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**The Experiment of Night:  
Jan Patočka on War, and a Christianity to Come<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract**

*In the wake of the present-day crises, social conflicts and growing divisions, Patočka's reflections on war and totalitarianism appear abiding. Moreover, the enigmatic language, which Patočka uses, especially in his late Heretical Essays, sounds provoking and paradoxical. This article elaborates on the hypothesis that Patočka's reflections provide us with something more than a historical analysis interpreting the wars of the 20th century, and the 20th century as a war. I will argue that Patočka finds an intrinsic link between modernity, as a particular mode of being, and war and totalitarianism as unavoidable consequences of such a mode of being. To describe this situation, Patočka puts forth the dialectic of the light of day and the darkness of night. Paradoxically, in a somewhat mystical turn, Patočka gives preference to the night as the driving force of transgressing modern logic and the defective mode of modern being which throws crowds to the hell-fire of modern warfare. Against this background, this paper will present an innovative reading of Patočka's reflections as a specific search for an adequate spiritual response to the discontents of modernity. I will suggest that the trajectory of Patočka's thought can be read through the lens of a particular philosophy of religion, even though Patočka never elaborated on this avenue explicitly. Thus, I will propose that Patočka's thought opens up the possibility of reconsidering a heretical idea of Christianity that is coming after Christianity.*

**Keywords:** Jan Patočka, Christianity, modernity, war, totalitarianism

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History has known many wars. All of them were bloody, ugly and left uncountable numbers of victims. Nevertheless, the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the presupposed time of fullness, the kairos of rational modernisation and technical evolution, has changed the way we think about war. Modernity has transformed the perception of the world and humanity due to the machinery of modern warfare. Against this background, Patočka writes the last of his *Heretical Essays* entitled "The Wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and the 20<sup>th</sup> Century as War", which Paul Ricoeur characterises as "frankly shocking". Ricoeur was shaken because the content of Patočka's essay, as he writes, focuses on 'the dominance of war, of darkness and the demonic at the very heart of most rational projects of the promotion of peace' (Ricoeur 1996, viii). Experimenting with the experience of night underlines this paper.

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The enigmatic tenor of Patočka's reflections is best captured in his thought-provoking words concerning the status of modern warfare.

The first world war is the decisive event in the history of the twentieth century. It determined its entire character. It was this war that demonstrated that the transformation of the world into a laboratory for releasing reserves of energy accumulated over billions of years can be achieved only by means of wars. Thus it represented a definitive breakthrough of the conception of being that was born in the seventeenth century with the rise of mechanical natural science. (Patočka 1996, 124)<sup>2</sup>

If we were going to analyse Patočka's reading of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and its wars, we would need to examine the following three points. First, Patočka interprets modern warfare *historically* as the fight between the idea of imperial Europe and the idea of a revolutionary break with this status quo. Interestingly, he places Germany and the Central Powers on the side of a revolutionary attack on the status quo represented by the Allied Powers. In this respect, Patočka is inspired, on the one hand, by the German historian Fritz Fischer's thesis that Germany deliberately triggered the First World War (Fischer 1961), and, on the other hand, by his own analysis of the modern technical rationalism which he names as the revolution of scientification. Second, Patočka provides us with a reflection on the war as a global social change, a decisive moment of recent history, which remodelled Europe, and, in fact, the entire world. In this respect, the war is interpreted as an outburst of modernity (negative interpretation) and, at the same time, as the fire that purges and opens up possibilities of something new to come (positive interpretation). Third, Patočka formulates the philosophical reflection of the front in terms of the existential drama of individual human beings. The focus on the experience of the front is based on records by the Jesuit Teilhard de Chardin (1965), who confessed that the war was an encounter with the Absolute, and the German writer Ernst Jünger, who famously captured the modern spirit behind the warfare, for example, in his book *Der Arbeiter* (1932) and the essay *Die totale Mobilmachung* (Jünger 1930, 9-30).

These three facets usually delineate the framework of discussion about Patočka's thought-provoking interpretation of war and its consequences. Dozens of studies elaborate on the above-mentioned trajectory and it is worth mentioning that some of the best are collected in the special issue of *Studia Phaenomenologica* "Jan Patočka and the European Heritage" from 2007 and the *New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* (published in 2015) dedicated to Patočka, especially on the themes of *Religion, War and the Crisis of Modernity*. Although the present study builds on the previous schol-

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<sup>2</sup> I have modified and corrected Kohák's English translation which reads the sixteenth century while Patočka's original reads the seventeenth.

arship, its goal is to open up a new perspective on reading Patočka's enigmatic thoughts related to the ideas of war and the darkness of night.

The main claim of this paper argues that Patočka provides us with something more than a historical analysis interpreting the wars of the 20th century, and the 20th century as a war. I will argue that Patočka finds an intrinsic link between modernity, as a particular mode of being, and war and totalitarianism as the unavoidable consequences of such a mode of being. To describe this situation, Patočka puts forth the dialectic of the light of day and the darkness of night. Paradoxically, in a somewhat mystical turn, Patočka gives preference to the night as the driving force of transgressing modern logic and the defective mode of modern being which throws crowds of people into hell-fire. Against this background, this paper will present an innovative reading of Patočka's reflection on war (and totalitarianism) as a search for an adequate spiritual response to the impasse of modernity. Furthermore, I will suggest that the direction of Patočka's search makes sense from the perspective of a particular philosophy of religion, even though Patočka never elaborated on this avenue explicitly. Thus, I will argue that one of the most paradoxical and shocking consequences, to recall Ricoeur's evaluation once again, of Patočka's thought is the reconsidering of a particular path of spiritual thinking, namely a heretical idea of Christianity that is still to come.

### 1. The Discontents of the Light of Day

The interpretations of the cruel bloody events of the last century are numerous, different and contradict each other in offered explanations. However, they all have one thing in common. Their shared denominator is, in Patočka's wording, the perspective of *the day, the life and the peace* (Patočka 1996, 120). In this respect, the rivers of blood and rotting bodies are interpreted as an ugly but necessary price for a better world. Casualties and victims become heroes who laid down their lives for peace. This interpretation of the consequences of war as the necessary price for peaceful wellbeing is, in Patočka's opinion, untenable and scandalous. Instead of the perspective of the day, Patočka provocatively invokes the darkness of the night.

It is the demonic of the day which pretends to possess all in all and which trivialises and drains dry even what lies beyond its limits. [...] The grandiose, profound experience of the front with its line of fire consists in its evocation of the night in all its urgency and undeniability. (Patočka 1996, 127 and 129, transl. modified)

How can Patočka's mystical tone phrased as the conflict between *the day and the night* be explained? And why is it the darkness of night that should interest us more than the dawn of the day?

The metaphor of the day evokes the light and the light turns our attention to the Enlightenment. From the Cartesian *clare et distincte*, modernity advances the idea of bringing clearer light into the world. The narrative of progress promises a constant evolution in this respect. Patočka claims that the gradual process from the mathematisation of nature, through thinking *more geometrico*, to the techno-scientific rationalism of late modernity produces a massive reservoir of forces. Warfare puts this potential in motion. "It is the forces of the day which for four years sent millions of humans into hellfire" (Patočka, 1996, 125). In other words, Patočka seems to suggest that the front, total mobilisation, the machinery of mass-killing and uncountable casualties is the result of the enlightened reason of modernity.

The promise of modernity initiates the project of peace and a better life based on the progressive rationalisation of humanity and society. Thus, modernity is knowledge and more knowledge brings a brighter future for everyone. What is meant here by knowledge is the force of *techné* – a technical comprehension of nature supposedly allowing its absolute control – creating "a perfectly functioning thoughtlessness" (Myšička 2004, 197). Indeed, despite its orientation to the gain of knowledge, one of the consequences of the modern spirit, as Heidegger often reminds us, is the pause of thinking. This is caused due to the illusion that 'modern man' marches toward a paradise. However, the accumulation of (technical) forces attained on this path leads neither to paradise, nor to rational and peacefully society, but to the tragedy of warfare. The tragedy is re-narrated and presented as an eschatological struggle for the future. And the future, in this respect, is nothing less than the end of all wars and the ultimate instalment of eternal peace: a bright prospect, indeed. Yet Patočka ironically points out that the aims of peace are, in fact, perpetuating war aims (Patočka 1996, 125). This calls for an explanation. But first we need to listen to Patočka himself.

The war against war seems to make use of new experiences, seemingly acts eschatologically, yet in reality bends eschatology back to the 'mundane' level, the level of the day, and uses in the service of the day what belonged to the night and to eternity. (Patočka 1996, 127)

The demonic of the day, as Patočka calls the situation of late modernity, does not fade away with the last shot on the front. The eschatological war continues in totalitarian hegemony of the second half of the century of wars. The fight for tomorrow's progress proceeds, even though there is no open front.

The warfare of totalitarian hegemony is cold and hybrid. Thus, Valérie Löwit reads Patočka's last *Heretical Essay*, which is our main concern here, as his contribution to the study of totalitarianism, notwithstanding that he does not mention the term in the course of

the entire text (Löwit 1997). Löwit remarks that, for Patočka, totalitarianism is not only a political regime. Rather, it is a general tendency of modernity. Why? As we have seen above, a key feature of the modern spirit is gaining knowledge. And the purpose of knowledge is not, as it used to be in the preceding historical epochs, to discover wisdom but the mastery of things. In this sense, Patočka sees modern epistemologies as the deviation from the traditional metaphysical questioning that is based on the wonder in front of that what is. The consequence of the modern development is the loss of the very question of being human. And it is in this respect when Patočka actually comes close to Hannah Arendt and her groundbreaking analysis of totalitarianism not only as a political, but also a philosophical problem.

Arendt opens her provocative study on *The Origins of Totalitarianism* with an alarming warning: 'The totalitarian attempt at global conquest and total dominion has been the destructive way out of all impasses' (Arendt 1973, viii). In other words, totalitarianism is an effort to solve crises, overcome uncertainties and answer questions, in Patočka's wording, by means of shedding the light of day on all problems. According to Arendt, the totalitarian hegemony pursues its goals by way of, at first sight, negligible confusions and substitutions. For example, the responsible action is exchanged for obedient behaviour, political power is turned into a force pushing through planned goals, rationality and rational reflection are confused with argumentation and, consequently, truth is replaced with a logical coherence (Arendt 1973, 475-477). An unavoidable consequence of all this is the remodeling of the human condition. Instead of the philosophical tradition which stresses the self's *relation* to life, that is, a constant questioning of life's meaning, the situation of totalitarianism turns the goal of human life into a sheer survival which is presented as the *absolute value*. What is at stake here is aptly formulated by Patočka's own characterisation of a totalitarian society, which he describes as a deceptive portrayal of human life longing for its self-preservation. And this illusion of life lived as a lie sacrifices many for 'bonum (malum) futurum' (Patočka 2006, 426).

A totalitarian logic and the rule of the day, in the name of an even brighter future and peace, is the cruellest form of war 'appealing to the will to live and to have'. As such, Patočka continues, this is 'the terror that drives humans even into fire-death, chaining humans to life and rendering them most manipulable' (Patočka 1996, 133). To put it bluntly, a constant threat of physical oppression and also psychological intimidation, often directed at the most vulnerable places, or just a tacit agreement about 'live and let live' in relative comfort in the sun which is brought by the day, make totalitarianism a prolongation of the war agony of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The relentlessness of the day turns our eyes to the night. For Patočka, Teilhard de Chardin is the one who mystically shows that the night—the front and the war—contains a sort of absolute freedom which has been lost for the day. The night has the power to reveal the depth of being, something which is difficult to realise against the background of the techno-scientific rationalism of our modern, all too modern minds. What kind of reasoning is behind this line of thought, which may be—with Ricoeur—described as frankly shocking? Peter Trawny clarifies this enigmatic train of Patočka's thoughts (Trawny 2007). Drawing inspiration from Jünger, who expresses the experience of the front in a less mystical tenor than Teilhard, Patočka seems to argue that warfare is a natural state of modernity due to its totalitarian character. Totalitarianism is a new metaphysical principle of modernity: the organisation of work and life, scientific knowledge, the government and, of course, war; this all has the contours of total control. To use the above-mentioned idea of Arendt, modern totalitarianism is the way out of all impasses. This means no room for questions because everything has been already answered.

In consequence, the human being is considered to be an object, a raw material (*Rohstoff*) usable and mis-usable for anything, including the fight against war. For Patočka, this is the adequate description of the situation of the day because it demands from particular persons their deaths for purposes stated by others. Now, how is it possible, against the background of the above mentioned absurdity of the war, that a heretical idea hatches out from this? A shocking idea that the war has another side, perhaps a positive one which manifests something important, is something we should not omit.

## 2. Blessing the Darkness of Night

Patočka delves into the night. Heraclitus is his guide in its depths. 'At the dawn of history, Heraclitus of Ephesus formulated the idea of war as that divine law which sustains all human life' (Patočka 1996, 136). Thus, Patočka thinks of war from the perspective of *polemos*—conflict—which has its positive side. Through this lens, war is not a totally rational means with an absolute irrationality of ends, as it appears to be in modernity due to its need to enlighten everything and everyone. War is not for *something*. The Heraclitean perspective presents war as the situation where one stands in front of *nothing*. This is the experience of the front, that is, the engagement with something that is no-thing. And precisely in this, Patočka discovers a constructive, positive element coming out of the negativity of war (Patočka 2002, 373).

*Polemos* reveals the opposition between the totality of life in modernity and the search for meaning, questioning the meaning of being in front of nothing. The absoluteness of the

day forces out the consciousness of one's own finitude. This means that the awareness and anxiety of being-towards-death is displaced and substituted with an emphasis on bare life and its preservation at whatever cost. The night of war is the break-even point and a dramatic upheaval which unveils modernity's rational, all too rational, and enlightened illusions (Trawny 2007, 393-394).

The point of Patočka's turn to the night is to overcome modernity as a total mastery of (bare) life, which has lost its energising power of questioning. Patočka explains the notion of the night in his fragment with the working title *The Way Out from the War*:

This deliberate emphasis on the *Night, death and war* is not a penchant for irrationality. Rationalism which may be endangered here is the rational *escapism* in which find refuge all the weaknesses of human beings declining to the snare of *bare* life. The argument of the Night, war and death is directed against this *bare* life without depth and absoluteness. (Patočka 2002, 490)

And as Patočka adds, the night is not driven by *force* but has the *power* to awake, that is, 'the power of spiritual authority' (Patočka 2002, 490). Patočka's unusual, one would say heretical account of modern warfare provokes dissenting opinions on the matter. For example, Catherine Chalié in "On War and Peace" expresses her disappointment at Patočka's glorification of war as the force of the night (Chalié 2002). Furthermore, she disagrees with placing Heraclitus on a pedestal of western thinking for his *polemos*. According to Chalié, reading the war through the lens of Greek ontology leads Patočka to the interpretation of war as if it were a beautiful harmony of cosmic forces, as it is expressed in the works of Teilhard. After all, she adds, how can one understand war as the disclosure of meaning?

Indeed, the war is a rotten fruit of modernity, as Patočka says. However, Chalié repudiates the preference of an ontological perspective and favours an ethical one. Performing a Levinasian gesture, Chalié suggests that war urges us to see the face of the other and to assume the responsibility for the other instead of individual immersion in the consciousness of being-towards-death (Chalié 2002, 38-39). In other words, what war reveals is primarily not one's finitude but the fragility of the other, which lays foundations for an ethical life and thus meaningful being in the world.

To deal with this criticism, two points must be made. First, it is an undisputable fact that Patočka draws inspiration mostly from ancient Greek philosophy and thus, for instance, in comparison to Levinas, he really seems to neglect other sources of European tradition, such as the (Hebrew) Bible and religion. Nevertheless, and this is the problem with Chalié's interpretation, it would be a fatal mistake to identify Patočka's use of 'Greek ontology' with the supposition of a static ready-made conception of the world, through which

Patočka reads modern warfare. In fact, Patočka's choice of Heraclitus, a pre-Socratic figure, shows his attraction to a kind of philosophy, which questions all-too-easy metaphysical, static concepts. Patočka enhances philosophy, which challenges harmonious portraits and totalitarian pictures of the whole, including an image of war as a complex harmony of cosmic forces. Heraclitus' *polemos*, contrary to Chaliel's critique, is the place where disharmony, problematicity, and thus questioning reveal themselves.

The second point to be made concerns the meaningfulness and meaninglessness of war. For Patočka, the experience of the front itself does not give a new meaning of life. Myšička reminds us that the front, in Patočka's opinion, is an absurdity par excellence and as such it shows *nothing*, no thing. War and the totalitarian hegemony of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is a step out of *something* into *nothing* (Myšička 2004, 199-200). Hence, the question of meaning arises against the horizon of the front and war. However, the place—*locus*—of the manifestation of the question of meaning is not the agent of this question itself. It is always a concrete human being who is shaken and (re)discovers the urge of questioning because of his experience of upheaval, which interrupts the ruling of the day. In short, Patočka is far from any glorification of war. He says that 'war is senseless as a nihilistic war and only provides the best opportunity to find the other' (Patočka 2002, 500).

The core idea of Patočka's 'frankly shocking' reading of warfare can be expressed in four points: (1) enemies stand on the same side of conflict (*polemos*) because 'they' are thrown into the same turmoil as 'we' are; (2) the project of the day, that is, the idea of progress and emancipation, does not necessarily postulate more meaning than the reality of the night; (3) those who engage with war experience upheaval, which enables them to conduct the *epoché* from the aims of the day and to find something that is no-thing; (4) this no-thing, manifested in the darkness of the night, reveals itself as an unimaginable possibility of being (Patočka 2002, 501).

Thus the *night* comes suddenly to be an absolute obstacle on the path of the day to the bad infinity of tomorrows. In coming upon us as an *insurmountable* possibility, the *seemingly* transindividual possibilities of the day are shunted aside, while this sacrifice presents itself as the authentic transindividuality. (Patočka 1996, 130-131)

This needs to be unpacked in more detail and explained in less metaphorical language. It seems to me that the notion of sacrifice can illustrate the meaning of Patočka's reasoning in a more practical way.

The night rehabilitates the notion of sacrifice as something essentially non-technical and absolute. For Patočka, sacrifice breaks with the logic of modern warfare and the logic of modernity. The rule of the day sends millions of souls to die for peace, the progress of humankind, and a better world based on the technology of rationalism, humanism, etc.



However, these totalitarian projects are not about authentic sacrifice but only leave victims. Patočka carefully distinguishes between the notion of victim and the notion of sacrifice because his native Czech language uses for both the same word: *oběť*. Patočka plays with the enigmatic meaning of the word, which is difficult to capture in English. For him, the victims (*oběti*) of the day, offered (*obětováni*) for the dawn of tomorrow, urge sacrifice (*oběť*) which bears witness to the truth transcending bare life. Marc Crépon rightly senses two senses of sacrifice in Patočka while he is commenting on the dark tone of the philosopher (Crépon 2007). The victim is used and scapegoated, freely or forced, for the ideology of the preservation of life. Conversely, sacrifice is the absolute experience, from which there is no way back, breaking the calculus of techno-scientific modernity. Sacrifice reveals the idea of truth, uncovers the pressing question of meaning. Only in the night is light shed on this *absolute freedom* of sacrifice (Patočka 1996, 129-130). Is it a mere coincidence that the sun set and darkness came over the whole land, as if it were night, during Christ's crucifixion? (Cf. Mt 27:45; Mk 15:33; Lk 23:44).

The idea of sacrifice, in its relation to the dialectic of the light and darkness, drives us in close proximity to religion, specifically to a particular philosophy of spiritual being in the world. In the following section, I will elaborate on this thesis, which might be considered to be "frankly shocking" in the context of Patočka's thought.

### 3. Transgressing Everydayness

Although the 6<sup>th</sup> Heretical Essay is the most famous text where Patočka deals with the tension between night and day, the dialectic itself is introduced much earlier. For example, in the essay "Life in Balance, Life in Amplitude" from 1939, Patočka distinguishes the philosophy of day, on the one hand, and the philosophy which experiments with the experience of night, on the other (Patočka 2007). Life in balance stands for the former, whereas life in amplitude is the expression of the latter.

The philosophy of day, in Patočka's opinion, corresponds with the axioms of modernity. Its goal is to ground being in harmony and balance. It promises full enlightenment and emancipation from uncertainty. It brings progress, clarity, logicity and the absolute rationality of all means; in short, the rule of the daylight. The consequence of this philosophy is, according to Patočka, a total organisation of life, that is, a life without disturbing questions, a life of unproblematic everydayness.

The second philosophical approach, which Patočka favours, rejects such a totalisation of human life within clearly the delineated borders of a fully enlightened system. In contrast, Patočka claims that "man [sic!] appears to be most human [...] where the seem-

ingly fixed form of life is scattered and where everything problematic, unsteady and extreme, which is hidden under the surface of normal living, is recovered" (Patočka 2007, 32). However, this philosophy of the human being prefers the darkness of night over the bright sky of the day.

Patočka deliberately chose to experiment with the night because this experience withdraws the human being from a plain life of balance and everydayness. The upheaval and crisis opens up the path of life in amplitude. The philosophy of amplitude breaks with the drab world of boredom, which Patočka associates with the words of Voltaire's *Candide*: 'cultiver son jardin' (Patočka 2007, 33). Patočka never left this idea of transgressing the everydayness of plain life behind. For example, in the last study completed during his lifetime, "On the Masaryk Philosophy of Religion", he addresses the same problem, although he uses a different vocabulary (Patočka 2015b). Against the background of the question of the meaning of being-in-the world, and taking into account Heidegger's distinction between being and beings, Patočka interprets the realisation of ontological difference as the breaking point with the boredom of everydayness. Patočka's question, in fact, tackles the problem of whether the meaning of being can be found outside a life in history, that is, somewhere in a world of eternal ideas which will shed light on everything there is, or whether the meaning and the search for it is something indissociably related to particular human lives. In other words, the point of a broad discussion, which reviews mainly the thought of Kant and Dostoevsky (despite the name of Masaryk in the title of the essay), can be summarised as dealing with the conflict between the idea of a given meaning on the one hand, and a never complete and constantly sought meaning on the other. Figuratively, and continuing in Patočka's language game, the light of everydayness makes visible only beings (including the disclosure of their meaning) which are present-at-hand. However, what really matters in one's life is the embracing of being as an event (*Seinsereignis*) which gives itself in the darkness of *nothing*. What seems to be a trait of the 'frankly shocking' nihilism in Patočka's thought is rather the opening of a deep existential drama. It is against the background of the confrontation with the nothing of finitude where the difference between things and persons, which are no predetermined things, appears. The whole problem, as Patočka sees it, is about the question of undecidability 'beforehand.' This emphasis on the open (hi)story of every individual being leads Patočka to the position which embraces the uncertain darkness of night over accepting the light of everydayness because uncertainty is also freedom.

Now the question is: What is wrong with the life of everydayness? Why would the philosopher want to disturb us from the ordinary life and its pleasant tranquillity?

By way of addressing these questions, we touch upon the crucial aspect of Patočka's argument about war as an outburst of the enlightened modernity. For Patočka, war, as Euro-

pean humanity experienced it in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is a horrifying force of the day because it constrains the human being to less than it is in its capacity and even its vocation in-the-world. Uncountable victims of war laid their lives down for the illusion of peace, that is, life in balance. For Patočka, the problem is not that someone would like to live a life in balance. The problem is that human freedom, understood as a vocation to become more than human seems to appear, is substituted for the deception of a life in balance, that is, in a plain acceptance of forces of the day that urge humanity to march on the path of progress towards a bright paradise of balance and life equilibrium. This is the crucial problem that Patočka identifies in the modern mode of being, which he analyses under the rubric of *Gestell* (borrowed from Heidegger). The danger of enframing is overly technical reasoning and, in consequence, the instrumentalisation of everything (Patočka 2015a, 15). Modern war stands as a perfect example for its total character which is possible due to technical enhancement. Suddenly, human beings become numbers. It applies both to the soldiers to be 'used' in the battlefield and also to the casualties and victims of the warfare and its side-effects. To paraphrase a horrifying saying: the tragedy of one's death turns into statistical information about the death of many.

In other words, for Patočka, the modern condition sheds light on everything, makes everything visible and pretends that all that appears in focal points is possible to master. However, in consequence, for the deemed fullness of appearance, the appearing itself is obscured (Dangers, PP). Patočka illustrates this with the disappearance of authentic sacrifice. In his opinion, the modern mode of being oriented towards the mastery of things, the total control of everything and the radicalisation of rationalism suppresses the breakthrough of sacrifice. In fact, sacrificial acting, within the logic of *Gestell*, is turned into usable means for certain purposes (Patočka 2002; 2015a).<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, *Gestell* as this transformation of one's attitude to the world has also another side. Next to pointing out the fulfilment of the technical age, and its potentially tragic ends, it announces the possibility of something new arising, that is, the reconsideration of being in its difference from beings.

In this respect, the human being is more than he appears. Humans are called to freedom and the experience of the front is the *locus* where this vocation manifests itself, and where an individual being is able to rediscover it. Thus, the negativity of night turns out to be something positive. It reveals that the authentic vocation of the person is to transcend everydayness and to live in amplitude.

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<sup>3</sup> I have elaborated on the notion of sacrifice in Patočka elsewhere (anonymised, 2017).

War, after all, is the most extreme expression of embracing freedom. In his essay on the philosophy of amplitude from 1939, Patočka mentions another agent of this disturbing yet, in his opinion, deeper mode of being: namely, Christianity. It has been successfully argued elsewhere that his reflection on Christianity accompanied Patočka throughout his entire professional career (Veselý 2013). What kind of Christianity Patočka has in mind becomes clearer when we look at his later works (Patočka 2015a; 2015b).

Patočka commits a heresy against both rationalism and fideism in Christianity. Against Kant, who is extensively discussed in "On Masaryk's Philosophy of Religion", Patočka does not postulate regarding another world where rewards follow good deeds. Patočka's Christianity does not know any second—better—world above this world and its history. It is Christianity which is not escaping from this dark world to the bright light of eternal ideas or postulates regarding practical reason. In short, Patočka's Christianity does not know an absolute external meaning which is given, present, and to be accepted (Patočka 2015b, 408). Hence, Patočka turns Christianity upside down because he does not postulate a complete concept of Christianity which would demand conformity as the ultimate aim of human life. Or, as Hagedorn reminds ourselves, the concept of Patočka's Christianity does not reckon with individual immortality, a revealed transcendent God, or a God as a postulate of reason (Hagedorn 2011, 257). On the contrary, Patočka thinks about Christianity in terms of the event of being, or to put it better, as a possibility where a difference appears between manipulable beings and being. This Christianity does not need any externally given meaning and does not preach any fixed meaning to come either. The point is 'the coming' itself which is related to particular human beings. Again, the play between light and darkness is behind this way of reasoning. The bright world of eternal ideas is put aside in order to concentrate fully on being-in-this-world which is not just a thing among other things and, in this sense, concerns *no-thing*.

The whole thing can be translated into the conflict between the metaphysical and the phenomenological attitude towards Christianity. Patočka, who obviously favours the latter, suggests not to meditate on the grounding of the meaning of the world and existence but points out the problematicity of being-in-the-world and existential shakiness of all relative meanings.

By exhibiting phenomena of relative and convulsing meaning, phenomena such as the conversion of the significance of life where, in the apparent loss of 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. (Patočka 2015b, 130; italics author)

These new possibilities are a solid ground which appears against the background of the experience of being shaken. Christianity informs about this originary human vocation—the call to being—because Christianity 'rested its cause on the maturity of the human being' (Patočka 2015a, 22).

Thus, coming back to the pre-war essay from 1939, according to Patočka, Christianity is the philosophy of amplitude for its attentiveness to the depth of life which includes both dealing with pain and transcending everydayness. In other words, Christianity knows about the experience of night which is an indispensable part of human life and it also knows that this experience is not just to be overcome but enables humans to become more than they appear. Christianity seeks to break into the depth of the human experience of being in the world. And for Patočka, the crucial aspect of Christian attitude is that it does not enclose human experience in its finitude. In Patočka's wording: 'The essence of humanity is not to feel fulfilled by finiteness' (Patočka 2007, 41). Or, to formulate it positively, Christianity throws one into the love of eternity (De Warren 2015).

### **Conclusion: A Spiritual Thinker of a Christianity after Christendom**

We have started with war and ended up with religion. Moreover, Patočka is presented, perhaps unexpectedly, as a spiritual thinker *sui iuris* of unsettling life in amplitude. Although the Czech philosopher explicitly resists a reading which would associate 'something mystical' with his dialectics of the night and the day, it is an undisputable fact that the experience he refers to in relation to the front and warfare in his late works is an extremely important line of thought decipherable already in his earlier texts. And these reflections are explicitly related to Christianity. I take this discovery as an invitation to elaborate upon this thought-trajectory and to verbalise something which Patočka never did himself.

It is clear that the Christianity Patočka has in mind does not simply correspond with the mainstream understanding of this religion. However, at the same time, the reference to Christianity touches something that is a part of tradition. Let us meditate on this unusual reading of Patočka for a moment.

The idea of amplitude, that is, the call to life, which is not encapsulated in finitude, is, in fact, a Christian idea. Patočka even lists some examples from whom he draws this inspiration: Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Dostoevsky are prophets of a Christianity that is still to come (Patočka 2007, 40). Patočka sides with these figures on the edge of heresy, when looking from the traditional Christian standpoint, and thus shows that the title of his *Heretical Essays* pertains not only to his interpretation of war but has a multiple meaning.

Of course, Christianity can also be the agent of life in balance and, in this sense, the ground of everydayness. Perhaps, this is the mainstream manifestation of Christianity in its long history. Analogously to the tension between the light of day and the experience of dark night, there is a Christianity, which gives comfort, however, at the price of the total organisation of life, and a Christianity which gives access to unsettling and disturbing experiences. The latter is Patočka's, as well as our interest here.

If we want truth, we are not allowed to look for it only in the shallows, we are not allowed to be fascinated by the calm of ordinary harmony; we must let grow in ourselves the uncomfortable, the irreconcilable, the mysterious, before which the common life closes its eyes and crosses over to the order of the day. (Patočka 2007, 39)

These words summarise the reasons behind Patočka's opting for the experiment of night. The truth of being reveals itself in limited situations such as the experience of the front in the midst of total destruction. This is the inspiration drawn from Teilhard de Charadin's records. This is what Christianity bears witness to. However, I suggest that we can even move a step further. Patočka offers a radical reinterpretation of Christianity after the end of the Christian era.

"Christianity after Christendom" or a "Christianity to come" as a spiritual response to modernity and its defective modes of being is, in Patočka's conception, outside the sphere of the theological. Although Patočka alludes to some biblical topics, such as sacrifice (2015a), the story of the God-man (2016, 115-180), and conversion (1996, 75), he transposes their message for our—modern—context, his intentions differ from any apologetical aims. The crux of sacrifice is not the person of Christ but a challenge addressed to every human being; the call of conversion is not meant as a turn from unbelief to faith. Rather, it is the expression of an ever-present existential drama turning around a life in balance and the possibility of a life in amplitude; the concept of incarnation, if we can associate this theological term with the discussion of Patočka's philosophy at all, is not about the descent of the transcendent God to the world but must be understood as the event of being (*Seinsereignis*). Ludger Hagedorn aptly reiterates Patočka's vision:

Gott ist mit den Menschen, aber ganz anders als es die traditionelle Vorstellung will, anders als in der 'theologischen Öde'. Er ist mit uns in einer grundsätzlich sinnproble-matischen Welt. [...] Er wird erfahren als die Fraglichkeit dieser Welt, als die Fähigkeit zur Transzendierung dieser Welt in der Aufgabe aller singulären Interessen und Bindungen. Gott ist *in* der Geschichte, ist 'die lebendige Hoffnung auf Weltumkehr.' (Hagedorn 2014, 363, in reference to Patočka 2002, 450ff.)

For these reasons, for example, Veselý argues that we find in Patočka a tragic Christianity *without* the Christian proprium (Veselý 2013). Some theologians would perhaps agree, although the question whether theology in its contemporary (phenomenological) turn can find inspiration in Patočka's reinterpretations remains open for further discussion.<sup>4</sup> It seems to me, however, that Patočka's discussion on war contributes to, and also makes visible, the reality of his – philosophical – project of Christianity after Christendom (Patočka 2015a, 22).

It is clear that in its orientation towards the future, this Christianity has no pre-described patterns of development. On the contrary, it contains a moment of surprise. However, the question is how to move beyond the metaphor of destabilising night? What is the content of unexpected surprises delivered by Christianity to come? Looking from outside, this form of Christianity appears as truly embedded in history, free from the possession of knowledge about the next things to come. In other words, the Christianity, which is coming after the end of Christian era, does not follow any pre-given, pre-designed pattern of development. Internally, Christianity is not so much about the content of belief, meant as the adoption of opinion about things such as the existence of God, heaven, rewards for the good, etc., but as a mode of being in the world and, which is crucial, a mode of *thinking* about the world, history and human existence. To use Patočka's vocabulary, this being *qua* thinking is living in questions and problematicity, which are not seen as obstacles but as thought-provoking engines and paths to realise the depth of the entirety of life in the world and in history. And going beyond this disturbing language, the project of Christianity after Christendom offers a spiritual response to the tragic outburst of modernity. This response does not consist in turning to the creed as a sort of deposited knowledge. Rather it turns to thought patterns, known to traditional Christian intellectual structures and, at the same time, allows interruptions coming from the future.

My response to the above-mentioned criticism about Patočka's void Christianity *without* Christianity would be that it misses the point because it seeks to delineate a positive content of this Christianity, consisting of propositions, arguments and opinions to be adopted or rejected. Patočka's project of the Christian *after*, however, concerns the structural element of being Christian. In other words, the 'after' does not refer to a consecutive time, that is, to a progressing Christian entity exchanging one of its forms for another, that is, a more enlightened and rational one. The 'after' points out the internal experience of transgressing something we have called everydayness, or what might be called boredom, or a

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<sup>4</sup> I think particularly of the representatives of the so-called theological turn intentionally dwelling in the borderlands of theology and philosophy: Jean-Luc Marion; Emmanuel Falque, John D. Caputo.

life in balance, that is, a life without questions, which also means a life without a future. Christianity bears witness to this existential experience; however, this experience is surely not restricted to Christians. At one point in the *Heretical Essays*, Patočka talks about the experience of being shaken. The experience of those who go through a liminal situation, for example, war and totalitarian oppression. Christianity is, in a way, an institutionalisation of this movement of life and the background against which it is important to creatively live through this experience.

Patočka describes the experience of being shaken as the moment when certainties tremble, the defence of plain life is not enough, and history is interrupted by a greater force, which Patočka surprisingly calls, 'something divine' (Patočka 2002, 403). However, this is not any attempt to Christianise the Czech philosopher or even to claim that this unknown divine force is the Christian God. What Patočka has in mind is the break of transcendence in a particular (hi)story of the person. Yet this transcendence does not come from elsewhere but from within history. Only from history and within history is it possible that something new will come. This is the experience of being shaken.

But is it possible to withstand it? How can one live with the certainty of absolute uncertainty? For an individual, this is perhaps too demanding. This is the reason for introducing the concept of *the solidarity of the shaken*, that is, the interpersonal aspect of the experiment of the night.

Christianity, on which I elaborate against the background of Patočka's reflections, incorporates this interpersonal aspect. Moreover, Christianity in its constant coming, in its pondering of the 'after' is capable of finding value in the experience of the shaken. By way of internalising the darkness of night, that which seems as unsettling at first sight becomes something positive and a community building agency. And it appears as the community guarding being against its reduction to plain everydayness and the satisfaction with a life in balance. As Patočka remarks, the solidarity of the shaken is the community of those who understand the conflict between the slavery of finiteness and the freedom of transcendence: of those who are willing to engage with a problematic, shaken (*sinnerschütterte*) meaning of the world.

The suggestion of Christianity after Christendom is not meant as an apology for a supposed redemption (*das Rettende*) from the power of the day and its blinding light. Rather, I understand this Christianity as a potential advancement of Patočka's main concern, that is, not to be fulfilled by finiteness. Christianity is experienced in experimenting with the night. What war reveals in a rather brute way, Christianity delivers by way of internalising the experience of being shaken. Moreover, Christianity institutionalises the interpersonal element of this experience, which is something Patočka calls the solidarity of the shaken.



It is obvious that such a Christianity is not simply present-at-hand but still coming. Nonetheless, an important message of this *heretical* Christianity is that even from the negativity of night there is stemming out of it something positive: namely, the love of eternity without escaping from the peculiar realities of history. It is doubtful whether this conclusion will have any impact on theology and mainstream-lived Christianity. On the other hand, it would be a failure of philosophy not to see the potential, which is embodied in Christian thought-patterns. Patočka committed himself to exploring these paths, despite entering the edge of heresy.

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