler’s discussion of the remaining four questions provides additional support to the general insight that feelings unfold on different levels, even though this discussion does not corroborate the thesis that all in all, there are “four well-established levels of feeling.” Let us turn to the question concerning *feelings and intentionality*. According to Scheler, some feelings are intentional, while others lack intentionality. In Scheler’s view, purely sensible feelings are non-intentional: “A sensible feeling is given essentially as a *state*, never as a function or an act. Purely sensible feelings therefore lack even the most primitive form of intentionality: ‘having a mind to.’”¹⁸

How is one to understand the non-intentionality of sensible feelings? Following Husserl, Ni Liangkang calls us to draw a distinction between two different concepts of intentionality. In the broad sense, any experience that is related, aimed at, or oriented to an object is intentional. In the narrow sense, only object-constituting (i.e., objectifying) experiences are intentional.¹⁹ In which of these two senses are sensible feelings non-intentional?

Take as an example sudden and intense pain, which one lives through when, say, the dentist’s drill hits the nerve. Under such circumstances, all the themes that one might have been contemplating suddenly evaporate from the field of consciousness, leaving one with the bare sensation of pain. If one were to qualify this sensible feeling as intentional in either of the above-mentioned senses, one would need to establish a relation between the experience of pain and some other objects of consciousness.

It seems to me that such a relation could be established in two ways. First of all, one cannot overlook the relation between the experience of pain and the object that caused it. In such a way, one establishes a *causal* relation between the drill and the experience of pain. Secondly, one can recognize one’s sudden experience of pain as a sign of a particular physiological malfunction. One thereby grounds a *symbolic* relation between pain and the state of one’s body.

Are the causal or the symbolic relations intentional in either of the above-mentioned senses? They cannot be conceived as intentional in the narrow sense, which understands intentionality as an object-constituting experience. To be sure, I can qualify the drill as painful, or a certain illness as painful, yet these metaphorical qualifications of objects and states of affairs do not characterize the constitution either of the drill, or of a particular physiological state. Using Husserl’s vocabulary, one could qualify such causal and symbolic interpretations of pain as non-objectifying acts, which, as Husserl argued in the *Logical Investigations*, do not constitute objects themselves,

but rather are built upon other objectifying acts—either presentations (i.e., the givenness of the drill) or judgments (i.e., the state of affair that characterizes the condition of the body).

Yet even though the experience in question cannot be qualified as intentional in the narrow sense, could it nonetheless be qualified as intentional in the broad sense, i.e., insofar as intentionality is conceived as *any kind* of relation between consciousness and objects of experience? Consider in this regard Scheler's observation: the specifically sensible feelings "may be 'connected' with objects through the simple contents of sensing, representing, or perceiving; or they may be more or less 'objectless.'"²⁰ The experience of pain is "objectless" before it takes on a causal or a symbolic meaning. In this regard, it is lived-through on the *hyletic* level: it is nothing more than a sensation. However, once this sensation becomes the object of causal and symbolic interpretations, a connection is established between the experience itself and other objects, be they material things, such as the drill, or states of affairs, such as the condition of the body. Due to this relation, a sensible feeling such as pain can be qualified as intentional *in the broad sense of this term*, i.e., as an experience that is related to objects of experience.

Thus sensible feelings are non-intentional in the narrow, although not in the broad sense of the term. It thereby becomes clear that Scheler's qualification of sensible feelings as non-intentional is to be understood as a claim that these feelings are non-objectifying, i.e., that taken independently from other acts, these feelings do not constitute objects of experience.

Such a qualification of the non-intentionality of sensible feelings enables one to obtain a more precise understanding of what Scheler means when he qualifies *vital* feelings as *intentional*. This qualification does not merely allude to the fact that vital feelings are related to objects of experience in any sense one pleases. Rather, these feelings are *objectifying*, i.e., they *constitute* objects of experience. More precisely, according to Scheler, *vital feelings constitute particular types of values: the value of life and the value of the environment*. An important implication is entailed in the realization that vital feelings are objectifying: according to Scheler, such experiences as anxiety, disgust, shame, appetite, or aversion, are not mere *states*, and therefore, it would be illegitimate to conceive of them as nothing more than unpleasant experiences to get rid off, say, through biochemical means. What such a prevalent approach overlooks is precisely the fact that the experiences in question are marked by intentionality *in the narrow sense of this term*: by "erasing" the feelings in question, one would also block the possibility of the subject's exposure to the correlative values; for as Scheler has it, our exposure to values through feelings is more primordial than our understanding of these values that derives from cognitive intentionality.²¹

Scheler's analysis of psychic feelings and spiritual feelings is lamentably brief. In this analysis, Scheler does not make it *explicitly* clear whether the two highest feeling-strata are intentional or non-intentional. At some points Scheler conceives of spiritual feelings as feeling-states, while other times he argues that they cannot be states and thus must be conceived through the prism of intentionality. Nonetheless, as far as the question of the fourfold stratification is concerned, this unresolved ambiguity is of little importance, for all that the question regarding intentionality can establish is a division of emotional life into two strata: some feelings are intentional, while others lack intentionality.

5. Just as Scheler's discussion of the intentionality of feelings, so also his analysis of *feeling's duration* is geared towards highlighting the distinction between sensible and

non-sensible feelings. This structural analogy should come as no surprise, for arguably, Scheler's analysis of this issue is a direct consequence of the view that while sensible feelings are feeling-states, non-sensible feelings are intentions and functions. Sensible feelings are punctual, i.e., they lack continuity of sense for two interrelated reasons: sensible feelings do not intend a particular state of affairs in the future and thus, no sensible feelings can stand in a relation of fulfillment to any other sensible or intentional feeling. With this in mind, Scheler contrasts sensible feelings with such feelings as fear and hope—feelings, which have a future orientation and which therefore can lead to fulfillment or disappointment. The temporality of non-sensible feelings can be further clarified on the basis of the above-mentioned realization that non-sensible feelings are *objectifying acts*, i.e., that feelings *constitute* their own values, that they *mean* their own values *originally*. Because of their objectifying nature, non-sensible feelings can intend the value of phenomena *before* the givenness of phenomena themselves.²² Because of their “anticipatory” nature, non-sensible feelings carry “emotional consequences”: they lead to fulfillment or disappointment. Such emotional consequences are entirely missing in the case of purely sensible feelings.

6. Can feelings be reproduced? With regard to sensible feelings, Scheler's answer is negative: sensible feelings are exhaustively *actual*. Scheler qualifies their actuality by saying that in sensible feelings there is “no ‘*refeeling*,’ no ‘*postfeeling*,’ no ‘*prefeeling*,’ and no *fellow feeling*.”²³ One can interpret such a qualification as a suggestion that the actuality in question places a *twofold limit* on sensible feelings. We already saw that sensible feelings are limited “spatially”: they do not spread over the whole body, but are confined to particular parts of the body. The actuality of these feelings supplements the spatial limit with a “temporal limit”: sensible feelings cannot be reproduced in time. To be sure, I can bring about the emergence of a *similar* feeling by reproducing the stimuli that provoked it. However, what reoccurs in time might very well be a feeling that *resembles* a past feeling, yet despite this resemblance, the new feeling is necessarily different. Besides the temporal limit, the actuality of sensible feelings also introduces what one could call a “solipsistic limit of non-shareability”: sensible feelings are by definition *non-exchangeable* and *non-transferable*.

By contrast, “all vital feelings are accessible to postfeeling, prefeeling, and fellow feeling.” Moreover, as far as psychic feelings are concerned, “I can—and this is especially significant for ethics—*share* the ‘same’ grief ‘with’ another *feelingly*.”²⁴ In *The Nature of Sympathy* Scheler provided a powerful illustration of such a fellow feeling: two parents standing beside the dead body of their beloved child feel in common the “same” anguish.²⁵ In short, non-sensible feelings differ from sensible feelings in that they are both temporally and intersubjectively reproducible.

7. Finally, let us ask: how are feelings affected by *conscious attention*? Just as in the previous three cases, Scheler's answer highlights the distinction between sensible and non-sensible feelings. The evidence of experience suggests that sensible feelings such as pain are easier to bear when they remain unattended and much harder to handle when they become conscious themes. This experiential fact indicates that sensible feelings do not disappear when attention is directed to them; quite on the contrary, conscious attention intensifies their experience. By contrast, the grip in which fear or hope holds us loosens when attention is directed to them. Scheler takes this to mean that by transforming vital feelings into conscious themes, we may recognize that our fears are ungrounded or that our hopes are unrealizable. In this regard, psychic feelings are no different: just as vital feelings, they also thrive only in the dark. And even

though in this context Scheler does not discuss spiritual feelings, the evidence of experience suggests that in this regard, they are no different from psychic feelings.

Thus out of the seven criteria employed in support of the stratification of feelings, four intimate at least a two-fold stratification of feelings, one suggests at least a threefold stratification, and two corroborate Scheler's claim that there are "four well-delineated *levels* of feelings." Let me bring this critical *expose* to its end by placing its results in a table form:

FEELING-STRATA	<i>Sensible Feelings</i>	<i>Vital Feelings</i>	<i>Psychic Feelings</i>	<i>Spiritual Feelings</i>
EXAMPLES	Bodily pleasure, bodily pain, tickling, heat, cold	Comfort, discomfort, health (well-being), illness (ill-being), fatigue, vigor, anxiety, fear, disgust, shame, appetite, vital sympathy, vital aversion, dizziness, hope	Joy, sorrow, happiness, unhappiness, respect, disrespect, grief, sympathy	Bliss, despair, serenity, peace of mind
RELATION TO THE EGO	Relative and indirectly related to the ego on two counts	Relative and indirectly related to the ego on one count	Relative but directly related to the ego	Absolute and directly related to the ego
RELATION TO THE WILL	More subject to control than any other feeling-stratum	Less subject to control than sensible feelings	Less subject to control than vital feelings	Not subject to control
RELATION TO THE BODY	Localized in specific parts of the body	Participate in the total extension of the body	Do not participate in the extension of the body	
INTENTIONAL QUALITY	Non-intentional states	Intentional experiences		
DURATION	Punctual, without continuity of sense	Non-punctual, feelings entail a future orientation and emotional consequences		

FEELING-STRATA	<i>Sensible Feelings</i>	<i>Vital Feelings</i>	<i>Psychic Feelings</i>	<i>Spiritual Feelings</i>
REPRODUCIBILITY	Do not participate in the functions of post-feeling, pre-feeling, and fellow-feeling	Participate in the functions of post-feeling, pre-feeling, and fellow-feeling		
RELATION TO CONSCIOUSNESS	Intensified by attention	Alleviated by attention		

Three Questions

With this general picture of Scheler’s stratification in mind, it is highly tempting to subject the results of Scheler’s analysis to the test of experience. This general resource provides one with quite a few reasons to voice one’s suspicions about Scheler’s stratification. I will limit myself to a few illustrations.

1. According to Scheler, sensible feelings such as pain intensify when we focus on them. By contrast, non-sensible feelings, such as fear and hope, tend to decrease in intensity when consciousness turns them into its intentional themes. It is, however, doubtful if experience corroborates such a crude distinction between sensible and non-sensible feelings. One might very well wonder whether in this regard such vital feelings as *illness* and *health* are not like pain and pleasure, and unlike fear and hope. After all, it is highly doubtful that a patient suffering from an illness would be truly alleviated after learning that his illness is terminal. It seems that far from dissolving, the feelings of illness and health *intensify* when they become our focal themes. Moreover, should one not reiterate the same claim with regard to such vital experiences as discomfort, fatigue, anxiety, or appetite?

2. Scheler argues that sensible feelings are removed from the ego on two counts and further suggests that all other feelings unfold at a closer proximity to the subject of experience. Yet if one considers pain an example of sensible feelings in general, one would have to say that Scheler’s claim applies only to weak acute pain, which one experiences when, for example, one pricks one’s finger with a needle. Clearly, it makes little sense to interpret the pain experienced by a cancer patient or a victim of torture as a feeling that unfolds at a distance and that affects him less than all the other vital, psychic and spiritual feelings he might be living through.²⁶

So as to counteract such a plainly implausible implication, F.J.J. Buytendijk launched a critique of Scheler in his *Pain: Its Modes and Functions*. According to Buytendijk, the conception of pain as a sensible feeling “gravely underestimates its deeper effects”: it limits the consequences of pain on the body and excludes its deeper effects on the person. However, “the more violent a pain, the deeper it penetrates, affecting not merely the ‘body-self,’ but our actual personality as well.”²⁷ In short, the definition of pain as a sensible feeling “is unsatisfactory as it places too little emphasis on the relationship to the center of the person.”²⁸

3. Scheler argues that sensible feelings are easier to control than other kinds of feelings. But compare such sensible feelings as the pains that derive from late-stage cancer with such psychic feelings as sadness that one experiences after the loss of one's favorite football team. Is it really true that the former is more easily controlled than the latter?

These three questions are meant to be only illustrations of an apparent tension between Scheler's stratification and the evidence of experience. However, for methodological reasons, for the moment I would like to place *all* questions of this nature within brackets and proceed instead to address what I conceive as *two fundamental issues*, which pertain to Scheler's concept of *purity* and especially his concept of a *stratum*. A more precise understanding of these two operative notions will enable us to confront the numerous contradictions that seem to arise when the results of Scheler's analysis are subjected to the test of experience.

The Concept of Purity

Scheler's use of the term "pure" ("*rein*") is a source of truly puzzling difficulties. We find a reference to this problem (although not its resolution) in Zaborowski's contribution.²⁹ Here is the problem: at times, Scheler speaks of sensible feelings, at other times, of *purely* sensible feelings. Analogously, Scheler draws a distinction between psychic and *purely* psychic feelings. In some of his other works, we also find an operative distinction between spiritual and *purely* spiritual feelings.³⁰ How exactly are we to understand these distinctions? Scheler himself does not provide us with an answer, and this lack of an answer leads to far-reaching ambiguities.

Consider Scheler's remark I have already quoted above: "purely sensible feelings . . . lack even the most primitive form of intentionality."³¹ In a footnote that follows this claim, Scheler further speaks of the "vitaly important types of tickling feeling," which, he argues, carry with them a tendency toward increase and degeneration, and therefore are to be distinguished from the *purely* sensible feelings. Should one take these observations to mean that while *some* sensible feelings (so-called *purely* sensible feelings) are non-intentional, *other* sensible feelings (let's call them "impurely" sensible feelings) have an intentional structure? Does it also mean that while *purely* sensible feelings are punctual, "impurely" sensible feelings have a future orientation and "emotional consequences?" Moreover, since Scheler does not explain how "purely sensible feelings" are to be distinguished from "impurely" sensible feelings, it remains puzzling which exact feelings would fall into each class or how exactly either of these classes of feelings would relate to all other feeling-strata. We seem to be facing a conceptual classification without clarity regarding the phenomenal base to which it might apply.

A similar ambiguity is to be found in Scheler's discussion of psychic feelings. In the section, "Stratification of the Emotional Life," Scheler speaks of *purely* psychic feelings on no fewer than five occasions. In the context of discussing the relation between sensible feelings and the body, he refers to "purely psychic feelings," such as "sadness, woe, grief, and happiness,"³² which are attached to the ego in a direct way. This makes one wonder: are "impurely" psychic feelings also attached to the ego in the same fashion? In the context of discussing the relationship between consciousness and feelings, Scheler remarks: "*purely psychic* feelings tend to dissolve completely when

exposed to the light of attention.”³³ Do the “impurely” psychic feelings have the same tendency? In the context of addressing the relationship between feelings and the will, Scheler notes that *purely psychic* feelings are less subject to control than vital feelings.³⁴ And how about the “impurely” psychic feelings? The remaining two references to *purely psychic* feelings are to be found at the very start of Scheler’s analysis of psychic feelings in general as well as at the start of Scheler’s analysis of spiritual feelings, thereby giving rise to further concerns: should one understand Scheler’s analysis of psychic feelings as an inquiry into *purely* psychic feelings? Furthermore, are spiritual feelings to be opposed only to the *purely* psychic feelings, or to psychic feelings in general?

Just as in the case of the three questions I singled out in the last section, so in this case as well, it would be premature to look for a solution. Let us first address another fundamental issue that lies at the heart of Scheler’s analysis.

The Concept of a Stratum

The second fundamental question concerns the exact meaning of such terms as “levels” or “strata” (“*Schichten*”). What exactly does it mean to speak of this classification of feelings with the help of a geological metaphor? Why does it not suffice to qualify the different kinds of feelings as *types*, or *classes* of feelings?

We can now proceed to answer this question directly, and the answer obtained will also help us resolve the above-mentioned ambiguities. Arguably, the answer to this question is to be extracted from the one and only *independent* criterion that underlies Scheler’s fourfold stratification of feelings, which, as I have argued above, pertains to the question regarding the distance that separates different types of feelings from the ego. The four different classes of feelings are *strata* and not merely *types* of feeling precisely because *each of the classes of feelings stands in a different kind of proximity to the ego*. One could therefore say that the concept of a stratum indicates different levels of *emotional depth* and that the emotion’s relatedness to the ego constitutes the essential criterion to discern the emotion’s depth. Thus first, since sensible feelings have a doubly indirect relation to the ego, they unfold at a surface, leaving the subject of these feelings largely unaffected. Secondly, vital feelings, being indirectly linked to the ego, do not just constitute a separate class of feelings, but also a more intimate feeling-stratum. Thirdly, having a direct, although relative, relation to the ego, psychic feelings affect the ego even at a deeper level. Finally, spiritual feelings, having a direct and absolute relation to the ego, constitute the deepest feeling-stratum of emotional life.

The position I have just articulated largely corroborates the view that Quentin Smith defended in his analysis.³⁵ Nonetheless, such a view does not dispel all ambiguity, for it still remains unclear how exactly the relation between different feeling-strata is to be understood. So as to highlight the ambiguity in question, one needs to distinguish between three different interpretations of the problem at hand.

Three Interpretations

1. The first interpretation is the standard approach, which invites one to understand Scheler’s stratification in the following way: *none* of the sensible feelings are as close to the ego as the vital feelings, *none* of the vital feelings are as close as the psychic

feelings, and finally, *none* of the psychic feelings affect the ego as profoundly as spiritual feelings. In short:

Level 4	Sensible Feelings
Level 3	Vital Feelings
Level 2	Psychic Feelings
Level 1	Spiritual Feelings
<i>THE SUBJECT OF EXPERIENCE</i>	

Although such a picture springs to mind almost immediately after looking through Scheler's writings, I would nonetheless argue that it simply cannot be the view that Scheler himself was striving to articulate. So as to show this, I would like to return to the three questions I addressed. These questions provide sufficient evidence to argue that insofar as the Schelerian stratification is understood in the above-mentioned way, one has to dismiss it on the grounds that it lacks phenomenological evidence to support it. These three questions are illustrations that indicate the fact that there are *too* many instances in which Scheler's stratification contradicts the evidence of experience.

Yet one should also stress that such a conception contradicts not only experiential evidence, but also Scheler's own reflections. More precisely, the position I have just presented suffers from a serious deficiency in that it remains silent with regard to the distinction that Scheler draws between *pure* and "impure" feelings. With this twofold limitation in mind, let us proceed to the second interpretation.

2. The second interpretation would suggest that even though a certain group of sensible feelings is more distant from the ego than vital feelings, still, Scheler's stratification does not exclude the possibility that *in some cases, sensible feelings are just as distant from the ego as vital feelings*. In this regard, it is hard to overestimate the significance of Scheler's passing remark, which suggests that *purely psychic* feelings are pure to the degree that they remain *unmixed* with vital feelings.³⁶

How exactly is one to understand this "mixture of feelings" that belong to different levels of experience? Scheler himself has not provided a clear answer to this question. Nonetheless, I would argue that from his writings, one can derive a twofold response.

First, consider the example regarding "the vitally important types of tickling feeling," to which I have referred above. According to Scheler, this kind of feeling is not *purely* sensible because it has a *tendency* toward increase, due to which, after reaching a maximum point, the feeling would undergo a cancellation,³⁷ i.e., it could no longer be qualified as a tickling feeling but would call for alternative qualifications. This example, as well as Scheler's suggestion that feelings "can approach" different strata of our emotional lives,³⁸ intimates one possible way in which Scheler's distinction between mixed and unmixed feelings could be understood.

No feeling is given as a temporal instant that would be cut off from all past and all future; all feelings take time to unfold. Moreover, for the most part, feelings do not unfold in time monotonously, without undergoing any changes in intensity. These changes that the fluctuating intensity in a feeling brings about can be understood in two ways. 1.) Consider such cases when despite the vacillations in intensity, the

experienced pleasure remains wholly sensual, or when despite its “ups and downs,” the suffering one undergoes remains exclusively psychic. When the changes in question preserve the feeling within the boundaries of a particular feeling-stratum, one faces what Scheler has qualified as *unmixed feelings*. 2.) However, in other cases, the spectrum of the feeling’s fluctuating intensity can be so broad that one can find oneself at a loss regarding how exactly the feeling in question is to be qualified. For example, one could characterize a migraine both as painful (i.e., as a sensible feeling) and as an uncomfortable experience of fatigue, dizziness or disgust (i.e., as a vital feeling); so also, one could conceive of the fresh seaside air both as pleasurable (i.e., as a sensible feeling) and as comfortable and invigorating (i.e., as a vital feeling). Thus the feeling’s fluctuating intensity can not only impart feelings with a *tendency* to approach different levels of our emotional lives, but it can also enable feelings to pass from one level to another. Under such circumstances, we are faced with *mixed feelings*.

The second interpretation, which does not contradict the first one but rather complements it, derives from the distinction that Scheler has drawn between intentional feelings and non-intentional feeling-states. According to Scheler, intentional feelings can take on three fundamentally different types of objects: they can be directed at feeling states (bodily pain or bodily pleasure), or objective emotional characteristics of the atmosphere (the sorrow of the willow-tree or the melancholy of the landscape), or values (the beautiful or the good). For our purposes, it suffices to concentrate on the first case: what exactly happens when a sensible feeling-state, such as pain, becomes an object of an intentional feeling? As Scheler puts it, “there are changing facts involved when I ‘suffer,’ ‘endure,’ ‘tolerate,’ or even ‘enjoy’ ‘pain.’ What varies here in the functional quality of *feeling* it (which can also vary by degrees) is certainly not the *state of pain*.”³⁹

Thus according to Scheler, such feelings as pain can be conceived both as something that one *has* as well as something that one *feels*. In the first case, one conceives of pain as a pre- or non-intentional *sensation*, i.e., a mere feeling-state; in the second case, one transforms pain into an *object* of an intentional feeling. Put in Husserlian terms, in the first case, one treats pain as a *hyle*; in the second case, as a *noema* to which different kinds of *noetic acts* can be directed.

This distinction between the hyletic and noematic conceptions of feelings indicates the second way in which mixed and unmixed feelings can be understood. 1.) Insofar as the pain in question is something that I *have*, I live through an unmixed sensible feeling (i.e., a sensation). 2.) By contrast, insofar as the pain in question is something that I *feel*, my experience transcends the boundaries of purely sensible feelings. Thus to suffer from pain or enjoy it is to live through a mixed feeling.

This twofold interpretation of mixed feelings provides the basis of the second interpretation of the relation between different feeling-strata. One can now argue that the *purely* sensible feelings are pure to the degree that they remain unmixed with the stratum of vital feelings in either of the above-mentioned ways; that *purely* vital feelings are pure insofar as they remain unmixed with either sensible or psychic feelings; that *purely* psychic feelings are pure not only insofar as they remain cut off from the vital stratum, but also insofar as they remain unmixed with spiritual feelings; and finally, that *purely* spiritual feelings are pure insofar as they are unmixed with psychic feelings. Thus arguably, *purely* sensible feelings, although not necessarily sensible feelings in general, are furthest removed from the ego. Analogously,

the same is to be said about all other feeling-strata. We thereby obtain the following structure:

Level 4		Purely Sensible Level
Level 3	(a)	Mixed Level of Sensible and Vital Feelings
Level 3	(b)	Purely Vital Feelings
Level 2	(a)	Mixed Level of Vital and Psychic Feelings
Level 2	(b)	Purely Psychic Feelings
Level 1	(a)	Mixed Level of Psychic and Spiritual Feelings
Level 1	(b)	Spiritual Feelings
<i>THE SUBJECT OF EXPERIENCE</i>		

For two reasons the second interpretation is superior to the first one. First, the second interpretation clarifies the distinction that Scheler had drawn between purely sensible feelings and sensible feelings in general, purely vital feelings and vital feelings in general, purely psychic feelings and psychic feelings in general, purely spiritual feelings and spiritual feelings in general. Secondly, the second interpretation does not stand opposed to the evidence of experience, at least to the degree that it enables one to answer the first of the three questions I had listed earlier.

3. Nonetheless, just as the first interpretation, so the second one also is not without limitations. To be sure, it enables one to answer the first of the three questions listed above. It enables one to say: *illness* and *health*, as far as they are experienced, need not be *purely* vital feelings, they can also unfold on a mixed level of sensible and vital feelings. It thereby becomes understandable why they would share certain characteristics with sensible feelings, for instance, why, unlike purely vital feelings, they would intensify when we direct our attention to them. However, the second interpretation does not enable one to answer the second and the third questions successfully, for *these questions point to the possibility that sensible feelings might be mixed not only with the stratum of vital feelings, but also with higher strata as well.*

Yet how else is one to understand Scheler's own illustration of the subject suffering from pain or taking joy in pain if not as an intimation that sensible feelings can be mixed with psychic feelings? Moreover, if one is to admit that cancer pains or pains caused by torture can bring the patient or the victim to despair, then one is faced with the further realization that sensible feelings can be also mixed with spiritual feelings. Last but not least, if one also admits that such vital feelings as terminal illness, anxiety, or fear, can also bring one to despair, then one is faced with a further realization that vital feelings can also be mixed with spiritual ones. Taking *all* possible mixtures of feelings into account, the third interpretation offers us the following picture of the stratification of our emotional lives:

Level 4		Purely Sensible Feelings
Level 3	(a)	Mixed Level of Sensible and Vital Feelings
Level 3	(b)	Purely Vital Feelings
Level 2	(a)	Mixed Level of Sensible and Psychic Feelings
Level 2	(b)	Mixed Level of Vital and Psychic Feelings
Level 2	(c)	Purely Psychic Feelings
Level 1	(a)	Mixed Level of Sensible and Spiritual Feelings
Level 1	(b)	Mixed Level of Vital and Spiritual Feelings
Level 1	(c)	Mixed Level of Psychic and Spiritual Feelings
Level 1	(d)	Spiritual Feelings
<i>THE SUBJECT OF EXPERIENCE</i>		

To return to the second and third questions that exemplify the tensions with experiential evidence, I contend that this third interpretation is the only one that provides us with a way to resolve them. One is no longer at a loss regarding how one is to understand the pain experienced by a torture victim within the framework of Scheler’s stratification. One is no longer compelled to say, as Buytendijk does, that Scheler’s stratification “gravely underestimates pain’s deeper effects,” entirely excluding the profound significance it can exert upon the center of the person. If one is justified to speak of mixed feelings in the contexts of Scheler’s phenomenology, and if one is justified to interpret mixed feelings along the lines of the third interpretation, then one has to admit that pain is by no means an exclusively sensible feeling; rather, it can also (in the two ways described above) be experienced at the vital, psychic, and even spiritual stratum of our emotional lives. Such is the answer that the third interpretation offers to the second question.

So also, as far as the third question is concerned, one has to admit that sensible feelings can often be less controllable than the feelings that belong to other strata of our emotional lives. Consider in this regard Emile Zola’s *Monsieur Hennebeau*, who has no doubts that his sadness and remorse, which derive from his unfulfilled marriage, are in fact more easily controllable than the pain he would live through if, like the coal miners, his “empty belly were twisted with pains that made his brain reel.”⁴⁰ Consider also Oscar Wilde’s observation: “God spare me physical pain, and I’ll take care of the moral pain myself.”⁴¹ These direct acknowledgements that sensible feelings such as pain often prove to be far less controllable than vital or psychic feelings need no longer be conceived as pieces of counter-evidence to Scheler’s stratification, for arguably, the pains of which Zola and Wilde speak are by no means merely sensible. What is at issue is the realization that physical pain can lead one to despair, i.e., that sensible feelings can have spiritual significance. The superiority of the third interpretation to the first and the second ones derives from the fact that it can account for how feelings from all strata can mix with each other.

Although in the present context a detailed analysis of this issue would take me too far afield, I would like to note in passing that Scheler's "The Meaning of Suffering"—an essay he wrote during World War I and originally published as part of *Krieg und Aufbau*—can be read as a work that demonstrates in some detail how feelings that belong to distinct strata of our emotional lives can be mixed with each other. I will limit myself to a few observations. 1.) One should not overlook that here Scheler no longer speaks of pain and suffering as two fundamentally different phenomena which we find on different levels of experience. Rather, he now speaks of "all suffering," "from sensations of pain to religious-metaphysical despair." Thus according to Scheler's own admission, pain is a particular mode of suffering, i.e., a mixed feeling that unfolds on different strata of experience. 2.) One should not overlook that in this work Scheler singles out four fundamental ways in which such feelings as pain can be thematized. These feelings can be addressed (I.) by turning one's attention to the stimulus that underlies them, or (II.) by thematizing them as a feeling state, or (III.) by conceptualizing them as a feeling taken along with an emotional reaction, or finally, (IV.) by conceiving them as feelings enveloped in a spiritual interpretation.⁴² 3.) All of this means: according to "The Meaning of Suffering," pain can be thematized as a sensible feeling, or as a mixed feeling that unfolds on the sensible and vital levels of experience, or as a feeling that affects one at the intersection of the sensible and the psychic levels, or finally—and this is what interests Scheler in particular—as a sensible feeling that has spiritual significance.

Feelings and the Body

One of the great strengths of the third interpretation lies in its capacity to resolve a challenging ambiguity that lies at the heart of Scheler's reflections on affectivity. The ambiguity in question concerns the relation between feelings and the body. Scheler seems to think that a feeling's depth can be measured according to the feeling's freedom from the body. For instance, he suggests that if a feeling is not experienced immediately but is given through the mediation of the body, then the feeling in question is not as deep and intimate as the feelings that unfold on the specifically psychic and spiritual levels.

However, this approach overlooks the different ways in which feelings can relate to the body. (1.) Insofar as the feelings in question are *purely* sensible or *purely* vital, they are *merely* bodily: the body-ego is their subject of experience, while the psychic ego and the spiritual ego remain unaffected by them. (2.) Besides being *merely bodily*, both sensible and vital feelings can also affect the subject on the psychic and spiritual levels of experience. Because of this, we are likely to say that the victim of torture is not only in pain, but also in despair, or that the cancer victim is not merely ill, but also in misery. (3.) A psychic feeling, such as joy or grief, just as a spiritual feeling, such as bliss, serenity or despair, can very well affect not only the psychic ego and the spiritual person, but also what Scheler calls *the body-ego*. And arguably, when this takes place, the feelings in question affect us in a more profound way.

Scheler does not distinguish between these three essentially different ways in which feelings relate to the body. In his explicit reflections on this issue, he conceives of this relation exclusively in accordance with the first of the spelled-out ways. Yet arguably, if one follows what I have identified above as the third interpretation, one is in full right to supplement Scheler's account of affectivity with a significantly richer account of the

relation between feelings and the body. By contrast, a follower of the first interpretation would have to claim that Scheler's perspective is incompatible with the second and third ways in which feelings relate to the body; and a proponent of the second interpretation would have to admit that even though Scheler's stratification points to a significantly richer interrelation between feelings and the body than his explicit reflections on this issue suggest, still, the two accounts are compatible *only in part*.

Concluding Remarks

Probably the greatest challenge that confronts the third interpretation concerns the worry that with this interpretation, Scheler's stratification has lost all rigidity. Of what use is this stratification if it does not enable one to clearly place different feelings within different strata of affectivity? If I follow what I have identified above as the first interpretation, and if you tell me that you are in pain, all is clear: I can immediately respond that you are living through a sensible feeling; if you speak of illness, sadness, or despair, then I know that your feelings unfold on the vital, psychic or spiritual levels. Yet now, with the third interpretation, responses such as these turn out to be premature. Any feeling could prove to be an affect that unfolds at any of the four levels. And so it seems that we are left with a conceptual schema, which we can apply in whichever way we please.

This critique is an instance of what one could call an "error of a philologist." By this I mean that it pertains not so much to feelings themselves, but only to the crude and imprecise terms designed to qualify the feelings in question. What is pain? A victim of a mosquito bite, of heartburn, of late-stage cancer, of natural disaster, of self-flagellation or of torture—all of them are in pain. What is sadness, or sorrow? A traveler who has missed a train, a loyal fan after the loss of his team, a tourist whose trip to a foreign country has been affected by bad weather, or a parent who has lost a child—all of them experience sadness, or sorrow. Yet clearly, in these diverse cases, the crude terms we use indicate something significantly different.

It would be a mistake to assume that with the fourfold stratification, Scheler aimed to provide a means to pigeonhole our emotional life. Quite on the contrary, the profound insight that underlies Scheler's contribution to our understanding of affectivity pertains to the fact that we can distinguish between different feelings not only in terms of their *quality* or *intensity*, but also in terms of their *depth*.⁴³

This very fact explains why Scheler would list such experiences as hope, shame, anxiety, fear, disgust, ire, revenge, and a certain kind of gladness and sadness as illustrations of vital feelings.⁴⁴ At first glance, this appears to be a crude error, and not surprisingly, both Smith and Zaborowski point out that emotions of such a nature must belong to the psychic and not to the vital level. However, as seen from the perspective of the third interpretation, the mere fact that Scheler refers to these emotions as illustrations of vital feelings does not mean that these emotions cannot be conceived as psychic feelings as well. They can! Nonetheless, if it is true that feelings can be experienced at different levels, then depending on the kind of feelings they are, they do not exhaustively belong to the psychic stratum. In fact, I would argue that more often than not, feelings of the above-mentioned nature are not cut off from the body, as purely psychic feelings are, but rather, like such vital feelings as fatigue or dizziness, they take the body hostage and spread over it entirely. Thus in fear, my body freezes; in anxiety, my face turns white; in shame, its color is red, etc.

On the basis of the above, I would argue that *Scheler's stratification of affectivity should not be understood as a stratification of the terms used to qualify diverse feelings, but as a stratification of feelings themselves*. It is not meant to replace reflection on experience with short answers prepared well in advance. Rather, it is meant to provide a philosophical account of the depth dimension of our affective lives—a dimension that in the dominant trends of the philosophy of emotions to this day remains either marginalized or disregarded.

Notes

- 1 Saulius Geniusas is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Geniusas received his PhD in philosophy at the New School for Social Research in 2008. Before joining CUHK, he was an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at James Madison University (2008–2012). He is the author of *The Origins of the Horizon in Husserl's Phenomenology* (Springer, 2012) and of some thirty articles and chapters in anthologies, including “The Origins of the Phenomenology of Pain: Brentano, Stumpf and Husserl” (*Continental Philosophy Review*, 47/1: 1–17) and “Between Phenomenology and Hermeneutics: Paul Ricoeur's Philosophy of Imagination” (*Human Studies*, 2014).
- 2 Max Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values. A New Attempt Toward the Foundation of an Ethical Personalism*, trans. M.S. Frings & R.L. Funk (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1973). Henceforth cited as *Formalism*.
- 3 Quentin Smith, “Scheler's Stratification of Emotional Life and Strawson's Person,” *Philosophical Studies* 25: 103–127 (1977).
- 4 Robert Zaborowski, “Max Scheler's Model of Stratified Affectivity and Its Relevance For Research On Emotions,” *Appraisal* 8 (3): 24–34 (2011).
- 5 Zhang Wei, “The Foundations of Phenomenological Ethics: Intentional Feelings,” in *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 4 (1): 130–142 (2009), and “Die Intentionalität des Fühlens und die Schichtung der emotionalen Sphäre: Die fundamentalen Fragen in Max Schelers Phänomenologie des Fühlens,” *Bulletin d'analyse phénoménologique* VI 5: 1–19 (2010).
- 6 One could also mention Rainier R. A. Ibana's “The Stratification of Emotional Life and the Problem of Other Minds According to Max Scheler,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 31 (4): 461–471 (1991). However, here Ibana is primarily concerned with intersubjective feelings, Scheler's indebtedness to Edith Stein, as well as Scheler's alternative to the Husserlian account of intersubjectivity in the Fifth Cartesian Meditation. For these reasons, Ibana addresses Scheler's stratification only in passing.
- 7 As my subsequent remarks will make clear, by “context” I do not mean the general framework of the philosophy of emotions, but rather the set of issues in Scheler's own reflections that define the scope and purpose of his analysis of different feelings of affectivity.
- 8 See *Formalism*, 104–110 and 328–344.
- 9 “The story is that Leontius, the son of Aglaion, coming up one day from the Piraeus, under the north wall on the outside, observed some dead bodies lying on the ground at the place of execution. He felt a desire to see them, and also a dread and abhorrence of them; for a time he struggled and covered his eyes, but at length the desire got the better of him; and forcing them open, he ran up to the dead bodies, saying, Look, ye wretches, take your fill of the fair sight” (Plato, *Republic*, trans. by Benjamin Jowett, New York: Vintage Classic, 1991, 439e–440a).
- 10 *Formalism*, 330.
- 11 *Formalism*, 331.
- 12 *Formalism*, 331.
- 13 *Formalism*, 331, fn. 112.
- 14 Such is the argument that Scheler employs to clarify the motive that underlies his stratification of affectivity. Admittedly, while this argument does establish that feelings differ from each other in terms of *depth*, it cannot be employed as a sufficient reason to justify Scheler's

fourfold stratification. Such is the case because both positive and negative feelings that belong to one and the same feeling-stratum can also be experienced simultaneously. For instance, at the same time, the subject of experience can be both healthy and fatigued, both hungry and disgusted; and as we will soon see, these feelings belong to what Scheler identifies as the stratum of vital feelings. This experiential fact compels one to admit that feelings that belong to one and the same level also differ from each other with regard to their depth. Taking this into account, one has to emphasize that Scheler's argument concerning positive and negative feelings is meant to do no more than constitute a motive to inquire into different feeling-strata.

- 15 *Formalism*, 332.
- 16 See Carl Stumpf, "Über Gefühlsempfindungen," *Zeitschrift für Psychologie und Physiologie der Sinnesorgane* 44, 1907, and "Apologie der Gefühlsempfindungen," *Zeitschrift für Psychologie und Physiologie der Sinnesorgane* 75, 1917.
- 17 Admittedly, as Quentin Smith had noted in his analysis, Scheler has provided us with deeply ambiguous reflections on the question regarding whether or not spiritual feelings are intentional. In **Chapter II** of his *Formalism*, Scheler refers to such spiritual feelings as despair and bliss as feeling-states ("the feeling-states belong to this modality range from 'blissfulness' to 'despair'" (*Formalism*, 109). By contrast, in **Chapter 5** he insists that spiritual feelings are intentional through and through, and thus, they cannot be conceived as feeling-states ("spiritual feelings are distinguished from purely psychic feelings, it appears to me, first by the fact that they can never be states" (*Formalism*, 343).
- 18 *Formalism*, 333.
- 19 See Ni Liangkang, "The Problem of the Phenomenology of Feeling in Husserl and Scheler." In K.-Y. Lau and J.J. Drummond (eds.), *Husserl's Logical Investigations in the New Century: Western and Chinese Perspectives* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007), 206–207. Zhang Wei has repeatedly employed this distinction between the two concepts of intentionality in his contributions to the intentionality of feelings, which I have mentioned above.
- 20 *Formalism*, 256.
- 21 See *Formalism*, 341.
- 22 See *Formalism*, 341.
- 23 *Formalism*, 334.
- 24 *Formalism*, 335.
- 25 See Max Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy*, trans. Peter Heath (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1954), 12.
- 26 My references to torture in the present context should not be taken to mean that this essay aims to provide an exhaustive account of this truly troubling phenomenon. Here my goal is much more modest: I only aim to argue that the dominant conceptions of Scheler's stratification, which reduce *all* pain-experiences to the level of sensible feelings, cannot provide a satisfactory account of what the victim of torture or a patient of a terminal illness lives through. The cases of torture and terminal illness are thus used as extreme illustrations of those experiences of pain, which, according to my thesis, cannot be subsumed under the heading of purely sensible feelings.
- 27 F.J.J. Buytendijk, *Pain: Its Modes and Functions*, trans. Eda O'Shiel (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), 114.
- 28 *Ibid.* In the present context my goal is not to carry out the explication of the effects of diverse types of pain upon the subject of experience in all the necessary detail. For a more detailed study of this issue, please see Elaine Scarry's classic study, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985). According to one of Scarry's central claims, pain can "touch" the person at deeper levels of her existence than what Scheler would identify as psychic or spiritual forms of suffering because physical pain has the power to obliterate all psychological content, be this content psychologically painful, pleasurable, or neutral. Also, for the effects that acute and chronic pain have upon the subject of experience, see Christian Grüny's recent study, *Zerstörte Erfahrung: Eine Phänomenologie des Schmerzes* (Würzburg: Verlag Königshausen & Neumann GmbH, 2004), esp. 149–167.
- 29 See Zaborowski, *op. cit.*, 30.

30 Although Scheler does not draw a distinction between spiritual and purely spiritual feelings in his “Stratification of the Emotional Life” in *Formalism*, in a later essay, “The Meaning of Suffering,” he speaks of “purely spiritual, religious-metaphysical feelings,” thereby giving rise to similar concerns to the ones I will address below with regard to sensible and psychic feelings. See Max Scheler, “The Meaning of Suffering, in *On Feeling, Knowing, and Valuing: Selected Writings*, ed. by Harold J. Bershady (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 85.

31 *Formalism*, 333.

32 *Formalism*, 342.

33 *Formalism*, 336.

34 *Formalism*, 336.

35 As Quentin Smith has it, “the deeper the emotion, the deeper the sphere of my ego the emotion is felt to permeate. ‘Deeper’ is not a metaphor in this context, for it literally describes the feeling of the emotion being ‘further down inside myself.’ The deeper the emotion, the further down inside my ego its emotive substance is felt to reach. For example, the psychic feeling of sadness is felt to extend further into the interior of my ego than the vital feeling of fatigue, and the spiritual feeling of despair is felt to extend even further downwards into the depths of myself than sadness” (Smith, *op. cit.*, 123–124).

Although my own analysis largely corroborates Smith’s view, there are some differences worth noting. According to Smith, there are three *essential* criteria that underlie Scheler’s fourfold stratification: (1) the feeling’s relatedness to the ego, (2) the feeling’s practical controllability, (3) finally, the feeling’s duration. Yet as I have argued above, the second criterion cannot be conceived as independent criterion, and therefore, it is not essential. Moreover, in my view, the third criterion that Smith singles out is only of peripheral significance in Scheler’s analysis. What is more, as far as the evidence of experience is concerned, sensible feelings can have a shorter *or* longer duration than vital, psychic, or even spiritual feelings. Therefore, in contrast to Smith, the position that I wish to defend in this paper suggests that the feelings’ relation to the ego is the *one and only essential criterion* that underlies Scheler’s fourfold stratification.

36 “And *purely psychic feelings*, to the degree that they are pure and unmixed with vital feelings, are attached so intimately to the *entire* constellation of contents of the individual consciousness that they are even less subject to purposeful control than vital feelings are” (*Formalism*, 336).

37 See *Formalism*, 333, ft. 116.

38 See *Formalism*, 336.

39 Scheler, *Formalism*, 256.

40 Emile Zola, *Germinal*, trans. by L.W. Tancock (Baltimore: Penguin, 1966), 338.

41 François Roland Truffaut attributes this aphorism to Wilde in *Jules et Jim* (Paris: Seuil, 1971). Quoted in Scarry, *op. cit.*, 33.

42 See especially “The Meaning of Suffering,” 83.

43 One might be left with the impression that the third interpretation I am here defending precludes one from meaningfully employing the concept of depth in the context of Scheler’s stratification. In this regard, it is important to emphasize that the qualification of depth can be understood in *two significantly different ways*: either on the basis of *exclusion*, or on the basis of the feeling’s *effect* and *reach*. In the first case, one would argue that precisely because psychic and spiritual feelings exclude the body, they affect the subject of experience at a deeper level. In the second case, one would argue that spiritual and psychic feelings do not need to exclude the body in order to affect the ego at deeper levels of her existence. Rather, if a feeling is to be qualified as psychic and spiritual, it must reach and have effects not only on the body, but also on what Scheler identifies as *the person*. In the case of *pure* psychic or *pure* spiritual feelings, the body remains unaffected. By contrast, in the case of mixed feelings, the effects that psychic and spiritual feelings have on the body do not discredit the fact that they affect the person at a deeper level than purely sensible or purely vital feelings do.

44 See *Formalism*, 107, 335, 341; see also Quentin Smith’s discussion of this issue in Smith, *op. cit.*, 108.

19 Thomas Mulvany Seebohm (1934–2014)

In Memoriam

Olav Wiegand

Professor Thomas M. Seebohm died at home in Bonn, on August 25, 2014. He was born on July 7, 1934 in Gleiwitz. Seebohm taught at The Pennsylvania State University from 1970 to 1984 and Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz 1984 to 2000. He graduated from Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz in 1960. He published the following books: *Die Bedingungen der Möglichkeit der Transzendentalphilosophie* (Bonn, 1962). From 1960 to 1965 he studied medieval Russian philosophy and culture, eventually publishing *Ratio und Charisma. Ansatz zur Ausbildung eines philosophischen und wissenschaftlichen Weltverständnisses im Moskauer Russland* (Bonn, 1977), *Zur Kritik der hermeneutischen Vernunft* (Bonn, 1972), *Philosophie der Logik. Handbuch Philosophie* (Freiburg, 1984), *Elementare formalisierte Logik* (Freiburg, 1991), *Hermeneutics: Method and Methodology* (Dordrecht, 2004). His phenomenological-epistemological valediction, completed shortly before his death, *History as a Science and the System of the Sciences*, is in press.

My first encounter with Prof. Seebohm was in 1985 shortly after his return from the United States. I was a student in my third term and attended his Seminar entitled “Kant’s Practical Philosophy.” Coming from University of Mainz he was of course acquainted with Kantian Philosophy. However, Seebohm’s understanding of “practical” was influenced by his encounter with American Pragmatism, which allowed him to see the practice of life from the Kantian perspective. There was no gap between theory and practice, no lengthy theorizing as an aim in itself. He summarized a Kantian idea and then his examples ranged from particular moral decisions relevant to the background of Nazism to present day environmental protection, eventually culminating in the problem of the scope and limits of science (in a moral sense). And this is the first point I wish to make: Thomas M. Seebohm never lost sight of the phenomena of practical life. He was a philosopher with both feet on the ground.

The second point I wish to make is that he lived life in humanistic tolerance, both within the realm of the academic world as well as in everyday life. His colleagues, his collaborators and his students appreciated him for this. He appreciated other people’s views—if they were original, sharp and phenomenologically justifiable, but he never let go if the argument was flat.

Only quite late in our relationship, however, did I come to understand why he had become a thoroughbred philosopher, and in particular a phenomenologist (with a passion for German Idealism). It was because he was driven by the quest for an understanding of consciousness. This may sound academic, and in this sense innocuous. However, understanding consciousness in the ultimate sense means *nosce te ipsum*. It took me a while to grasp that his views of the Transcendental Ego and Gurwitsch’s

non-egological theory of consciousness (which have strongly influenced my own work) are ultimately compatible. And this leads to the last point I wish to make, that becoming a philosopher in the actual sense of the word means to transgress the limits of the purely mundane, in the sense of the phenomenological tenet that consciousness is not mundane. This can be said of Thomas M. Seebohm in the same vein as it can be said of Husserl. Already in his Habilitation, Seebohm came close to what Wittgenstein spoke of when he said, “we must pass it over in silence.” When I last saw him in March of 2014, I found books by Epictet and Marc Aurel by his side.

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