

## EDITORIAL

This first issue of the Journal *Labyrinth* in 2017 is dedicated to the philosophy of Jan Patočka. It commemorates not only the 110<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth (\* 1.6.1907 in Turnov in Bohemia) but also the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his tragic death in 1977. In that year, Patočka became one of the first spokespersons of the civil rights movement *Charter 77* – an engagement marked by confrontation with the communist regime, which ultimately cost him his life. Weakened by poor health conditions, Patočka died in the aftermath of a police interrogation on March 13<sup>th</sup>, 1977.

The issue's title *The Heretical Perspectives of Jan Patočka (1907-1977)* invokes this double commemoration and alludes to his most famous and most heartily debated book, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History* (Patočka 1996). These essays, written towards the end of his life, in some sense can be seen as the culmination of his inquiries and long-term aspirations in the philosophy of history. Yet, it is by no means unequivocal why the author deemed these six essays to be "heretical."

Since they address the philosophy of history, the obvious explanation would be that the essays are considered heretical in regard to the most influential theories of historical evolution and lawful progress, such as in Marx' famous and often referenced "iron laws" of history. Patočka's break not only with the Marxist view of history is all-too obvious when he bluntly expresses his disbelief in the ideas of socialism, of progress, of democratic spontaneity, of independence and freedom – all of which, according to his considerations in the 6<sup>th</sup> essay, don't achieve their full meaning in themselves, but only in relation to an inner shaking and upheaval of human existence. For those who have gone through this existential upheaval and learned to overcome the admiration of mere force and to relinquish the objectifying calculation of human life, Patočka instead envisions a new solidarity – his famous and abundantly quoted "solidarity of the shaken", a solidarity even of the enemies despite all their contradiction and conflict. It is not difficult to discern the "heresy" of these assumptions in regards to all philosophical claims made about the laws of history and their universal validity. Written in Communist Czechoslovakia in the 1970's, the prototypical Marxist understanding of history seems to be the foremost target of this critique, yet Hegel's historical idealism assuming a natural progress of world history following the dictates of reason is evidently the main philosophical opponent. And, from a different angle, Patočka's existential view of history certainly also undermines philosophies of evolutionism such as Comte's "religion of positivism" with its three periods of a theological stage, a met-

aphysical stage, and ultimately the positive or scientific stage that is meant to offer stable (eternal) solutions for the social questions of humankind.

However, while such distancing from the main currents of philosophy of history is evident, it is also true that, in the foremost meaning of the word, heresy is always an attitude towards and within "one's own church." In this sense, it is especially Patočka's extensive processing of Husserl's and Heidegger's philosophy that is of interest. Although both of them are not *philosophers of history* in the eminent sense, Patočka dedicates in-depth analyses to them. This is in keeping with his overall philosophical venture which always tries to live up to both of their approaches and carefully ponders the complementary and mutually elucidating character of their thought.

As throughout his oeuvre, also in the *Heretical Essays* Patočka expresses great admiration for Edmund Husserl and his attempt to base life on insight, reason and responsibility. Yet it also is clear that Husserl's idea of a teleological nexus of European history is too much of an idealizing assumption that he is not willing to share. In that regard, as Patočka holds at one point, Husserl's phenomenology is even more reminiscent of the absolute character of Hegel's philosophy than of enlightenment rationalism. Conversely, Patočka often is critical of Heidegger's ontology for its lack of "phenomenological provability." Yet in regards to the philosophy of history, it is precisely Heidegger's approach that, for Patočka, recommends itself as a starting point, since it is eminently "historical" – its inherent historicity deriving from the fact of being built not on any kind of disinterested spectator, but on every human being's interest in one's own destiny and in the history of Being. Therefore, as Patočka holds, Heidegger's philosophy – in contrast to Husserl's – takes its "departure from freedom and responsibility already in being human, not only in thought" (Patočka 1996, 51).

While this preference regarding the starting point of his philosophy of history is clear, the appropriation of Heidegger is nonetheless, and blatantly so, carried by a heretical attitude. One could characterize it as a double heresy. Firstly, there is the *heresy of Heidegger's philosophy*, i.e. his apparent turning away from the philosophical tradition. Obviously, Patočka is fully aware of this and even lends his own twist to it. Writing about the novelty of Heidegger's approach, he at one point holds: "Freedom is not an aspect of human nature but rather means that Being itself is finite, that it lives in the shaking of all naïve 'certainties'..." (Patočka 1996, 49). The breaking not only with Husserl, but also with any subject-based philosophy is evident, yet by describing this move as an existential "shaking" and loss of "certainty", Patočka immediately gives it his own (Socratic) shift. This proves to be the second kind of *heresy*, which is pitted directly *against Heidegger*. While Heidegger's diagnosis of Western philosophy is that of a "forgetfulness of Being" (*Seinsvergessenheit*), which makes him want to revive the very early sources of pre-Socratic philosophy, for Patočka it is precisely the Socratic impulse that serves as the

guideline for his philosophy of history. In this sense, the overall venture of his *Heretical Essays*, namely to give an account of European history along the lines of Socratic questioning and the "care for the soul," is an undertaking that, from its very beginning, is heretical to Heidegger's basic idea.

Finally, and as a third explanation for the "heresy" of these essays, one has to refer to the context from which the word itself derives. First and foremost, *heresy* obviously means heterodoxy in terms of religion. For Patočka it is a heresy in regards to Christianity – and once again one could distinguish a double meaning: firstly an important aspect of his thought that stresses the *heresy of Christianity*, i.e. its potential to serve as a resuscitating source amidst the patterns of Greek "metaphysical" thought, and secondly it is a distinctive line in his philosophy that is *heretical towards Christianity* itself, clearly questioning its basic assumptions and its ongoing meaning in what Patočka declares to be a *post-Christian epoch*.

The attempts to rethink Christianity, or to unfold its "unthought" potentials, represent a continuous effort of his philosophy. They are led by the endeavor to exhaust philosophically Christianity's heritage for the contemporary world, or, more pertinently, for the future. In this sense, Christianity for him is (and always will be) a Christianity to come. Its real shape is still in the process of emerging: some kind of "Christianity" after the end of Christianity, understood as an organizing principle for political and societal order. Accordingly, also the repeated talk of a "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" then would indicate a kind of heretical adaption: the maintenance of a certain core of Christianity even after its suspension, and through its suspension. It is the signal for an investigation into what is left of the Christian spirit without being confessional or credulous.

Regarding its role in the history of ideas, Christianity for Patočka is characterized by one central trait that has strong (anti-)philosophical implications: the truth for which the soul struggles is not the truth of intuition but rather the truth of its own destiny. This led – as Patočka puts it – to an "abysmal deepening of the soul" and makes Christianity "thus far the greatest, unsurpassed but also un-thought-through human outreach" (Patočka 1996, 108). The chief difference appears to be that it is only with the arrival of Christianity that the inmost content of the soul is revealed, namely the struggle for its own destiny, bound up with eternal responsibility. One could hold that Patočka's whole conception of history is driven by the conviction that precisely this heritage is (or rather: should be) an irreplaceable component of the European history of ideas. Derrida, in his reading of Patočka, calls it the "Christian mystery" or the "Christian secret." The marginalization, repression, suppression of this secret would exactly be what Patočka understands not only as the post-Christian, but

simultaneously as the post-historical epoch. History is the history of responsibility, and every attempt at its totalizing appropriation forces responsibility out of history, turning it into post-history.

The heresy of Jan Patočka's thought thus can be understood in manifold ways. Derrida nicely sums it up, when writing:

What is implicit yet explosive in Patočka's text can be extended in a radical way, for it is heretical with respect to Christianity and a certain Heideggerianism but also with respect to all the important European discourses. Taken to its extreme, the text seems to suggest that Europe will not be what it must be until it becomes fully Christian (...) (Derrida 1995, 29).

This might suffice as a little motivation why the editors decided to put this issue under the title of "heresy". The articles collected in it cover the wide range of Patočka's thought and interests. Under the first rubric, *From the Archives* we are happy to publish a lecture in German that so far was hardly accessible to readers. It was presented in the history-charged year of 1968 just after the suppression of the Prague Spring at the Protestant Academy of Hofgeismar in Germany. The author starts his lecture on "The Function of Literature for Society" with the sweeping remark that literature, or better to say *belles lettres*, is at the "heart" of all intellectual endeavors and in the center of the intellectual world. Literature – Patočka says quoting the contemporary German writer Heinrich Böll – is the search for "a habitable language in a habitable land." (Böll 1979, 53) Moreover, it seems that the dual criticism he formulates, a criticism of communism as well as of capitalism, carries a lot of the spirit of Prague Spring that was so abruptly suppressed less than a month before this lecture was given.

Also the second rubric is opened with an original text by Patočka, and indeed an iconic piece of his. Written in late 1976, it was the first article that he conceived in his new role as a spokesperson of the civil rights movement *Charter 77*. Entitled "On the Matters of The Plastic People of the Universe and DG 307," it is a writing of public defense for some underground musicians of the two eponymous rock bands who had been arrested for political reasons. Yet at the same time this short piece is also a powerful reflection in which the author – as if speaking to himself – explains the reasons for his turn toward political engagement. Not of least importance, the defense entails a wonderful reversal of Dostoevsky's short story *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man*: it is not only that, as in Dostoevsky, a single human being can morally corrupt a whole planet, but also, as Patočka puts it, that the moral integrity demonstrated by some young rock musicians can ultimately change and awaken the tired consciousness of a whole society. Jozef Majernik has done a careful new translation of this crucial piece into English, which here is published for the first time. It is followed by Majernik's commentary and an insightful reading of this text as the final articula-

tion of Patočka's "lifelong striving to live in the best possible, truthful and *clear* way", i.e. "to live the properly human life."

The third category, *Articles* is comprised of seven original contributions that highlight the wide spectrum of Patočka's versatile oeuvre. As is good practice for *Labyrinth*, articles are published in three languages: English, German, and French. Ovidiu Stanciu's "Subjectivité et projet. La critique patočkienne du concept heideggérien de *projet de possibilités*" is the sole contribution in French, yet it is also outstanding in another sense, because it represents the only reworking of a phenomenological core issue. Starting off with Patočka's critique of Heidegger, Stanciu especially examines the novel approach of his "asubjective phenomenology" and its entrenchment in corporeity. A distinctive closeness to the phenomenological mode of thought is also characteristic of Jan Frei's "Zerstreuung, Verschliessung, Hingabe", an article that analyses the different representations of "transcendence" in Patočka's philosophy. While, on a more general level, transcendence for him always means a liberation of the human being from her/his distraction between things, Frei also emphasizes the emphatic meaning of "transcendence" as a turn to the "myth of the divine man" and the key metaphor of resurrection.

As becomes evident in Frei's paper, a certain inclination towards religious topics and a language of religion is typical of Patočka's oeuvre. It seems most fitting to characterize it as post-Christian in inspiration; i.e. in the above outlined heretical sense of a reflection on the innermost meaning of Christianity precisely after the "end" of Christianity. This aspect of Patočka's thought is also a crucial point of reference for the articles by Jason W. Alvis and Martin Kočí. Alvis offers a rather novel approach by interweaving the two core motives of "solidarity" and "sacrifice." The idea of solidarity figures prominently in the *Heretical Essays* where the "solidarity of the shaken" is envisaged as the main hope and prospect for mankind to overcome its war-like status of permanent mobilization and instrumentalizing of other human beings. Kočí characterizes this grim hope as "The Experiment of Night" and describes it as Patočka's somewhat paradoxical attempt to give a spiritual response to the discontents of modernity and its destructive energies. Similarly, Alvis invokes the power of sacrifice (or self-sacrifice) to counteract these tendencies and, as a biblical comparison, recalls St. Paul's famous prompt to the Corinthians to become "The Scum of the Earth."

The topic of war and its disconcerting handling in the sixth and final of the *Heretical Essays* is also at the center of Christian Sternad's contribution. It is one of the significant merits of his article that this topic is traced back to Max Scheler and his "war philosophy." This influence has hardly ever been recognized. Sternad convincingly outlines Scheler's engagement for the "spiritual mobilization" in the First World War and highlights a characteristic trait of his philosophy of that time that he designates as a "dangerously romantic conception of *force*." The main assumption of Sternad's article is that it was this concep-

tion of force that underpinned Patočka's estimation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a "century of war" and led him to analyze it in terms of "excess" and "total mobilization."

The section of *Articles* is completed by two further contributions that tackle crucial issues of Patočka's political thinking: Philippe Merlier analyses "the meaning of the post-European spirit", and Ludger Hagedorn examines the "crisis of humanism" and its shimmering, ambivalent reflection in Patočka. While Hagedorn focuses on writings from the period of the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, Merlier highlights Patočka's "visionary texts" from the seventies. It is the great achievement of Merlier's article that on the one hand it recalls Plato's "care for the soul" as a pillar of European philosophy, but on the other hand takes Patočka's ideas as an invitation and, in fact, as an urgent call to think anew the formation of Europe and its preeminent tasks today. Hagedorn draws the reader's attention to the fact that Patočka's existential philosophy indeed debunks any "cult of the human being" and heavily questions all ideologies of evolution and progress. Yet, his thought nevertheless insists on the precious integrity of human life, a claim that paradoxically can be met in life's confrontation with its inherent weakness and fragility.

This issue also is comprised of a section for a *Book Review* and another one for *Discussion*. Susanne Moser contributed to both of them. Her intervention in the section for *discussion* is highly topical, since it addresses the ardently debated claim for political correctness in its inherent danger to install a moral and juridical system of "Tugend-Terror" (= terror of virtues). She convincingly discusses this issue along the lines of religious or quasi-religious war: on the one hand political correctness as a new kind of religious surrogate especially for academics, on the other hand political correctness as the main target of its (typically right-wing) opponents who attack it with a fervor that also bears quasi-religious connotations. Susanne Moser's *book review* tackles a further delicate issue: the interrelation between monotheism and violence. Jan Assmann has worked on this topic for many years and put forward an impressive collection of writings dedicated to this issue, most prominently his *Monotheismus und die Sprache der Gewalt* (Assmann 2006). The book reviewed by Moser – *Totale Religion. Ursprünge und Formen puritanischer Verschärfung* (Assmann 2016) – can be seen as a continuation and sharpening of the same question against the background of an alleged "return of religion" that overshadows recent debates and eagerly generates new bogeymen. It is also more than a superficial coincidence that the German title of Assmann's book immediately reminds of Hannah Arendt's *Elemente und Ursprünge totaler Herrschaft*, her masterpiece in analysis of the totalitarian political movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. With this parallel in mind, Moser's book review also nicely links back to her article discussing the new "terror of virtues" and the ensuing ideological war on political correctness.

Finally, the issue is concluded by an interview that Czech philosopher Jakub Homolka conducted with Klaus Nellen, founder and former head of the Patočka-Archive at the Viennese *Institute for Human Sciences* (IWM). It recalls the early days of Patočka research and the dramatic circumstances of the rescuing of his literary estate. As such, it is the perfect conclusion for an issue that is dedicated to Patočka's intellectual legacy.

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