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## "Scum of the Earth": Patočka, Atonement, and Waste

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### Abstract

*Sacrifice, solidarity, and social decadence were essential themes not only for Patočka's philosophical work, but also for his personal life. In the "Varna Lecture" sacrifice is characterized uniquely as the privation of a clear telos, as counter-escapist, and as sutured to a comportment of finite life that is non-causal and non-purposive. In his Heretical Essays a similar hope is expressed to extract meaningfulness from use-value, and to deploy a Socratic and Christian "Care for the Soul" that can counteract the decadences of our age. These interests and developments of the practice and notion of sacrifice point to Patočka's double-hereticism, both of the post-industrial age of technological advancement, and of what had become the unthought-through (and therefore taken for granted) of the Christian tradition. In both senses, his theory of sacrifice is not unlike that of St. Paul, who saw the necessity of counter-acting the decadence and pompousness of the Corinthians by calling them to become "scum of the earth."*

*This helps reveal how sacrifice presumes, in general, an operative notion of waste, and this paper seeks to lend further understanding to the relation between solidarity and sacrifice by developing, from out of Patočka's own work, precisely how waste figures prominently in such a relation. Waste may be refused by merit of being deemed to have no value; waste can mark a layer of expenditure of using "something up" in a way that overlooks its societal surplus; and waste could depict whatever is, like a wasteland, uncultivable and barren. Waste then is employed in the essay as a heuristic tool for understanding how the normalization of the relation between solidarity and sacrifice is in need of being inverted, and how this inversion has consequences also for how solidarity can be considered in relation to atonement.*

**Keywords:** Patočka, phenomenology, atonement, waste, hereticism

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### 1. Introduction

*"Wasteland"*  
*April is the cruelest month, breeding*  
*Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing*  
*Memory and desire, stirring*  
*Dull roots with spring rain.*

T.S. Eliot, 1922

Atonement is at-one-ment. What at first seems like banal word play indeed remains rooted in an etymology – *Atonen*, to be at-one (perhaps modeled on the Latin *adunare*, to unite), combines *ad* with *unum*, and (post 1300) concerns the melding of two parties into a unique social accord (*adunare*). Atonement eventually (from early 1500) depicted a condition or series of actions that resulted in fraternity, and in a more theological sense (from

early 1600) became a matter of re-union or reconciliation after humankind's great wrongs due to a propitiation of the offended God.

One underlying preunderstanding that goes along with any understanding of atonement is that in order for any such reunion to occur, something must be laid to waste or sacrificed. The Hebrew *korban* is used in the Old Testament for sacrifice, and expresses the idea of an approaching or "bringing near" to a place of interaction with God in the temple – likely at an altar – via a ritual of "purification." In the Book of Isaiah the loss of meaning of the sacrificial slaughtering of animals is deeply bemoaned since atonement (*Zebah*) had become taken for granted, which led to a particular kind of political disorder the messiah-to-come eventually would restore. In the New Testament a radical shift is made in an understanding of atonement through shifting to the use of the word "ransom" (ἰλάσκομαι *hilaskomai*) – an atoning, propitiating, and forgiving sacrifice that makes for reconciliation of social bonds (Καταλλαγὴ, *katallagē*). Ransom covered the debt owed to God for contributing to evil<sup>1</sup> as Christ "came to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45).<sup>2</sup> Christ's sacrifice amounted to the greatest waste or *expenditure* ever possible: God Godself (the irreducibly highest of values ever to be evaluated) is discarded vehemently from the social sphere. Early Christians thus stopped performing the tradition of animal sacrifice because they deemed it no longer necessary for solidarity and atonement (a scandal to the prevalent religious traditions).<sup>3</sup> The end of scapegoating is one thing that makes Christianity "the religion of the egress from religion." (Gauchet 1999, 40)

One could venture to suggest that the 20th century marks the return of forms of a religionless scapegoating – to destroy one individual for socio-economic grounds – but in a more effervescent, implicit, and culturally-embedded form. In every attempt to be no longer Christian, global capital has reinstated scapegoating in a way that its mechanisms seek the benefit of its function while discarding the husk of religion and its hopes of sacrifice to strengthen social bonds. Although such a theory never was introduced by Jan Patočka,

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<sup>1</sup> Compare here Isaiah 53:10 with Mark 10:45, especially the use of "in the place of many." See also Isaiah 43:3 for this understanding of "ransom" or *kýper* in the context of other nations being given in exchange for Israel (also see Kim, 1983, 57).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Hebrews 2:17: "For this reason [Jesus] had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that...he might make atonement [*hilaskesthai*] for the sins of the people." Then in Romans 3:25, Paul claimed: "God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood." The verbs "propitiate" or "atone," *hilasterion*, are used by the apostle John, referencing Christ's death as an *hilasmos* (I John 2:2, and 4:10).

<sup>3</sup> For example, the rituals of Christianity – baptism and communion, e.g. – replace animal and scapegoating sacrifices. Paul claimed we are to no longer sacrifice in these ways. Jesus "cleansing of the temple" in the gospel of John was an act that began the process of reinstating solidarity and communion.

anyone familiar with his work would not find it too surprising, as the interplay between sacrifice, solidarity, and a critique of modern European society remained essential for his work. Patočka enacted a kind of *double-hereticism*: First, he was a "heretic" of modern, industrial life in part because he drew attention to how society had taken for granted the role of sacrifice and taking-the-place-of-another. Patočka enacted an understanding of sacrifice that amounted to a paradoxical, non-economic, non-utilitarian, and counter-utopian vision of becoming a reject in a time of crisis instantiated by a certain industrialization of humankind. As a Czech dissident and original signatory of the Charter 77 civil rights movement in the 70's, his life was caught in the firefights of the post-world war amidst civil unrest and the struggle for liberation from Soviet occupation, and this first hereticism contributed to his becoming a philosopher not only *in a time* of crisis, but *of* crisis itself.

Second, he also was a "heretic" of the Christian tradition: here the theme of sacrifice again became a dominant one because he witnessed the radical attempt in the Czech Republic to extract Catholicism from its culture. In the 1940's he furnished a genealogy of this shift taking place in Europe more broadly (which he traced back to 15<sup>th</sup> century; c.f. Patočka 2006, 77), and ultimately concluded that there still remain "unthought-through" aspects of Christianity dispossessed of its religion "after the end of Christianity," with "sacrifice" figuring prominently among those forms of life in need of being thought-through (Hagedorn 2015, 10). In this sense he was a heretic of Christianity, for what called itself "Christian" had forgotten its core intelligibility – sacrifice. In the "Varna Lectures" Christian sacrifice is characterized as the privation of a clear *telos*, as in need of being distinguished from escapism, and as an experience in which the sacrifice is sutured to the sacrificee's mode of being. Christian sacrifice teaches that willing sacrificees care about a certain comportment of finite life itself that is non-causal, non-deterministic, and auto-resistant to playing by the rules of the industrial age in which we find ourselves still today.

These two, not so easily distinguishable hereticisms (of modern industrial life, and of the Christian tradition) coalesce perfectly in his two major tasks of *The Heretical Essays* – both to develop a new interpretation of "history" via a necessary distinction between purposelessness and meaningfulness, and to deploy a simultaneously Socratic and Christian "Care for the Soul" with the hopes of counteracting the societal pressures of decadence; pressures that have left us all placated and powerless to alter our own course in history. It is in this sense of being counter-decadent that his work is stunningly reminiscent of St. Paul's condemnation of the pompous and splintered Corinthians in needed of becoming the "scum of the earth" (I Cor. 4:13). They were called to become *peripsēma* (περίψημα,) – a scum that atones; an "offscouring" of dregs or filth by merit of being used-up or becoming a "waste" or rejection. This word *peripsēma* (like the grotesque remains of an exfoliation or shave) is used

only once in the New Testament, and in this case points to the necessity of an *expiatory* sacrifice that, in its counter-decadence, is the core of atonement.

The goal of the remainder of this paper first is to introduce in greater detail Patočka's doubly-heretical notion of sacrifice, and second, to engage the notion of "waste" as a heuristic tool for contextualizing the "unthought" space between Christian sacrifice and solidarity today, in an age when western society thinks itself to have pulled the fish-hook of religion from its mouth. Despite any attempt to discard it, there is always a running theory of (at least quasi-religious) atonement and sacrifice that enervates a given society, and "waste" may help understand that relationship. Waste has varied definitions, as what is unused, unproductive, or unwelcomed and therefore cast from oneself or society. Traced to its Latin origination in *Vastus*, it concerns what is refused by merit of being deemed of no value, may mark a layer of expenditure of being-used-up, or may depict whatever is, like a *vast* wasteland, an uncultivable, barren, and open expanse.<sup>4</sup> Waste, at least from a more phenomenological interpretation, is a product of one's activity; as deemed *the-out-of-place* (c.f. Douglas 1966).

## 2. Patočka's Notion of Sacrifice in the Varna Lectures and Heretical Essays

### 2.1. Sacrifice and Modern Decadence

It is in regards to the overcoming of a kind of Christian abyssal devastation of sacrifice through which I want to interpret Patočka's theory of sacrifice in the Varna lectures. Many others (Hagedorn, Evink, Dodd, et. al.) have described in great detail the overall thrust of Patočka's notion of sacrifice, so reflection here will be limited and focused. Essential, it seems, is the way the Varna lectures end: "our imprisoned age must face itself," and sacrifice, a radical Christian sacrifice is *one key* to that. The epic of sacrifice so easily can be reduced to a hidden/implicit expectation within a given society. Today for example, industrial advancements have drawn so many to sacrifice themselves in everyday life, whether through enframement (Heidegger), computerization (Latour) machination (Lyotard), or technologization (Anders). Yet in every case, as each of the aforementioned thinkers attest, these activities are not germane to the genuine flourishing of human life, but

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<sup>4</sup> "To waste away" is a temporal means of placating boredom in times of leisure. A "wasteland" is a barren place of death, lacking in vitality. "Wastes" are refuse and garbage often too emotionally offensive even to discuss. *Vastus* also can refer to *vaste* (Middle French, post 1500's), which characterizes what is immense, desolate, and unoccupied. The English word "De-vast-ation" unites these terms. Another word that is of etymological relation is effuse. From 1520's the Latin past participle adjective of *effuses* points to what is both "poured out" and to be vast, extensive, and broad".

rather benefit its proxy of technological apparatuses. These aspects of industrial life today embody empty, self-fulfilling, and vague themes of progress that shroud their most true functions, which are detrimental to the human good. It is in a similar vein that Patočka bemoans how sacrifice no longer is powerful in our time, and that whenever sacrifice does become a theme of engagement, it ends up economized in terms of resources. We once again succumb to retreating into technological language. Technology becomes the means by which the enlightenment of man gets overly conceived, as well as a bad-faith sublimation in response to the social-self reproach exacted via sacrifices and victims in waging wars.

A *true* understanding of sacrifice however, cannot be calculated in terms of power, is inherently paradoxical, and entails the radical experience of gain-via-loss in an inversion of power relations that involves a turning-away from the unproblematicity of "ordinary everydayness." Patočka endorses a particular form of Christian sacrifice as it differs from other religions of power, kingship, and authority-making. This kind of sacrifice is inherently social, in that neither no one person can embody it, nor one meaning underwrite its motivity. Yet his theorization of Christian sacrifice is anti-telic in a way that also is anti-escapist, suturing the sacrificee to its lived, ontological modality. Christian sacrifice thus teaches that willing sacrificees care about a certain comportment of *finite life* itself that is non-causal, non-deterministic, and resistant to playing by the aforementioned rules of technological advancement. Finally, while some think Patočka does not draw sharp distinctions between "victims" and "voluntary sacrifices" (as neither the Czech *Obět*, nor the German *Opfer* make such differentiation), his work seems to necessitate a distinction, unabashedly valorizing the latter; the willing, volitional choice to sacrifice.

## 2.2. The Role of History

Patočka's best-known work *The Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History* was an application of his dissident spirit to the core thought patterns of modern life in part responsible for the many atrocities of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This work challenged many of the prevailing and accepted contradictions of his generation and culture in regards to history, such as the contradiction that history determines the past according to which we are inextricably bound to operate, yet that its annals are composed of the detailed descriptions of the acts of free subjects. He sought to arrive at a synthesis that honors both of these driving conceptions in order to allow social actors to be original/singular, yet in a way that retains social meaning on a macro-institutional level. Within a perhaps more phenomenological analysis, history is a matter of self-construal: histories, traditions, and narratives are in constant upheaval within consciousness, and trying to rely on a particular tradition or event

is like "trying to hold on to the waves in a shipwreck." It is precisely this view of history that leads Patočka, in his 1952 essay "Time, Myth, and Faith" (Patočka 2015), to conclude that a *true* and free faith does not cling to an objective-relative meaning. The antinomy that generally goes unrecognized is that those who cling to myths and traditions seek with all of their energy a "pure origin", and in fact are clinging to but historically relativized meanings more in accord with a near-hedonistic escapism than with the teachings of Christ. Faith is opposed to such escapism, as the *very idea* of God has called the faithful *to realize* history, not simply be passive *subjects to* its many developments.

But this understanding of becoming radical shapers of history is a far cry from a call to become its superhero. Patočka's double-hereticism concerns the attempted reformation of both a secularized socialism, and a trenchant, Czech, cultural Christianity via a new understanding of myth as history itself. A flawed relation with history, in many respects, is at the core of the modern mind. Shaped against the backdrop of Karl Löwith's critique of teleological history in general and Christian eschatology in particular (Löwith 1957; cf. Hagedorn 2015), Patočka-the-phenomenologist understood how easily humans operate with the tendency to make the exception the rule; to integrate the truly outstanding into the naturalness of everyday life irrespective of such escapist views. Comparable to Arendt's view, the everyday absorbs how human acts are in fact given their purpose (not the other way around). Patočka remained disheartened by the fact that the majority of people's lives are spent either concerning themselves with their survival, or with the *forms* of everyday function that they have learned during this very survival process. For example, technology becomes an end in itself; work becomes a pleasure that fulfills our "orgiastic" drives for excitement; the *mysterium tremendum* is limited to the enchantment this world is capable of furnishing. The original synthesis of a new meaning of history at which Patočka sought to arrive ran counter to the modern insistence upon conflict and competition. His replacement or "heretical" understanding of history called upon, in the face of provocation, the revivification of a form of Christian "sacrifice" that grew from the solidarity of "the shaken" – those truly responsible persons who never forget the events that have shaped their lives, and therefore might respond to any crises that may befall them.

In addition to the profound and original meaning of Christian sacrifice, then, is the call to overcome the world. History only *is made* – it is not merely by observing or "knowing" (these highly enlightened means of more passive transcendental engagement) the truth, but rather by struggling for an inner historicity of the self. Christianity allows us not to be mere subjects of history, bound to the "information" given to its adherents from tradition

and myth.<sup>5</sup> The present, decadent, "Post-Christian" era runs antithetical to what Patočka fashioned to be a synthetic, Christian-Socratic "care for the soul," which is a taking of "origiastic" responsibility for one's own *Bildung* via radical individualization. If Christ has set one free, then this freeing perhaps is most importantly a freeing from political, cultural, and social imaginaries that seek to blackmail and entrap us. This freedom is from the metaphysical matrixes (not unlike Adorno's "substitute images of the divine") that seek to govern every thought away from true care and responsibility via myth and the history of origination.

This furnishes an essential backdrop for a very particular observation about Christian life:

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. (Patočka 1996, 108)

Christianity's yet-to-be-thought and *unsurpassed* greatness is its propensity as a resource to overcome everydayness by promoting the caring about one's salvation from imminent death. This is enacted and engaged not by directly caring *for* oneself, but by sacrificing oneself in a way that the self-sacrifice in fact amounts to the soul's getting cared for.

### 3. Deepening a Theory of Waste via Patočka's Heretical Essays

This leads to the potential to exfoliate from Patočka's work some deeper reflection on the notion of waste, and this will be accomplished through four topoi.

#### 3.1. History and Waste

A first reflection on waste points to a particular kind of insignificance one is called to attain in the act of sacrifice. The will to be significant is to be abandoned in the act, and the life of the truly Christian sacrifice, today, tends to be rejected automatically for it gets misunderstood (like religion in general) as insignificant. Religion often is deemed unimportant at worse, or it gets relegated to a private option at best, thus indirectly reinstating its lack of importance. It is in this context that a reflection on "waste" might be instructive:

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<sup>5</sup> See also Joas (2014) who questions this notion of optional, free-choice faith, which has set-off occidental reason on its individualistic, secular trajectories. Contemporary Christianity consequentially has led to a stark, often extreme individualization of belief, which in its secularized form is popularized according to petit-freedoms or, as Peter Sloterdijk once called them, "whims."

waste not only as what is passionately and willfully rejected, but also what is quietly dismissed to have no value, significance, or meaningful intelligibility. Even among the self-proclaimed "religious," the non-implicit and non-integrative conception of religious life leaves it in a precarious situation that leads to at least two possible outcomes: either it becomes insignificant (as just described) or it gets commandeered as an instrument. For example, even though Habermas quite recently has called for a "post-secular" society, the conception of religion within such a schema can amount to a pragmatic instrumentalization of religion as a tool for creating humans more moral. This inadvertently runs the risk of leaving religion as a second-order pawn to any purposive, social good.

Indeed, the contemporary rejections of Christianity today in this so-called "post-secular age" are far more inconspicuous and subtle, which makes such rejections in fact all the more dangerous: Christianity no longer is seen as being anything unique or of value on its own terms, but instead, in being instrumentalized, can but one tactic in achieving a purported social/political/moral *telos*. In other words, a post-secular acceptance of religion and the religious (so long as it and they are not "fanatics," of course) in contemporary society fact is a kind of rejection; namely, because it precludes from the very beginning the possibility that it operates with a differential that makes any "real" difference on its own. In what seems to be a shift from secular to post-secular also comes a shift from outright rejection to implicit rejection. To channel Patočka here, such interpretations of religious life can be counteracted only when a radical sacrifice initiates a new selflessness whereby one is aligned with what has become in a given society insignificance or waste itself. "Christianities" must not succumb to their own instrumentalization towards a utopic vision; otherwise the sacrificing of oneself for another and the solidarity it creates does not get unrealized.

### 3.2. Solidarity with Meaninglessness

A second aspect of Patočka's *Heretical Essays* relevant to interpreting waste is the recognition that what is found meaningless is *precisely* that according to which the highest degree of intelligibility is accorded. For Patočka, "Human acts can be purposeless, yet be meaningful." (Patočka 1996, 54). Following Heidegger, the activity of making-sense or making-intelligible is a core human endeavor and the produced intelligibilities of such activity are irreducible to purposiveness. This is a counter-industrial meaningfulness, sense, or intelligibility. Contrariwise, within our present age, the societies in which we gain our present forms of meaning-making have led not only to a social understanding of how "purpose is causality raised up to the region of the meaningful..."; that is, to how meaningfulness has been reduced to purposiveness, but also to how *purpose itself* has become the



ultimate meaning that in fact is incredibly *purposeless*! The result being that there is no purpose to purpose itself, yet the insistence (or obsession) with purposefulness today is affixed with a maximum meaningfulness. A certain determinism has found a social concubine in the synthesis between purpose and technology, which no longer only is a means, but has become an end in itself.

One problem here is that this kind of *telos-obsessed* thinking disregards and auto-rejects whatever is deemed to have *no purpose*. Its seeming inverse claim, which may amount to a more probing insight, reveals how we operate with the tendency to give the purposeful an ultimate meaningfulness in and of itself. And what is meaningful, we most always conclude, deserves attention, energy, and perhaps even adoration. In "man's search for meaning" (to reappropriate Frankl) one arrives at purpose itself, which in a decadent society often unknowingly gets raised to the status of a "value" and therefore ushered into the company of truth, beauty, or justice. As Patočka concludes, values are not purposes or goals, but rather indicative of the meaningfulness of what is formulated as "autonomous qualities," according to which we live as if they were universal (Patočka 1996, 55). We are the bestowers of meanings on things and – perhaps most importantly – it remains the task for man to be involved poetically in "bestowing meaning on the meaningless." (Patočka 1996, 57).

### 3.3. Meaninglessness and Waste

In another sense, meaninglessness is what presents itself as intelligible, yet is rejected on the grounds that it has no place in conscious life and is not deserving *attention*. Whatever is meaningless slips through our entirely "normalized" meaning-given conceptualizations of the world. This is entirely consistent with how Patočka ends his Varna lectures, claiming that "our imprisoned age must face itself" and that it now will take a radical Christian sacrifice to do so. Patočka bemoans how sacrifice is no longer powerful in our time, and that whenever we do recognize sacrifice it ends up economized in terms of resources (Patočka 2015, 20). The notion of sacrifice as such ends up getting lost once again in a technical and functional understanding of being.

Instead, sacrifice should be understood as precisely that which challenges these calculations and functions with a different form of life.<sup>6</sup> In a more prescriptive element, the Christian life lived (according to Paul's mandate to being scum of the earth) should involve

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<sup>6</sup> For Patočka, today we flee from sacrifice and "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" and "Thus sacrifice represents a persistent presence of something that does not appear in the calculations of the technological world." (Patočka 1989, 337)

one's closer association not simply with the meaningless, but also those actions, places, and aspects of life that serve no utilitarian purpose in life whatsoever, and therefore are capable of being subversive in their enactment of *meaninglessness*. Here again an understanding of waste can help draw attention to the essential role the making-intelligible-of-meaninglessness might play.

### 3.4. The Care for the Soul

A final aspect of Patočka's work that bears significance for conceiving the role of waste within sacrifice is his version of the "Care for the Soul." To care for the soul is to reject any essentialist, never-differentiating *information* that hides under the guises of truth in myth, which amounts to *adequatio* or correctness. Instead, caring is born in an event to which one responds (e.g. St Paul's miraculous blindness and healing) by being "shaken" in a way that is powerful enough to shift the actor from being merely a passive observer and subject of history's movements, to becoming an alterer of them through a never-ending and dynamic inquiry and practice (Patočka 1989, 82).<sup>7</sup> These inquiries and practices enact a direct *devaluation* of what the world claims to value. They result in counter-cultural movements against what humans presuppose to be – by nature undebatably – good. These values range from climbing social ladders to attain better jobs, to keeping quiet and living unproblematically in a corrupt social state.

The care for the soul always entails a devaluing of how worth typically is attained, and it is in these regards that Christianity especially is instructive as the means of "devaluation of this world by a 'true' world, of life [and] will..." (Patočka 1996, 97) To devalue is to become subsequently rejected by the worlds' forms of decadence that enable what a society thinks to be a smooth, effortless, unproblematic, and carefree functioning. Patočka prophesied what he perceived to be a nascent and growing threat in Europe beginning in the 60's – we have begun a social "addiction to things" that only ends in "a decadent life, a life addicted to what is inhuman by its very nature." (Patočka 1996, 113, 97) Decadence goes hand-in-glove with increasing reliance upon the non-human. Instead, Christian life sutures the "care of the soul" to *melete Thanatou*, "care of death," which more accurately amounts to

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<sup>7</sup> Regarding the constant movement of such caring especially under the Greek conception. Patočka also claimed that the soul "is the origin of movement, it can only be understood in movement. The movement of the soul in its most proper sense of the world is precisely *care for its very self*." (Patočka 2002, 124) Continuing, "The proper, positive care of the soul is somehow the concluding of something that is sketched into the nature of the soul, but is not always explicitly captured." (ibid.; see also Findlay, 2002)

"care of life." (Patočka 1996, 105) Under Patočka's theorization, this care of death/life/soul can only result in one's becoming a sacrifice for the lives of other's.

In particular, the Greek care for the soul is enriched by Christianity's adding to it an infinite, non-decadent care that at its core most simply *seeks to know what it does more fully*:

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 unthought-through human outreach that enabled humans to struggle against decadence." (Patočka 1996, 108).

As it enriches the care for the soul via a radical sacrifice of the self, Christian life can slow down the grinding wheels of history in a way unique from other religious traditions.<sup>8</sup> As he put it in *Plato and Europe*, a Christian care of the soul is "disengaged from...Greek dialectic" and this has consequences for how it understands authority and acts in relation to dogmas that "are not considered as something to be accepted blindly" although "these dogmata have meaning." (Patočka 2002, 129) For Patočka Christian faith is the last hold-out in the struggle against social, political, and cultural decadence, but only in its renewed sense of sacrifice, that irreducible core of Christian life.

Since the care for the soul occurs paradoxically by abandoning self-interests, it is a care for the death and therefore life of others that motivates acts that help lift individuals from decadence. Decadent are those of us out of touch with our innermost *understanding* of the distinctions between functions, values, and meanings. And by merit of being distracted by that which has captured and held in stasis our "orgiastic" search for the *mysterium tremendum*, we remain trapped in a simultaneously kenotic and consumptive relation with the *forms* of utility themselves. Care for the soul offers a unique freedom from the authority of the historically evolved, social norms that order our lives, which tend to be marked by an economically oriented obsession with function. Means of overcoming such obsessions entails forms of relation whereby one is more attuned to what escapes the oversight of function, whatever within such a system is deemed an insignificant and meaningless waste.

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<sup>8</sup> It is in this context that Hagedorn argues for how Derrida drew from Patočka in these regards in claiming that Europe must be emancipated from Athens and Rome in order to reach its full potential. Such a task can be accomplished only by being "fully Christian." (Hagedorn, 2015)

## 4. Waste and Sacrifice

It now becomes possible, via further insights from Patočka's Varna Lectures, to integrate more carefully the intelligibility of the role of waste in the relations between sacrifice and solidarity today. While there are many paths one could take in such an effort, there are three conceptual notions that I find most convincing when thinking about waste alongside Patočka's Varna lectures. Waste in this case can be thought and distinguished according to *Vastus'* three pronged distinction: devastation, expenditure, and wasted.

### 4.1. Devastation

Once a sacrifice occurs, it comes with a radical experience of mourning what has been lost. What could have been can be no more, and the future of possibility in this sense is wasted. If it is the case that, as Patočka suggests, "Those who thus sacrifice themselves do not avoid finitude, nor do they seek admiration on that account...", (Patočka 338, 1989) then it also remains true that one must go through finitude, and the abysmal reality that it would entail without reliance upon any escapist narrative (Re: Löwith). Christ on the cross was estranged from union with neither man nor God. This lonely devastation is given voice in the sense of abandonment: Christ's "Father, why have you forsaken me?" marks the experience of a certain vastness and emptiness, which gets expressed in terms of loneliness.

This points to how the sacrificee's life is one of a kind of devastation. The sacrificee does not come to expect a miraculous redemption in the act of sacrificing, or a form of "pay back" that would oblige a powerful God to bless the willing sacrificee. True sacrifice counteracts the hope to tap-into divine power for its own good, and to bring "this power under an obligation."<sup>9</sup> The lack of full divine activity for what at the time the sacrificee thinks to be good for him results in a kind of devastation of that for which a sacrificee somewhat naturally yearns – an exchange of goods for services. The sacrifice must be prevented from falling into economy by lacking a "return gift" or payment that would make for even a kind of enjoyment of the sacrifice. This could threaten to make for an easy sacrifice, the quality of which is not strained because there is a delayed gratification awaiting the sacrificee. The

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<sup>9</sup> For Patočka "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 (...) and rested its cause on the maturity of the human being." (Patočka 1989, 338).

terror of devastation is part and parcel of the risk, faith, and abandon of sacrifice, which surrenders fairness, economy, and exchange.

#### 4.2. Expenditure

It is in a similar sense that a willing sacrificee is not seeking recognition, completeness, or fulfillment, but (among other things) a certain unconditional and total accomplishment of giving in an indirect way. The sacrificee is not singularly focused upon one possibility of comportment but many, as the very notion of *directedness* often is inflected in causal or technological terms. In the place of this economy of directedness, the sacrificee yields to *something* beyond *some-things* so as to become implicit, incarnate, and integrated. The sacrificed-for is affirmed (which is not necessarily economical) in part because it calls for dedication as it retains the unique ability to not be appropriated economically in a totalizing instrumentalization. *This alone* would be something worthy of sacrifice.

Here one might be reminded of Bataille's notion of expenditure, which can point to both products of neoliberal waste (the bourgeois' buying and selling of useless adornment and jewelry, e.g.) as well as total abandonments of what one cherishes the most for a seemingly a-rational "cause." Bataille observed how Native American Potlatch festivals demonstrated a "general economy" whereby a competition is initiated to out-give other tribes excessively, riskfully, and wastefully (see Bataille 1991). One must "give it all away" to the point of wasting it. In this general economy "everything is put at stake" in a way comparable to Aztec scapegoating sacrifices, which are meant for a community to see its obsession with "restricted economy." Both readings reflect Bataille's tendencies to interpret the master/slave dialectic as an ultimately negating and abyss-leaping act in order to subvert economy.<sup>10</sup> Although Bataille's understanding has come under critique for an over-emphasis upon pure negativity, which counter-acts the gift of sacrifice (Derrida 1967), Bataille understood that a waste of expenditure is necessary in order for any sacrifice to take place.

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<sup>10</sup> Countering Bataille, Derrida insisted on an aneconomical nature of the gift of sacrifice (see Derrida 1967). In what would become decades of work on the gift, Derrida's language and conception of "economy" originates in a deconstruction of Bataille's general economy, which does not allow for a "resolution" or return to self-consciousness and ultimately, absolute knowledge the Hegelian dialectic insists upon. Bataille's exposition of economy fails because it ends in *absolute* negativity of death, and in "*abstract negativity*:" for "To rush headlong into death...one risks losing the effect and profit of meaning which were the very stakes one hoped to win." Bataille's excessive gift "can only utilize the *empty* form of the *Aufhebung*" (ibid.).

This helps qualify a definition of "waste" according to a certain logic of expenditure and excess. In abandoning economy, one relates with the "something" of sacrifice via an affective expenditure, and Patočka seems accurate to think that it is precisely the "cost" of the sacrifice that certainly is *not counted* in any typical sense. This is because, as he claims, sacrificees have an entirely different 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. (Patočka 2015, 21)<sup>11</sup>

This essential grounding is a kind of "weak" resistance that makes up the core of man and, especially in times of crisis, provides the motive to attempt the inversion of power relations. This is not unlike Gusdorf's (1948, 67) claim that "sacrifice puts us in the presence of a 'paradoxical' form of exchange," and inherently subverts power relations by an expenditure that counteracts what is straightforward and economical.<sup>12</sup>

### 4.3. Wasted

This leads to a third reflection upon waste as the experience of oneself-as-wasted. For Patočka, today we flee from sacrifice and "into a technical understanding of being which promises to exclude this experience and for which there exists nothing like a sacrifice, only a utilization of resources" and "thus sacrifice represent a persistent presence of something that does not appear in the calculations of the technological world." (Patočka 1989, 337). The soul of Europe has lost touch with its deeper enervation, and sacrifice is a non-telic means of restoring frayed social bonds. Sacrifices are irreducible to causes and fall outside the jurisdiction of utility and usefulness. In a sacrifice, there can be no praise of the input/output register (Lyotard).

To become "a waste" is to be subjectivized according to a non-cultured space that is radically held in place by a certain *hyper-naturalness*. By opening oneself up to death, and

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<sup>11</sup> Patočka employs a late-Heideggerian ontology, one where the relation with being as Dasein becomes a matter of dynamism that matches the "not-here-ness" of Dasein. Dasein, like the gift, is never "here," and Patočka then applies this to sacrifice. One does not sacrifice for some "thing" but for that which already exceeds what one thinks to be the motivity or *telos* of the sacrificed.

<sup>12</sup> Sacrifice is an a priori structure within the affirmation of personal life, and one remains caught between the economic and counter-economic. Earlier, Gusdorf claims that "sacrifice is the realization of a kind of economy between man and the gods, but the economic sense of this economy masks in reality a deeper sense." (Georges Gusdorf 1948, 86)

to the non-ordinariness of life, one commits the *most natural act* (the natural, the unconditioned, and the uncultured here all are related) of living by yielding oneself truly to what one lives for. In the case of a willing sacrificee, one likely knows that eventually their sacrifice *will be forgotten*, and this amounts to the experience of being wasted: the sacrificee is to be cast from the social norm, is not to be re-integrated into the whole, and is not to be saved or her dignity restored. Yet it is in this role of being-sacrifice that today one might perform the role of being a de-socializing, sliding signifier (not unlike the Aztec or Native American practices) in the registers of economical calculation and industrialization. The sacrificee may find consolation in being – as Patočka knew all too well – an embodiment of social waste that issues the persistent call for a re-evaluation *not simply of all values* as Nietzsche so eloquently sought, but of a society's *non-values*: of what it rejects and is willing to not save or die for.

### 5. Scum of the Earth

These reflections on waste hopefully remain irreducible to a straightforward *negativity* through which one must persevere in order to achieve some positive social outcome. Sacrifice is not a *direct affirmation of the negative*, a "tarrying with the negative," or even a dialectic of negation and affirmation. Patočka's reflections go deeper than these tendencies by pointing to atonement as the key for solidarity via (as interpreted throughout this essay) a radical relation with waste. Despite the sacrificees' attitude of ambivalence necessary towards an instrumentalized social outcome, she must heed the warnings that the lives of early Christian martyrs present in their imitation of Christ's sacrifice. For the sacrifice to have any productive outcome (again, beyond any hopes of utility) it still needs to have some affirmative return to that which was sought for atonement. If Christianity is to offer anything radical for today it must challenge its economically oriented predicates that so often easily ensnare it. Far too often theories of Christian atonement presume a certain Divine economy with penal justice as the principal and overarching means. Instead Christ atoned for any further needs of scapegoating and paying penance. Yet it occasionally gets presumed falsely that sacrifice (along with scapegoating) also is to be discarded from Christian practice. However, a true sacrifice can protest against our "technical understandings" of everyday life, and it indeed can teach "our outwardly rich yet essentially impoverished age to face itself." Patočka's renewed, Christian/Hellenistic understanding of sacrifice involves an "abysmal deepening of the soul" that employs a dedication to being-wasted so as to defect from the ever-widening reach of technologization and its fraying social bonds.

In this article<sup>13</sup> I have had no other pretense than to reveal some of the ways an understanding of waste might thicken a conceptualization of the relation between solidarity and sacrifice. The relation between sacrifice and solidarity generally is presumed to operate pragmatically: one sacrifices for whomever one already has solidarity, fraternity, or friendship. In other words, this kind of sacrifice is a natural, if not evolutionary product of such solidarity. This would mean that there is very little that is special about sacrifice, as it is not so incredibly difficult to sacrifice oneself (a parent protecting a child for example) for someone with whom a bond already has been established. Instead, given the a-telic and waste-oriented qualifications of sacrifice to which this paper has drawn attention, such a pragmatic, if not utilitarian understanding of this sacrifice/solidarity relation needs to be corrected. Patočka's understanding of Christian sacrifice (the sacrifice to end all scapegoating as well as any telic orientation), alongside an understanding of how waste figures into its operations, points us to how sacrifice comes ontologically prior to solidarity, namely because solidarity must be prevented from becoming an end or purpose, by which *sacrifice would be reduced to a mere means*.

Instead, the inverse seems more accurate: solidarity should be predicated upon sacrifice. This necessity hopefully also draws attention to the role of waste in the inversion of power relations Patočka underscored. The three-fold qualification of waste (wasted, expenditure, and devastation) and its aforementioned description highlight this paradoxical value of sacrifice, and may help prevent sacrifice from reverting to instrumentality. Recognizing the role of waste within sacrifice helps take it one step further so as to prevent "solidarity" from becoming a telic end of the sacrifice. If it become a telic end, then once again, sacrifice takes on a purpose of function. Waste, as closely related to the "Unconditioned" may serve a divine function by de-culturing such tendencies. This helps remove sacrifice from being but a means of achieving some (seamlessly weaved and implicit) *ideal* of a perhaps false understanding of solidarity as a form of social balance.

Indeed, if one accepts the aforementioned inversion of the solidarity/sacrifice relation, then this also calls for another understanding of solidarity. It is not merely the tranquil, beautiful soul of a peaceful social relation. Instead, it should be seen more like an *atonement*, one that has gone through the experience of forsakenness in a way that the natural flow of the will to "exist unproblematically" (Patočka 1996, 13) is suspended. As Patočka understood, solidarity, like atonement must overcome its being presumed synonymous

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<sup>13</sup> This article was conceived and written with the generous support of two research grants from the Austrian Science Fund (FWF). It was conceived within the framework of the project "The Return of Religion as a Challenge to Thought" (I2785) and concluded in the project "Secularism and its Discontents: Toward a Phenomenology of Religious Violence" (P 29599).



moreso with an "unproblematicity" and the many persistent *demands* of our carnal and mundane livelihood. And this is one reason why sacrifices must also be embedded culturally in order to atone for our technological decadence that pays no attention to the affects of waste or "non-values." St. Paul's call to become "scum of the earth" is perhaps more relevant today than it ever has been. Yet it is perhaps only when 1) reason runs aground, 2) technologically decadent means of everyday life are suspended, and 3) the escapisms that so easily entrap our theological imaginaries are placed at bay that a sacrificee might find her identity finally where it belongs: between purposelessness and infinity.

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