# Introduction

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The question facing the editors of the present volume is: why Jan Patočka, why now? On the one hand, this is a collection of essays for the specialist, for those working in phenomenology, the philosophy of history, political philosophy, philosophical anthropology, literary theory, and other fields to which Patočka makes valuable contributions—and provocations. Patočka's erudition is remarkable, from his knowledge of Plato and Aristotle,[1] to his rich engagement with Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, to his command of the European history of ideas and his dialogue with contemporaries; there is a wide field of potential impact for his ideas. But perhaps his greatest contribution is the clarity he brings to the question of what is at stake in philosophical inquiry.

For Patočka, philosophy is always an activity oriented toward the urgent question of how to live in the world with others. Given the world in which he lived, in his own words a twentieth century of war,[2] in a Czechoslovakia that endured first Nazi occupation and then decades of Soviet rule, Patočka is alive to the difficulty of this question and to the darkness that hangs over human efforts to live meaningfully. For him, solidarity, justice, truth, and meaning are forged only in the face of radical uncertainty and unease. In this respect, his work has appeal beyond the world of academic specialists; it would be a great loss if a philosopher whose ideas inspired and shaped an entire dissidence movement, and who himself took part in this movement, were to be relegated to an academic footnote. His

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[1] Patočka held courses on the Pre-Socratics, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle between 1945 and 1949, and in 1946 he published an important monograph on Aristotle, which has recently been translated into French: Jan Patočka, *Aristote, ses devanciers, ses successeurs*, trans. Erika Abrams (Paris: J. Vrin, 2011).

[2] Jan Patočka, "Sixth Essay: Wars of the Twentieth Century and the Twentieth Century as War," in *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, trans. Erazim Kohák, ed. James Dodd (Chicago: Open Court, 1999), 119–37.

writings on the movement of human life, on the value of the arts and literature, on the pitfalls of a technoscientific society, on the problems of European identity—these speak to any intellectually curious reader and to any person wrestling with the question of meaningful action. All of us involved in producing this volume share the conviction that the Czech philosopher not only remains relevant but that his ideas are vital for understanding and responding to our contemporary social, political, environmental, and indeed philosophical situation.

The overwhelming majority of writings included here date from Patočka's most creative period, in the 1960s and 1970s. From 1965 to 1972, Patočka was allowed an official university post after many years of being banned from lecturing and publishing; lectures in his characteristically engaging style were delivered to packed auditoriums. After being forced out in 1972 following a shift in government policy, he continued to hold "underground university" seminars in Prague that were attended by keen students, among them my co-editor Ivan Chvatík, who organized many of these sessions. After Patočka's death, Ivan and his fellow students produced and distributed *samizdat* manuscripts of their teacher's work—printed in secret on a Ministry of Finance copy machine—which were eventually smuggled out of the country and made available in Europe. Patočka also published a number of works abroad during his later years, written for German and French audiences. In the texts from this period, readers are presented with a mature vision of Patočka's philosophical thought.

We have chosen to organize this volume around themes for the benefit of the general reader who may be encountering Patočka's ideas for the first time. However, Patočka rarely confines himself to a single theme within a text; readers will find valuable reflections on history in Patočka's writings on arts and culture, or insights into his account of the soul in his writings on history; we hope this volume will offer a sense of the rich interconnections among these themes.

## Care for the soul

Care for the soul is a pervasive theme in Patočka's work and is central to the recent surge of interest in Patočka as a political philosopher.[3] Here, "soul" is not a religious but a philosophical concept, one that pertains to the essential life of the individual yet is inextricably linked to the task of living together in the *polis*. For Patočka, as for Hannah Arendt, care for that element of human being which is not exhausted by mere labor and the maintenance of life is crucial to any genuine politics. The soul forms the counterpart to what Patočka and Michel Foucault call "biologism"[4] or "biopolitics"—a politics that is concerned with optimizing and controlling physical life, but which is in fact hostile to flourishing in a deeper sense.[5]

Patočka offers a portrait of the soul in one of the most eloquent and moving pieces in this collection, "Limping Pilgrim," dedicated to the Czech modernist painter and poet Josef Čapek. The essay was originally a talk delivered on the fifth anniversary of Čapek's disappearance and subsequent death in a Nazi concentration camp, lending poignancy to Patočka's discussion of the soul's struggle as well as presenting a veiled social critique. Patočka obliquely raises the question of what kind of society would allow or actively pursue the death of a person so decent, wise, and humane. And the reader is left to consider what kind of society might result from Čapek's portrait of the soul in contrast to the "titanic" humanism of the nineteenth century.

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[3] See *Thinking After Europe: Jan Patočka and Politics*, ed. Francesco Tava and Darian Meacham (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016).

[4] "An Outline of History."

[5] Simona Forti, "Parrhesia Between East and West: Foucault and Dissidence," in *The Government of Life: Foucault, Biopolitics, and Neoliberalism*, ed. Vanessa Lemm and Miguel Vatter (New York: Fordham University Press: 2016), 187–207; Darian Meacham, "Biologism and Supercivilisation," in *Thinking after Europe: Jan Patočka and Politics*, ed. Francesco Tava and Darian Meacham (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016).

The arresting image of a pilgrim hobbling along life's way is Čapek's, from his essay of the same title,[6] and through an extended reading of this metaphor, Patočka describes his vision of the path of an authentic human life, moving always towards something that is never specified: a pilgrimage to an unknown region. "The pilgrimage for Čapek truly is a path from the unknown to the unknown, from darkness to darkness. 'I was not—*I am*—I will not be.'"[7] Limping becomes a metaphor for being suspended between two impulses: that which would bind us to the earth and the familiar, and that which leads us to strike out again and again into the unfamiliar and alien, the reflection of some uncanny dimension in human being.

The uneven gait of the pilgrim is a result of being pulled in opposite directions toward the finite and toward the eternal: such is human existence. Patočka writes, "A total reabsorption into reality is not even possible for us; the very fact that we always in some way transcend it, that we walk through life on legs of different length, means that we will limp." Like Kierkegaard then, Patočka sees existence as a movement between opposing poles, always in a state of tension. In the "Limping Pilgrim" essay, Patočka uses Čapek's language of the "Person" and the "soul" to describe the aspects of the self that move in constant relation to one another, each pulling its own way. In normal life, where the Person rules, playing the appropriate roles and keeping order, the soul is forced into:

> … the function of a mere servant with no independent say, no leading role in life, never intruding or getting in the way; the moment the soul subjugates itself in this way, it creates order and balance, biologically and socially—provided, of course, the Person is clever and successful in having its way.

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[6] Josef Čapek, *Kulhavý poutník: Co jsem na světě uviděl* (The limping pilgrim: What I saw in the world), in *Spisy bratří Čapků* (The works of the Čapek brothers), vol. 37 (Prague: František Borový, 1936), 181–217.

[7] "Limping Pilgrim Josef Čapek."

However, there are moments—in Patočka these are typically moments of deep crisis and pain—in which the soul rises through the mask of the Person and changes our sense of ourselves and the world.

> In the event that the soul, that is, our unobjectified component, our connection to the infinite, does not subjugate itself, in the event that it awakens and demands its rights, then all of a sudden the way we move among things, our reactions to life become unsettled, unpredictable; things happen that never happened before—life no longer runs on automatic, but begins to be aware that it is not of a piece, that it is—limping along.

Patočka presents the possibility of a rupture with the actual, with what has been accepted as the realm of possibility. The ultimate rupture is death, and indeed for Patočka the soul is "allied with" death, insofar as it breaks away from everyday life with its certainties and calculated probabilities. A break of this kind opens up the whole in a mood of anxiety or unease. Čapek wonders, "What if the soul is nothing but unease …? It may not be much, but, ultimately—it is everything!" This unease is not something to be avoided, as it awakens us to something essential. Ultimately it contains an element of hope: "Things happen."

There is an advantage to our human-all-too-human infirmity. "What an odd humanism, you say, that sees humans as having an irreparable defect! Be that as it may, I believe it is this quality of Josef Čapek's humanism that sets it apart. His limping man is no successor to God, neither god nor demigod." Čapek's vision of the limping pilgrim appeals to Patočka precisely because it does not succumb to the atmosphere of titanism that dominated the end of the nineteenth century into which Čapek was born.

In this titanic form of humanism, of the kind seen in Feuerbach, Nietzsche, and elsewhere, human beings cast off the shackles of tradition and superstition and become the gods that they were always intended to be. Within this perspective,

> The moment humans break free of the clutches of illusion that obscure their full reality, the moment they rid themselves of metaphysical and mythological visions, they immediately become complete beings, heroes of the cosmos, every bit as much a product of worldly forces as the key to their meaning.

Patočka values the sense of possibility within this outlook, but he is skeptical, both of the power it promises and of the contradiction within this power: that human beings are ultimately nothing more than a force—the most powerful force perhaps—in a world of natural forces. For Patočka, as for Čapek, human life can never become fully natural in this way; there is an element of human being that the language of "worldly forces" cannot capture. The need for meaning persists, and meaning is always only achieved via a struggle, never finished.

> In Čapek's conception, the process of becoming a complete being, a sensate being with access to the universal, does not come automatically, naturally, so to speak, but only after a struggle with whatever it is that prevents us, and even then we never do so entirely and without damage, but only humanly—which is to say, partially, privately, without definitiveness. Humans may make sense of things, but only in a *finite* way.

"What prevents us," namely, our finitude, is not something that will be overcome, whatever advances humanity makes on the inherited world. Even if technology could

allow for much longer life, the fact of having a limited time and a necessarily limited perspective is not eradicated. This inevitable "infirmity" implies a tragic dimension to human life, one that the death of God and the titanic dispelling of illusion do not free us from. Human being remains suspended in movement between person and soul, part and whole, finite and eternal, necessity and possibility, and the movement between these poles is something that the individual must constantly reenergize, must tend and nurture.

## *The soul in the* polis

In his lecture "The Soul in Plato," Patočka shows the Platonic roots[8] of his notion of the soul and its path, again presenting the soul as a movement between opposing poles and demonstrating the need to care for the soul—both on the level of the individual and as a political necessity. Patočka portrays the ideal *polis* of Plato's *Republic* as centered on a concern for the soul's formation; the ideal social and political form would be one in which the person who has cultivated truth and justice, who has looked after the matters of the soul in themselves and in others, could "live happily and unharmed." Patočka hints at the brutality of unjust systems of governance in which the good are punished and the wicked are rewarded with power and acclaim. He describes Plato's myth of:

> … the perfectly just and truthful man who really *is* such without appearing so (this form of life would be realized at its purest when he appears to be unjust and when he is a stumbling block for everyone else), and of his complete opposite, of the perfectly unjust hypocrite and fraudster, who cannot be distinguished from a genuinely just man by anyone who is not a philosopher.[9]

[8] The Aristotelean roots are equally important, and Patočka's readings of Aristotelian motion influence his reading of Plato in this text. See Patočka, *Aristote*, 2011; *Body, Community, Language and World*, trans. Erazim Kohák, ed. James Dodd (Chicago: Open Court, 1998).
[9] Plato, *Republic* 360d–e.

> The former ends up on the cross, while the latter becomes the king and ruler of this world.

As with many of Patočka's writings, the grim reality of his situation, enduring two world wars as well as living under a Soviet regime and being forbidden to teach or publish for most of his life, appears just below the surface. His description of the philosopher's task in such a society is equally telling:

> To help himself and everyone else, Plato's Socrates now undertakes the only thing the philosopher can do, and the thing that only the philosopher can do—he projects a city in which it would not be possible to do injustice to the philosopher or to anyone else, a harmonious and happy city.

Here Patočka makes explicit the link between philosophical activity—a cultivation of the soul—and a liberationist politics. While there has been much debate over how to think of Patočka's politics, with some claiming him as a figure of political resistance and others enlisting him on the side of classical democracy and civil society (both positions have merit), there is no doubt that his philosophical inquiries are bound up with the thinking of our life in common, extending to questions about the organization of the state and the education system.

Patočka's decision in the late 1970s to help draft and to lend his public support to the human rights appeal and civic movement known as Charter 77[10] was, on the surface, out of character for a man who had never been actively involved in any political movement. But it is clear that such a decision issued from Patočka's deepest philosophical

[10] The authors of the main Charter text were never declared, but Patočka wrote several short statements that gave Charter 77 a deep moral appeal. He was one of the first three spokespersons of the Charter, along with Václav Havel and Jiří Hájek (Minister of Foreign Affairs in spring 1968).

commitments—commitments he had affirmed throughout his life and that were apparent to those who knew him.[11] Patočka died at the age of sixty-nine in the weeks following a lengthy interrogation by the secret police, so he was not alive to witness the eventual success of the Charter in helping to bring about the Velvet Revolution of 1989 and to usher in the writer and dissident Václav Havel as the first president of the Czech Republic.

One can see in Patočka's writings his high esteem for acts of intellectual courage, from the death of Socrates, to the founding of the independent Czechoslovak nation by the philosopher-turned-statesman Tomáš Masaryk, to the defiance of Čapek smuggling his poetry out of Bergen-Belsen. But his championing of such acts is not naive, and he is aware that many see a commitment to ideas—to non-instrumental thinking—in a less than heroic light. This comes through in a fascinating essay in this collection on "The Idea of Education." Patočka wrote this essay in 1938, in the immediate aftermath of the disastrous Munich Agreement, which gave Hitler the right to annex key areas of Czechoslovakia for Germany and opened the way to his subsequent takeover of the entire country six months later. In the essay, Patočka does not mention this event directly but instead responds to the occasion by defending—and renewing—the classical German humanistic ideal of education (*Bildung*), represented by Goethe, Herder, and others, to present a contrast to the dark reality of Germany in the 1930s. Writing in the voice of his contemporaries, and perhaps voicing reservations of his own as well, Patočka ponders:

> The harmoniously comprehending individual, embracing the entirety of the world with their mind, as the humanistic ideal proposed—is this not the idealism of the dilettante who seeks only the benefits, but lacks the courage to act, or productively investigate, in even the most limited fashion?[12]

[11] See the account of Patočka's death in Costica Bradatan, *Dying for Ideas: The Dangerous Lives of Philosophers* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).
[12] "The Idea of Education and its Relevance Today."

There is an echo here of Callicles' admonition to Socrates that he "let go of impractical philosophy and its paradoxical doctrines—such as that legality and truthfulness are under any circumstances better than their opposites, or that a harmonious life is happier than a wicked one" because "if he will occupy himself with or even conduct himself by his unrealistic philosophical thoughts, he will be disgraced in the city and die."[13] Yet Patočka defends the "impractical" and "unrealistic" reflective person who looks toward the whole against the charges of sterile dilettantism. The habit of distancing oneself from the conventional allows the reflective person to "go beyond their own narrowly personal standpoint as well as the perspective of whatever group they are attached to through their origin and interests." The self-discipline of an intellectually rigorous life means that "if they have the ability and capacity to act, they act not on impulse but out of understanding, and their authority is not based on putting ideas in people's heads and making an emotional impression, but rather on their ability to see into the heart of things."

Patočka recognizes that acts of intellectual courage of the kind represented by Masaryk are not available to everyone. Yet even where the reflective person is "incapable of action," where "they can understand but are not prone to act … politics in a deeper sense cannot do without their interventions; it would grow coarse and lose itself in demagoguery and utilitarianism." Such an outlook offers a framework for thinking about the political value of Patočka's philosophical activity, even though he for the most part avoids direct engagement in politics. Like Hannah Arendt, who influenced him, he sees thinking and other non-instrumental activity as the groundwork for an authentic politics. And for Patočka it is precisely when our naive faith in things is most shaken that we are in a position to think through and act toward the life in common that we want to see. He

[13] See Patočka's essay "On the Soul in Plato."

ends the 1938 essay with the admonition that education is "not simply blissful enrichment, but pain and struggle as well."[14]

## The whole and the natural world

Jan Patočka is, at bottom, a thinker of the whole. Despite the occasional clamor about a "theory of everything," it is not characteristic of our time to raise the question of the whole, and certainly not in the way that Patočka understood this question, as grounding and orienting all of our movements in the world. The present age is characterized by a mania for distinctions and specialization, for the multiplication of particulars. And yet, what have the developments of the last century—from globalization, to world-ending weapons, to the climate crisis, to a global pandemic—shown us so clearly as the fact of being a part of a whole? Ours, declares Patočka, is the "planetary era."[15] While the economic-material whole of globalization is not the same whole that Patočka describes, we note that in insisting on the urgency of the whole, Patočka identifies a contradiction in the modern condition: on the one hand ever greater specialization and division, and on the other hand anonymous forces of unification, or perhaps more precisely, of mobilization that gather everything that is under a singular concept. A thinker who, like Patočka, offers a more thoughtful vision of the whole than the purely contingent unity of existing within the same economic forces of "monopoly supercapitalism"[16] or the same planetary ecosystem is surely a thinker for our times.

Patočka's concern for thinking the whole comes very early in his philosophical development, as he begins to think through the problem of the "natural world" in response to Edmund Husserl's writings on the subject. The natural world in question is not what we now refer to as the environment—comprising the various physical ecosystems of the

[14] "The Idea of Education and its Relevance Today."
[15] "An Outline of History."
[16] "An Outline of History."

planet—though it is not unrelated to this sense of "natural world" and has bearing upon it. The world Patočka describes is also not "natural" in the sense of nature as opposed to culture. It refers instead to the world of our life or the total horizon of our experience, which includes both "nature" and "culture" and which, to Patočka's mind, has yet to become the subject of philosophical treatment. Husserl goes some way toward opening up a philosophical investigation of the natural world by identifying its importance and arguing for its primacy in relation to a mathematical-scientific conception of the world.[17] But Patočka advances this investigation significantly. The centrality of the natural world to Patočka's thought is evidenced by the fact it was the subject of his first major philosophical text in the 1930s and that he is still preoccupied with it in 1967, when he writes "The Natural World and Phenomenology."

Patočka's writings on the "natural world" as the whole in which we live are occasioned by years of passionate study of and reflection on Husserl and Heidegger. Nevertheless, he is equally motivated by perennial philosophical questions about the relationship between the world of appearance and the world as it is, between mind and world, between subjectivity and objectivity. Patočka's questioning of the whole is also motivated by pressing issues of life in the present age, which has lost a connection to the natural world both in the specialized sense that Patočka uses this term and in the more general sense of our relationship to the earth and sky as the "referents" of all our activity. For Patočka, the earth is

> … not originally a body like other bodies; it is not comparable to anything else, because everything else that might occur and that we might encounter relates to it as the ground that is always presupposed. It is the *natural horizontal* with

[17] Edmund Husserl, *Crisis in the European Sciences*, trans. David Carr (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970).

> respect to which we assume every attitude or stance—in every rising to one's feet, every step, every movement, the earth is presupposed, at once energizing and wearying, as well as sustaining and affording peace.[18]

The natural world, as we think of it, tends to be divorced from phenomenological considerations of this kind, instead belonging to the conception of the world in the sciences. Patočka's rethinking of the natural world as the lifeworld and the earth as the ground that is always presupposed by the movements of our life offers a different starting point for our response to the environmental crisis. Additionally, Patočka raises the question of the whole against the backdrop of deep political divisions within Europe and globally. His analysis opens up a space for addressing our common human world and the crises of modern civilization.

### *Phenomenology, objectivity, and technology*

The dialogue that takes place across different conceptions of phenomenology remains one of the richest sources available for thinking through our relationship to the world. Such reflection comes naturally to human beings, whether it is expressed through ritual, through artistic representation of features of the world we deem significant, through scientific enquiry, or through explicitly philosophical reflection on the self or on the nature of things. Phenomenology as a philosophical approach involves a refinement of this kind of perennial thinking, particularly in its commitment to understanding subject, object, and world in richer and more precise ways. In order to better understand Patočka's own phenomenology, it is necessary to give a general survey of the field, introducing some of the key ideas from the two phenomenological thinkers who most influenced Patočka: his teachers Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. One of the rewards of reading Patočka

[18] "The Natural World and Phenomenology."

is a sense for phenomenology as a living discipline—one that moves between and beyond the individual project of any singular figure.

Phenomenology is perhaps most immediately identified with the exploration of subjectivity or consciousness. Phenomenology's treatment of subjectivity, particularly in the figure of Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), is an important contribution to the understanding both of human and non-human being. In Patočka's reading of Husserl's project—the most extended examples in this volume are "What Is Phenomenology?" and "The Natural World and Phenomenology"—Husserl turns his attention from objects as such to the question of how things come to be available to consciousness at all. This is, in Patočka's mind, *the* philosophical question, the ground for any other kind of enquiry into the nature of things. Yet the sciences, the arbiter of truth in modernity, take the availability or givenness of the world for granted. Indeed scientific "objectivity" is meant to guarantee the full presence of the object, purged of the incompleteness, ambiguity, or biases of subjective perception. In Husserl's turn toward the phenomenal, toward the question of how things come to be manifest at all, a renewed understanding of subjectivity becomes imperative.

For Husserl, the subject plays an essential role in the manifestation of the world, as the "dative" of manifestation—that to which the world manifests itself. This is not equivalent to the strong idealist claim that the world is ultimately a *production* of subjectivity, though the subject, as in Descartes, guarantees the world in an important sense. Patočka summarizes in "The Dangers of Technicization":

> Husserl seeks to base this more fundamental sense of truth, on which our worldly strivings are grounded, systematically on a specially purified transcendental consciousness which sees through all the "prejudices" of

ordinary reality without sharing in them and which can see through them precisely because it does not.[19]

Husserl's notion of a transcendental subject in his late work *Cartesian Meditations* became a guarantor in this sense, providing the objectivity that the sciences could not themselves provide because they take the givenness or manifestation of the object for granted. Husserl's revised understanding of subjectivity thus entails a revised understanding of objectivity as well.

Yet Husserl's interest in subjectivity was not only the working out of a philosophical problem: he saw in the world around him—acutely toward the end of his life—the problems that could arise from a mistaken notion of truth as objectivity in the scientific sense. Patočka shared Husserl's philosophical vision of the trajectory of scientific objectivity as well as his feeling for the social and political urgency of rethinking objectivity and subjectivity in more philosophically rigorous ways. He describes Husserl's position not as a denial of the legitimacy of objectivity, but as a rejection of "its metaphysical hypostatization, for which mathematically conceived objectivity *is* reality, and the *sole* one at that."[20] One might express the problem in this way: in the present age a particular kind of reasoning has taken hold and restricted the collective imagination, skewing the understanding both of what is and of what could be.

In his *Crisis in the European Sciences* (1936),[21] originally a set of lectures in Prague which Patočka organized, Husserl sought to show how the ideal constructions of mathematics and the "mathematized sciences" stemming from Galileo and Descartes

[19] "The Dangers of Technicization in Science According to E. Husserl and the Essence of Technology as Danger According to M. Heidegger."
[20] "The Natural World and Phenomenology."
[21] The Prague lectures were given in November 1935. One of the lectures formed the basis for the first two parts of the *Crisis* book, published in 1936, while an expanded version was published posthumously. Edmund Husserl, *Die Krisis der Europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendentale Phänomenologie*, in *Philosophia: Philosophorum nostri temporis vox universa*, ed. Arthur Liebert, vol. 1, no. 1 (Belgrade: n.p. 1936).

became the metaphysical underpinning for our modern conception of reality as an objective world, a world standing apart from subjective experience and open to scientific measurement and mathematical calculation. Husserl calls this conception of reality a "construction," built upon the process of abstracting from lived experience to create idealized versions of the objects that surround us and eventually seeing the world itself as nothing but a set of such objects. As inheritors of this conception, we have come to understand that the world as it presents itself in the richness and ambiguity of experience is something less than really "real." The objects of our experience lack the exactness and "objectivity" (or generality) of the objects that concern the sciences, and this unwieldy quality makes them feel less reliable. In other words, the ability to predict something becomes a measure of its reality. In Patočka's words, we "dare to decide what is and is not by the application of a dry objectivist measure."[22] As for those phenomena that scientists and data analysts have not yet learned to predict, like human action, they are available in principle to such prediction, or will be, when they are understood within the correct scientific framework.

Such an outlook strikes most of us as commonplace; after all, the situation described by Husserl and Patočka is our own. What can easily be overlooked, within the ordinariness of such claims, and with the great advances the scientific framework has afforded humanity,[23] is the threat they pose to human life. As our meaningful experience of the world and our sense of the world as meaningful become relegated to subjective perception—and, following Nietzsche, illusion—a crisis of *meaning* follows. The realm of significance, of attachments and meanings that direct our actions becomes unanchored, divorced from what (really) is, rendering our actions in the world meaningless and

[22] "The Truth of Myth in Sophocles' Theban Plays."
[23] Patočka's position should not be confused with either Luddism or a rejection of science. On the contrary, like Husserl, he has great admiration for the sciences as such and for the possibilities they have unlocked for human being. Further, in "On the Principle of a Scientific Conscience" he demonstrates his respect for scientific inquiry in a passionate plea for the freedom of the sciences from dogmatic political demands or from bureaucratization.

undermining our ability to understand the world. For Husserl and even more so for Patočka, that threat was being played out on the world stage.

Patočka's own writings on caring for the soul, on the natural world, on history, on literature reflect his sense of the urgency of the spiritual crisis diagnosed by Husserl. But his philosophical understanding of the problem is equally influenced by Heidegger's later text, "The Question Concerning Technology" (1954).[24] In Heidegger, the metaphysical hypostatization spoken of by Husserl takes on a different form, becoming an all-encompassing worldview or world "picture,"[25] one that human beings did not create but that is "a particular metaphysical fate to which we have fallen victim, a danger we must outlast."[26] In "The Natural World and Phenomenology," Patočka analyses Heidegger's account of this dangerous metaphysics with great clarity and insight. In Heidegger,

> The central philosophical formulation of this practice of metaphysics is the *principium rationis*, or principle of sufficient reason, formulated by Leibniz in the seventeenth century, after a two-thousand-year incubation: the principle that there must be a reason for everything. Heidegger interprets this principle as one of universal calculability and predictability. Nothing is, nothing exists, unless it conforms to this principle, i.e., unless it meets and is subsumed within the universal requirement that it be secured by calculation. This principle thus amounts to the rigorous, exact objectification of all that is. This objectification transforms all that exists, the *universum*, into an object placed before the subject; the subject, seeking to secure its place in the world, places the object before itself in order to master it. The world becomes a re-presentation in this

[24] "The Question Concerning Technology," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, ed. William Lovitt (New York: HarperPerennial, 1977), 3–35.
[25] See Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, ed. William Lovitt (New York: HarperPerennial, 1977), 115–54.
[26] "The Natural World and Phenomenology."

> sense. Thus the entire modern era is the age of the "world picture," if *picture* is understood in the sense of an "objectification," a "representation for the subject," a "counterpart to the explicit reasoning and deliberating activity of the subject," a "structure of re-presenting, of form-ing, of constructing."[27]

It is clear from this passage that a will to mastery stands behind our commonplace assumptions about the subject and the object, about what we are and what the world is. It is no surprise that part of our metaphysical fate is to face the planetary consequences of our attitude of mastery toward the earth. Following on from Heidegger's account in "The Question Concerning Technology," Patočka concludes that modernity is characterized not just by a narrow and flawed sense of reality but also by an immense technoscientific power that seeks relentlessly to uncover what is hidden, to mobilize resources. Everything that is, from human beings to the planets above, becomes a "resource." For Patočka, this project of mobilization reflects the triumph of reason of a certain kind and yet lacks any human rationale, any place in a wider field of human concern and meaning. It is epitomized by the twentieth-century development of the atomic bomb, which follows such a logic of mobilization to the end of total destruction. Patočka refers to this development as a "rationality of means" applied to an "irrationalism of goals."[28] The same dangerous combination can be seen in many of the twentieth century's horrors.

Nevertheless, Patočka shares Heidegger's sense that there is something positive in the essential core of technology, a seed that might generate new possibilities for being in the world different from the attitude of mastery and domination. Patočka writes:

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[27] "The Natural World and Phenomenology."
[28] "Two Senses of Reason and Nature in the German Enlightenment: A Herderian Study," in *Jan Patočka: Philosophy and Selected Writings*, ed. Erazim Kohák (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 157–74.

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

It is the "essential core" of technology to uncover what is concealed. The disclosure of the present age operates only within the framework of what is manipulable and predictable, what can be mastered. However, Heidegger notes that if we grasp the essence of technology as disclosure, we will understand that truth does not lie in correct determinations, in successful models, but in this disclosive activity itself, bringing into manifestation from out of concealment.

Understanding truth as the activity of disclosure means a different role for human being in the world than that of a "force" among forces or a "resource." In "The Dangers of Technicization," Patočka offers his own account of the form this might take, namely what he calls "sacrifice." Willingness to sacrifice oneself for that which does not "count" within the framework of the real that we currently understand, a sacrifice "for nothing," demonstrates the ability of human action to realize possibilities of being that lie beyond the actual and beyond "a technical understanding of being … for which there exists nothing like a sacrifice, only utilization of resources."[29] This openness to being characterizes human being as such. We are creatures that are capable of truth, of letting what is show itself as it is—and this is something that we can consciously take responsibility for.

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[29] "The Dangers of Technicization."

### *Asubjective phenomenology*

Late in his thinking, Patočka advanced the practice of an asubjective phenomenology. While questions about the nature of human being and human subjectivity remain important in this project, especially in Patočka's concern with embodiment and care for the soul, Patočka distances himself from Husserl's transcendental subjectivity: the passive witness that underpins the possibility of the appearance of the world. Patočka instead shines a light on the strands in Husserl's thought that stress the subject's active nature and intimate relationship to the lifeworld through bodily orientation and need. The natural world, the world of our life, is "not open to us like a theater, where we sit looking on and the director lets us take control, but rather a whole *in which* we are always like an embedded component that is never permitted to stand above it and never will."[30] This rejection of the spectator model of the subject who "stands above" the action is a direct shot at Husserl's transcendental subject and the Cartesian ego cogito.

However, Patočka reads elsewhere in Husserl an appreciation for our active interest in life, and he further develops this understanding in his own conception of the relationship between subject and world: "The primordial world of our pre-theoretical life is originally a world in which we *move*, in which we are active, not a world that we discover and observe."[31] Furthermore, "the world and human beings are *in mutual movement*"[32] rather than standing at odds with one another as the legacy of subject and object suggests. The language of mutuality is also intended to counter the notion that the world is ultimately a production or projection of subjectivity. We are, in a most basic sense, movement, and while we take the possibilities of our being from the world, the world also moves through our movement.

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[30] "The Natural World and Phenomenology."
[31] "The Natural World and Phenomenology."
[32] "The Natural World and Phenomenology."

Patočka, in emphasizing this mutual movement between human being and world offers a revised, more primordial understanding of what the world is, and of our relationship to it. Rather than a "worldless" objectivity, the view from nowhere that characterizes the sciences, we are worldly beings through and through, and our connection to the earth and sky through our lived bodies makes the world always a world of our own, in which we actively participate.

> All space and all that fills it, the states and transitions that we observe within it, are originally referents of our primordial movement; they have meaning only in correlation to it, and are open to us only because the movement of a being that is not worldless but has a world cannot simply *take place*, cannot be nothing but a gradual unfolding of a state, but must be *performed*, and so this movement has its own real where from/where to, its own in-the-midst-of, its own growth, its own encounters.[33]

Ultimately, as the term "asubjective phenomenology" suggests, subjectivity understood in isolation or understood solely as consciousness is not Patočka's concern. Heidegger's existential analytic had already shifted the terrain of phenomenology from subjectivity to a broader structural analysis of human being in the world—and of being itself. By the time of Heidegger's late writings, he had moved away from discussions of subjectivity altogether and turned his attention almost exclusively to being and to language as the "house of being." Though Patočka does not follow precisely the same lines of inquiry, by the 1950s the ground had already been prepared for his asubjective approach.

Building on this ground, Patočka applies himself to the task that he sees as the core of Husserl's work: developing a philosophy of phenomena or the phenomenal field—

[33] "The Natural World and Phenomenology."

the space of emergence. He considers the explicit thematization of phenomena—as opposed to subject and object—to be a relatively recent philosophical achievement. As a result, phenomenology proper, as a science of phenomena, is still largely unworked and only beginning to come into its own. This puts Patočka's conception of phenomenology at odds with those who understand it as a moment in philosophical history, already dwindling by the 1960s and 1970s when Patočka was setting out his agenda.

Patočka contributes to the development of this new science of phenomena, building on the scaffolding of Husserl's and Heidegger's projects, through his skillful analysis of their shared concerns and their divergences. He is convinced that

> The diversity of phenomenological projects, the very differences among concrete descriptions and analyses of phenomena, depend upon the guiding idea which directs the great progression of phenomenological work, i.e., upon the progress toward concrete experience.[34]

Following Husserl's model of returning to "the things themselves,"[35] but differing procedurally with Husserl on how to achieve this, Patočka's late phenomenological texts present the ongoing drama of philosophical ideas in their relationship to one another and in their relationship to history. Indeed history is not merely an accumulation of experiences but an unfolding of the philosophical project, though not only a linear one. For Patočka, the way to the things themselves is to turn our attention toward phenomena, to the appearing of what appears as it appears.

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[34] "What Is Phenomenology?"
[35] Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, 2nd edn, vol. 2, trans. John Niemeyer Findlay, ed. Dermot Moran (London: Routledge, 2001), 168.

The phenomenal field—the space of emergence or becoming—encompasses both subject and object, and so goes some way toward a new beginning of philosophy that does not take for granted the Cartesian rift between subject and world or the Kantian distinction between the phenomenal and noumenal. Unlike his predecessors, Patočka understands history as vital to the investigation of phenomena, since history is the manifestation of human movement, or the "mutual movement" of soul and world. He stresses contingent moments of rupture from the status quo that lead history in incalculable directions. History proper begins with a rupture of this kind, as human beings turn from the inherited world as a world of given meaning to a "problematic" relationship to the world. History is ultimately the story of human freedom lived out in problematicity.

Patočka's asubjective phenomenology then does not take him toward what was in recent years called an object-oriented ontology, where the question of human being was sidelined out of a worry over subjectivism or anthropocentrism. But some of the same impulses are at work in both of these approaches: a reclaiming of being as primary, defending it against the constructions of subjectivity, not least because of the disastrous environmental crisis whose roots can be located in the view that the world is ours to master. It is an insistence that *the world* reveals itself to us, but that being is not identical to thought. Part of the contemporary appeal of Patočka's phenomenology is precisely his insistence on the "equal absoluteness"[36] of the world and subjectivity, avoiding the extremes that would insist on the reality only of "things" or of mind. Patočka is interested in the human world, the world of our life, in opposition to the world as a scientific construction. However, he is deeply skeptical, especially in his late writings, of a philosophy in which we only ever see ourselves, what Heidegger calls the "delusion" that

[36] "The Natural World and Phenomenology."

"man everywhere and always encounters only himself."[37] Being remains other and essentially "mysterious."[38]

Patočka points to Christianity as a model for acknowledging the primacy and otherness of being.

> For the Christian soul finds itself placed before something which in principle it can never master, which fundamentally surpasses it, which remains incomprehensible to it and which has to remain unconquered by it as long as it does not reveal itself to the soul of its own accord.[39]

Patočka finds in Christian theology, here that of the seventeenth-century Bohemian philosopher Comenius, an alternative to the attitude of mastery that defines the prevailing framework of modernity. Patočka's intelligent reading of religion along philosophical rather than dogmatic lines is a reminder of the reservoir of possibility held within religious thinking. The rehabilitation of Christianity in this Schellingian light is typical of contemporary speculative realism and post-secular theology. An alternative presentation of the otherness of being is offered in "What Is Phenomenology," where Patočka presents being as no-thing, that which is not in the order of beings.[40] The modern understanding of being as nothing more than a set of beings or things rests on a more primary, preconceptual sense of being as the horizon of all possibilities of manifestation.

## Patočka's aesthetic and literary criticism

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[37] Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology."
[38] See, e.g., "The Writer's Concern," "The Natural World," and "What Is Phenomenology?" in this volume. See also Patočka's remarks in the third heretical essay (Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, 75).
[39] "Comenius and the Open Soul."
[40] The basis for this discussion is Heidegger's analysis of the nothing of being in *What Is Metaphysics?*.

This volume includes several of Patočka's best and most significant texts on the arts and culture, most of which are being translated into English for the first time. Patočka wrote a great deal on these topics, and his works of literary criticism in particular unfold in conversation with other philosophers and theorists working in literary studies and aesthetics, from J. G. Herder to Goethe to Roman Ingarden. His writings on the phenomenological contributions of poetry and literature, as well as on language and fantasy, were influential on later literary scholars including Paul Ricoeur and, in the Czech tradition, Milan Jankovič and Zdeněk Kožmín.[41]

Patočka's writings in this field are divided between general "theory," as in "The Writer's Concern" and "Art and Time,"[42] and philosophical expositions of a single work or author, as in his exegesis of Chekhov's *Ivanov* or Sophocles' *Antigone* and *Oedipus* plays. While Patočka does not give priority to poetry and literary writing to the same extent as Heidegger, he takes these forms seriously as a working out of phenomenological themes such as the lived experience of time, being toward death, and the horizon of a whole within which experience takes place. His forays into deep criticism demonstrate an eye for the formal and structural elements of a text as well as a keen sense of their philosophical import.

Patočka tends to emphasize the difference between philosophy and literature, since philosophy, for him, is about making "thematic" or explicit reflections on the whole, something that literature need not do. Despite this, he recognizes a distinctive philosophical contribution in literary works, and some of the philosopher's most powerful

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[41] See Jan Tlustý, "Contemplating literature with Jan Patočka: phenomenology as an inspiration for literary studies," *Bohemica litteraria* 23, no. 2 (2020): 81–98.

[42] For secondary sources on these texts, see, e.g., Erin Plunkett, "'New Human Possibilities' in Patočka's Philosophy of Literature," *Bohemica litteraria* 23, no. 2 (2020): 69–80; Jan Josl, "The End of Art and Patočka's Philosophy of Art," *Horizon Studies in Phenomenology* 5, no. 1 (2016): 232–46; Miloš Ševčík, "Dominant science and influential art: Jan Patočka on relations between art and science," *AUC Philosophica et Historica* 1, Myth, Philosophy, Art and Science in Jan Patočka's Thought (2014): 73–84.

expressions of his philosophical commitments are found in his readings of literature. His reading of the Faust myth in "On Faust: The Myth of the Pact with the Devil," his commentary on temporality, history, and guilt in Karel Hynek Mácha's poetry in "Time, Eternity, and Temporality," and his exposition of Josef Čapek's humanism in "Limping Pilgrim" are all exemplary in this regard.

In "The Writer's Concern," Patočka offers an account of how the literary writer discloses a world and what role this world disclosure plays within the wider field of cultural understanding. He begins the essay by echoing Husserl's rallying cry to return to the "things themselves," and asks what might be the "thing" of the writer as opposed to the thing that concerns scientific inquiry? Where the sciences comprehend the world as a particular set of contents or things, literature orients us toward an understanding of the world as the whole horizon of our movement. It does this by offering "an *individual* capturing of *life's meaning*," as given in the author's presentation of the world.[43] This is not to say that a work of literature need be concerned explicitly with the question of life's meaning or with moral questions; Patočka instead refers to the particular way of making sense of things that is reflected in a literary work, which both awakens readers to their own frame and opens up reflection on the process of sense-making more generally. In the same essay, Patočka also considers how literature, in reflecting on the whole and on the activity of meaning-making, may offer a glimpse out of the technoscientific framework that dominates contemporary life.

His analysis here prefigures his comments in "The Dangers of Technicization" about truth as the disclosure of what is, rather than "truth as correctness." But Patočka, ever clear-eyed about the practical and societal obstacles to genuine progress of this kind, also warns of the various ways in which writing may become co-opted by the larger culture machine, being tailored to "market forces" rather than guided by its own internal

[43] "The Writer's Concern."

demands. He decries this "traffic in writing, which makes the writer into a cog in the complex machinery of supply and demand."[44] Of course, this is a danger for both literary and intellectual writing. Yet Patočka is adamant about the social urgency of the writer's task in a world dominated by the imperatives of the technoscientific paradigm:

> The significance of literary work, therefore, in the future will grow to the extent that other intellectual fields, especially today's science and technology centers, continue to strengthen in their power to penetrate things, controlling and shaping them, which is the power of specialization and segmentation. The greater the segmentation, the greater the need for compensation and a reminder of the wholeness of life, of the undivided relationship to the universe. Literature defends this undividedness above all else. For this same reason, its place is wherever there is a confrontation of the major tendencies arising from the character of society today, in both West and East alike.

The "undividedness" of literature concerns the relationship between the world and the living, embodied subject—a relationship that has been severed in the modern conception both of the subject (as a nexus of forces) and of the world (as the objective world of the sciences). Literature rehabilitates the "natural world," the world of our life.

### *Myth, guilt, and uncertainty*

Several of the texts in the "Arts and Culture" section of this volume deal with Patočka's understanding of myth as a form of cultural understanding, namely as "the original instance of human reflection on humanity's overall relationship to the

[44] "The Writer's Concern."

world."[45] "On Faust: The Myth of the Pact with the Devil" is one of the most penetrating literary readings in this collection. In Faust, as well as in the dramas of Sophocles, the theme of myth centers on the relationship between human action and necessity, represented by the Greek notion of fate or destiny. Patočka draws from these myths an understanding of what it is to be responsible, to be "guilty" before the whole.[46] This guilt is not religious, as in the earlier Faust myths, but refers to individual human action in the face of uncertainty, the necessity of acting and being held responsible despite being unable to foresee the outcome. The possibility of failure and catastrophe looms over all of our actions, since we move always within uncertainty.

One sees in Patočka's analyses of guilt echoes of his idea of the "solidarity of the shaken" from the late *Heretical Essays*.[47] In these essays, it is clear that the soul's guilt over action in the face of uncertainty forms the basis for community—one that does not rely on national identity or any other form of identity but that responds, in anxiety, to the basic situation of human action. Patočka closes his exposition of Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus* with the recognition that guilt is our basic position. He reinforces and expands on this idea in his essay on the poetry of K. H. Mácha: "There can never be freedom without an act, but an act is always finite and guilty."[48] Guilt is a condition of my always limited understanding of the context of my actions, "I must be *in* a situation (not: *above* or *before* it) in order to understand it, and therefore I understand it always only in part."[49] Any action carries the burden of guilt, of being "in the wrong."

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[45] "The Truth of Myth in Sophocles' Theban Plays."
[46] This is also a theme in "*Ivanov*" and "Time, Eternity, and Temporality."
[47] Patočka, *Heretical Essays,* 135.
[48] "Time, Eternity, and Temporality in the Work of Karel Hynek Mácha."
[49] "The Natural World and Phenomenology."

Chekhov's Ivanov kills himself over this guilt, unable to reckon with the unshelteredness of such an attitude. But guilt, as Patočka declares in "Ivanov," should be understood as the beginning of authentic action and not the end. One of Patočka's most difficult demands was adopted by Václav Havel as a motto for the type of politics he and the other dissidents were attempting: the idea of "living in truth." "Living in truth" is not in the possession of the truth, nor is it a worship of the factual ("*idolum facti*"):[50] it is a desire to risk oneself for truth. "Living in truth" then means, as Patočka writes in the Faust essay, "wanting to participate in universal justice as the only condition in which the soul can exist as such, as a being soaring out of the fall."

## History and the movement of life

One of the features that marks Patočka's later works is a preoccupation with history, with what separates a prehistorical from a consciously historical age and with the threat posed to "historical" life by the "twentieth century as war." Understood most broadly, Patočka's philosophy of history describes the movement of human being. Just as the subject in Patočka is not an observer standing before the theater of the world, so history cannot be understood as simply a set of events or unfolding processes available to objective scrutiny. Patočka reads the movements of human life in—and as—history.

Patočka describes these movements within a tripartite framework similar to that of Arendt in *The Human Condition*.[51] Life begins with acceptation, both being accepted by and cared for by others and accepting the world as it is given to us. We put down our roots in life. The second stage is marked by a recognition of life's fragility; in response to this sense of threat to life, human being works to defend itself, striving for the

[50] "A Few Remarks on the Concept of World History."
[51] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd edn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

maintenance of life into the future, through labor. The third movement is human action in which the inherited world and accepted meaning become problematic; in this sphere, human being takes responsibility for itself and its freedom in an attempt to live in truth or care for the soul. These movements mark both individual life and the collective life of human beings as a species, developing over time. In Patočka's account, it is only in the third movement, in the break or rupture with the past, that we enter history proper. Yet, unlike Heidegger, Patočka is not dismissive of the first two movements and sees them as an essential part of human being in the world.

"Time, Myth, Faith" and "Time, Eternity, and Temporality" both deal with the relationship of history to time. It is characteristic of the third movement of human life that it is oriented toward the openness of the future, a future for which there is no assurance that it will be like the past. Properly "historical" time contrasts with the eternal repetition of the same in what Patočka calls "prehistoric" life:

> Historical time does not flow *aequabiliter*, i.e., uniformly, like biological succession or the absolute time of Newton. There are moments of contact with what is ultimate and defining that time will never contain, yet nevertheless they may shape time and give it meaning. As a result, historical time is preparation for "the right time," "the right moment," "the fullness of time." Only in this historical time do we live with an awareness of human meaning, in the fullness of human life (whether true or illusive).[52]

The Greek notion of *kairos*, the right time or the fullness of time, suggests that historical life is not merely a series of events in a uniform spacetime. History makes "contact" with "that which time will never contain" and is shaped by this contact. In Patočka, these

[52] "Time, Myth, Faith."

ruptures in time are reflective of the human capacity to go beyond the actual and thereby to change the space or course of history. "Against this backdrop [of historical life] the life of an individual human, that finite stretch of time, takes form as something capable of fulfillment or failure, of overall 'success' or catastrophe, at once shaped by these great events [of history] even as it shapes them."[53] This is what he refers to elsewhere as the "mutual movement" of human being and world.

Patočka ultimately proposes a very restricted sense of history as the project of human beings taking responsibility for themselves and their shared world in the face of uncertainty and unease. This is the "problematicity" of history, when the nature of our relationship to the inherited world becomes shaken and undone. In a sense, our reckoning with that relationship *is* history, or we could also say that history is the phenomenon of human action, human movement, which Patočka also calls the movement of the soul.

One of the main sources of contemporary interest in Patočka is as a thinker about Europe. Patočka offers to the study of history a series of what James Dodd aptly calls "provocations." One such provocation is Patočka's definition of Europe, which does not conform to any set of geopolitical boundaries but refers only to the project, carried over from Greek philosophy, of caring for the soul, of working toward the ideal community that lives in truth.

> Thus it is not Christianity, nor capitalism, nor the political and social legacy of the Roman Empire, nor imperialism and revolution, nor even the abstract ideas of freedom and democracy, but philosophy as a way of life, defined by the care for the soul, that forms the genuine heritage of Europe.[54]

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[53] "A Few Remarks on the Concept of 'World History'."
[54] James Dodd, "Jan Patočka's Philosophical Legacy," in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Phenomenology*, ed. Dan Zahavi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

The European project does not describe the *possession* of truth and enlightenment, not in any positive sense. Rather, it is commitment to care for the soul and for human life in common without the reassurances of given, traditional sources of meaning and identity. In Patočka, it is precisely this project that inaugurates history proper, when human beings renounce their sheltered existence and strike out on a fundamentally risky path.

Yet Patočka declares that the project of this ideal community called "Europe" is dead. It was, in James Dodd's summation, "overcome by the nihilism of its embrace of technological civilization and the pursuit of power and possession for their own sake."[55] While Husserl in his 1930s *Crisis* identified the threat to Europe and attempted to pull the European project back from the brink, Patočka sees more clearly that this project, by the end of the 1930s, has already come to an end. Writing in 1970 about the political turmoil of the 1930s and 1940s, Patočka describes the failure of the classical German incarnation of the European ideal, which morphed instead into the tyrannical horror of the Third Reich; the intellectuals meant to uphold and defend the formation (*Bildung*) of the soul became complicit.

> Once again, there is a "German Reich," but in a form completely different from the German classical version. Spiritual power and authority are now completely out of the question. Looking at its political structure, this "Reich" is an inheritor of the Prussian, pre-revolutionary century; after its failed attempt at world dominance, it is finally transformed, in Plato's catalogue of superseded polities, into an unprecedented tyranny, which was made into a waking reality by unleashing forces otherwise daring to appear only in the nightmares of madness. Confusion among intellectuals, who were initially still

[55] Dodd, "Jan Patočka's Philosophical Legacy."

> trying to build a bridge back to the age of Goethe, is expressed in stultified followership.[56]

The idea of Europe, as Patočka sees it, was only able to authorize and sustain itself on the basis that it was a movement oriented toward living in truth. The Reich becomes a "superseded polity" that can no longer claim authority from its own movements, but instead relies on subjugation and terror to enforce its "ideals."

Several decades on from the events that Patočka describes here, it can be difficult even to conjure up his idea of Europe. His announcement of a post-European age, with Europe no longer on center stage, seems far more consistent with the global developments of recent decades and will likely seem far more plausible to contemporary readers. That said, Patočka offers one final provocation, which is to ask whether it is possible to carry on the project of Europe beyond Europe's collapse? As he poses the question in "An Outline of History," "will humankind of the planetary [that is, post-European] era really be able to live historically?" Patočka suggests that reckoning with Europe's failings must be part of any "post-European" project of moving forward with the open soul as a political ideal. His writings on this subject do not offer an answer to the question, and he moves between despair and hope about the possibility of such a post-European project. On the side of pessimism, it must be noted that the "biologism" which dominates contemporary life is a major obstacle to living in truth, since such a framework does not recognize any good beyond bare life, so does not recognize the third movement of human existence at all.[57] On the side of hope, we note that it is characteristic of "historical," problematic human life that: "The main thing, what is most important, always lies ahead of us, however far we go. And yet its very absence may shape what comes next for us, our concrete future."[58]

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[56] "The Spiritual Foundations of Life in Our Time."
[57] See "An Outline of History."
[58] "Time, Myth, Faith."