

INTRODUCTION: THE INSPIRING THINKING OF JAN PATOČKA TODAY

This volume is based on papers given at an international conference in Pilsen, on 9 December 2013. The articles are versions of the papers which have been developed after discussion and modification initiated by the interaction of the participants. The collection is, among other things, testimony to the intellectual legacy of Jan Patočka (1907–1977), which continues to inspire thinkers today. Explicitly or implicitly, the individual contributions go through a number of Patočka's key concepts, including care of the soul, solidarity of the shaken, *chōrismos*, the theory of three movements of human existence (*tří životní pohyby*), and asubjectivity. A brief outline of the orientations of the individual contributions and the interconnections that exist amongst them will perhaps be useful here. These interconnections exist despite the relatively wide range of approaches used by the authors, which results in part from their working in different countries and institutions.

For clarity, we can distinguish, on the one hand, 'extensive' or comparative articles, that is, essays that see parallels between Patočka's thinking and that of the great philosophers past and present (including William James, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Gilles Deleuze, David E. Cooper, and Cornelius Castoriadis), while presenting Patočka's reflections from other angles, often achieving a partial synthesis and finding surprising links, and, on the other hand, 'intensive' essays, immersed deep in Patočka's philosophical legacy.

In the first group, we would include Heleen J. Pott's contribution 'Emotions, Persons, and the Body: William James and Jan Patočka', which tackles corporeity, a big topic and one fundamental to Husserlian phenomenology from Husserl and Max Scheler to Merleau-Ponty. Taking the line that considers the emotions to be the embodiment of consciousness, Pott's extends it back to William James and American Pragmatism (to which I would add the British philosopher of psychology E. F. Stout, who met Husserl in person). James's and Patočka's view of the emotions as the feeling of physical change comports with recent neurobiological and neurophilosophical conclusions (for example, those of Antonio Damasio and Daniel Kahneman) and, thanks to the thorough consideration of the parallels between James's and Patočka's work, she provides food for thought not only to philosophers, psychologists, and neuroscientists, but also to aestheticians and theorists of art.

Another extensive article, Philippe Merlier's '*Péri tēs psychēpoias*. Patočka et l'art: une pensée de la création sans sujet', explores the self-creation of the soul (the psyche), that is, not only the personality or the self, but also asubjective creativity as its basis, which

Merlier interprets on the foundations of Patočka's theory of the three movements of human existence and the project of asubjective phenomenology (Negative Platonism). He compares Patočka's concept of *chōrismos* – distance at the core of the consciousness of existence – with the views of Deleuze, Foucault, and Castoriadis, and comes to the conclusion that the essence of the psyche is processual and continuous self-creation, as the feed-back link of the grasping of the asubjective challenge of revealing. Patočka, according to the author, and I find this conclusion acceptable and useful, was thus heading in the same direction as Deleuze with the concept of becoming, Lyotard with the concept of the subject in a nascent state, Ilya Prigogine with the primacy of becoming before being, and, before them, Alfred North Whitehead with his concept of the actual occasion, concrescence, negative and positive prehensions, the nexus and the society of events. Asubjective creativity thus conceived can then be randomly revealed, for example, in the work of British modernist poets like T. S. Eliot and understandably a number of other creative people, whether in the context of philosophy, the humanities, or art.

We would include Ondřej Dadejík's 'Distance and Immersion: Phenomenological Aesthetics and the Question of a "Paradigm Shift"' in the same group. In this essay, Dadejík focuses on the possible tension, present in every aesthetic experience, between distance, the exclusion of practical and other interests from actual experience, on the one hand, and immersion, 'forgetting about the world', on the other. This tension, even paradox (the coexistence of two opposing movements of consciousness), is also the source of a number of controversies in contemporary aesthetics. Dadejík explores possible ways of solving the paradox by tracing the development of aestheticians' views about this topic in recent decades, with an inclination to a developing phenomenological view, a misleading paradigmatic change in the understanding of the aesthetic object as an event-object and the 'joint venture' of the original scheme of the subject-object pair. It is in surmounting this scheme with the help of the concept of environment that he finds a possible solution to this apparent paradox, and he supports it with an analysis of Patočka's discussion of the experience of space, implicitly referring to Patočka's project of asubjective phenomenology.

On the borderline between the extensive and the intensive approach is Felix Borecký's contribution to this volume, 'The Significance of the Concept of *Thauma* in Patočka's Philosophy of the History of Art'. Aristotle's concept of *thauma* or wonder at the beginning of all knowledge is developed by Borecký in connection with Patočka's division of the two fundamental states in the development of Western civilization and culture into the prehistoric and the historical ages and the situating of the emergence of the history of art and aesthetics, that is, two disciplines whose scholars consider the historicity of the relevant cultural segments right up to the present day. With reference to Gadamer, he then analyzes a certain reductivity in Patočka's approach.

The intensive approach is taken in the articles by Inês Pereira Rodrigues, Daniela Blahutková, and Miloš Ševčík. The first of these articles, 'Patočka, Myth and Literature: Illustrations of the Possibility of Paradise on Earth', analyses Patočka's conception of myth and responsibility as a key concept of mythic thinking. In it, Pereira Rodrigues compares the conception of universal love and the possibility of a new paradise in the works of Patočka and Dostoevsky; the basis of her conclusion is Patočka's theory of three

movements of human existence, particularly the third, the movement to truth and the understanding of one's own responsibility.

It is no coincidence that the next article too, 'Patočka's Reflections on Faustus and Modern Art', by Blahutková, links Patočka with literature, in this case Thomas Mann's novel *Doktor Faustus*. In Patočka's analyses, Blahutková examines the crisis of meaning and the resulting crisis of art in the 1920s, which Patočka finds expressed precisely in this novel (and here we may hear an echo of Husserl's *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, 1936), and she considers his making precise the cognitive value of art, long before the boom in the cognitivist approach in aesthetics and the philosophy of art.

The 'depth' analysis of Patočka's thinking is then concluded by Ševčík in his essay 'Dominant Science and Influential Art: Jan Patočka on Relations between Art and Science'. In Patočka's works, Ševčík explores the discussion of the relationship between science and art in its widest social connections. Since the nineteenth century, and probably even since the Renaissance, science has generally been understood as the rule of power (or, in the words of Francis Bacon, knowledge is power) and the rapid development of technologies shapes modern society often negatively. One need only recall the changes in the models of behaviour which are linked, for example, with the mass spread of mobile telephones. Art and its role necessarily had to change with this development, and they changed from the religious and ethically oriented art of classical antiquity and the Middle Ages, and became, in supreme expressions, a protest against, and the subversion of, the technological age. The author then presents Patočka's analysis of the 'solidarity of the shaken', evoked by experiences from the front lines of the First World War, which, for Czechs, acquired a new dimension during the years of Communist 'normalization' policy (1969–89) after the crushing of the Prague Spring reform movement. Together with Patočka, Ševčík finds in art the potential to limit this scientific and technological Power that lacks responsibility and reflection. The relationship between Power and art manifests a dialectical nature or, to put it differently, a complementary feedback relationship, in which increasing Power, together with the effectiveness of technology and of new scientific discoveries, simultaneously accelerates the opposite spiritual pole and therefore also the orientation of part of the population, finding the expression of this movement in the sphere of art. The concrete expression and evidence of the correctness of the presented analyses appears also in current numbers of applicants to universities – an important predominance of the demand for study in the humanities and the arts over an interest in technical fields. Patočka, and together with him Ševčík, who offers insightful interpretation, believes in the possibility of limiting that Power, that inorganic principle of technological growth 'no matter what the cost', and, unlike Heidegger's lamentation that 'now only some god can save us now', he expects that well-considered responsibility, solidarity of the shaken, and (artistic) movement towards truth will have the power to bring 'deliverance' of this sort.

This collection of essays is therefore evidence of the continuing contribution and relevance of Patočka's thinking, which is clearly not a closed chapter in the history of Czech philosophy; rather, it is a powerful source of inspiration and a basis for the young generation of philosophers, aestheticians, sociologists, and other scholars from all over the world, which they can continue to build on.

This collection follows on from two preceding monothematic issues of the periodical *Acta Universitatis Carolinae* (nos 1/2011 and 1/2013), which are also devoted to Patočka. It is one of the main results of a project funded by the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic, ‘The Question of Art in the Thought of Jan Patočka’ (GAČR P409/11/0324).

Vlastimil Zúška
Prague, August 2014