Erika Abrams and **Ivan Chvatík**, eds.
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This book is a collection of twenty papers selected from the proceedings of an international conference held in Prague in April 2007 to commemorate the centenary of Jan Patočka's birth. Its publication is particularly welcome. While some of Patočka's work exists in English translation, most of it remains untranslated, and there is—especially compared with the situation in French and German—a conspicuous dearth of scholarship available in English. This is unfortunate given that Patočka arguably stands among the most original and inspiring philosophical minds of the twentieth century. An historically erudite student of both Husserl and Heidegger, Patočka sought to overcome the momentous abyss that stood between the eidetic and existential tendencies in phenomenology. In this he was like Eugen Fink, with whom he remained in lifelong contact. But a key difference lies in the unusual circumstances of Patočka's career—to wit, that most of his work was developed privately and clandestinely in the repressive context of post-war Czechoslovakia. This experience gave Patočka a distinctively 'heretical' appreciation for the spiritual depth as well as the embodied historicity of human existence. (The term 'heretical' derives from Patočka's *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*). The sense of engagement and ethical responsibility that resulted manifested itself in the most well known aspect of Patočka's life, namely, his death following police interrogation as one of the first spokespeople (along with Václav Havel and Jiří Hájek) for the dissident human rights movement Charter 77. As Havel noted in his opening address to the conference (reproduced here as a preface), the ethical spirit of this movement—and by extension the philosophical project that informed Patočka's involvement—remains vitally relevant in the contemporary 'globalized' world. Thus, as the editors put it, the aim of the assembled papers is to provide an introduction to Patočka's thought which will show that his 'many-faceted thoughtful legacy [*sic*] has truly something to say to the world at large, and that the way in which it addresses basic questions of human existence in general, and the condition of modern man in particular, remains acutely actual' (xi).

The papers are divided into three parts, although there is substantial thematic overlap across the editorial distinctions. Part 1 mainly addresses Patočka's connections with Husserl and Heidegger, in particular his critical effort to purge phenomenology of the subjectivism that he regarded as vitiating its classical expressions. But because Patočka's alternative '*a*-subjective' formulation of phenomenology (which he characterized as a 'formal transcendentalism of appearing as such') was pivotally informed by a heterodox reading of Plato (a perspective he called 'negative Platonism'), the papers dealing with Husserl and Heidegger should be read together with those in Part 2 that address the meaning and significance of this perspective for Patočka's project. Inspired by Jacob Klein, Patočka's view of Plato is centered on the notion of *chōrismos* by way of supporting a non-objectifying view of extramundane ideality. As several contributions demonstrate, for

Patočka 'the idea' thus becomes an essential symbol of human freedom that serves to situate philosophy within a broader neo-Socratic project of 'care for the soul'. The remaining papers are mostly concerned with the larger implications of this project for the contemporary world, in particular with regard to the possibility of solidarity in the face of pervasive social crisis, and how the freedom thereby called for implies sacrifice. The overarching question that emerges is whether Patočka's work yields a coherent and acceptable way to understand the nature of philosophy and to remain hopeful with respect to humanity's future.

The volume begins with some reflections from Miroslav Petříček on the 'heretical' character of Patočka's phenomenology and how it relates to 'care for the soul'. This is an unusually short contribution, but it does make some suggestions as to how Patočka's a-subjective approach may be interpreted as radicalizing Husserlian lifeworld phenomenology and as thus remaining faithful to the core of Husserl's thought through a critical transformation of its understanding of transcendental philosophy.

Eddo Evink puts forward a broadly analogous view of Patočka's negative Platonism, arguing that this perspective can overcome the dilemma faced by contemporary philosophy *vis-à-vis* the 'end of metaphysics'—whether to negatively *one-up* the tradition, or else to sever the connection and philosophize in a *post*-metaphysical way. Evink thinks that these paths lead to absolutism and relativism respectively, but that owing to its existential commitment to 'care for the soul', negative Platonism can avoid both problems through a 'positive articulation of the metaphysical quest for meaning' (69).

While Petříček and Evink thus imply that philosophy today can learn something valuable from Patočka's work, Steven Crowell is more critical, calling into question the methodological coherence of Patočka's reinterpretation of phenomenology. In particular, he casts doubt on the possibility of an adequate kind of philosophical reflection if—as Patočkian a-subjectivism clearly implies—the constitutive role of transcendental subjectivity is denied. For even in the context of 'appearing as such', phenomenological experience is crucially concerned with the normative structure of intentional meaning. Yet this is unintelligible without recognizing some sort of subjective transcendental condition, a recognition which, contrary to the central thrust of Patočka's work, points to the corresponding necessity for some sort of irreducibly noetic analysis. So while Crowell can agree about the current relevance of Patočka's work, for him its main philosophical lesson—at least for phenomenology construed as a *theoretical* project—is decidedly negative.

Burt Hopkins offers a congruent critique of Patočka's negative Platonism. He shows that, following Klein, Patočka's view is based on Plato's so-called 'unwritten doctrine', and that its basic orientation is guided by the subtextual *chōrismos* thesis. Hopkins contends, however, that Patočka's understanding of Plato's 'written' metaphysics involves a misreading that fudges the question of truth with regard to the structure of appearing, and that to correct this oversight would destabilize the critique of Husserl and Heidegger. Although the upshot of this is uncertain, it could imply that the critical element that Crowell finds lacking in Patočkian phenomenology would require recourse to neo-

Platonic metaphysics.

This may be what Renaud Barbaras had in mind in his paper. Drawing on Rainer Schürmann's claim that the Plotinian henological difference—understood as a deeper, non-metaphysical version of the ontological difference—can and should be seen as the '*phenomenological* difference' (between appearing and what appears), Barbaras contends—through reasoning that is argumentatively tight but extrememly detached—that Patočka's phenomenology *is* a henology.

But it may be that Patočka's position is not to be taken—as Crowell, Hopkins, and Barbaras presume—in standard rational-scientific terms (although as James Mensch argues, it may prove useful in the context of cognitive science). Contributions from Tamás Ullmann and Pierre Rodrigo adopt a different tack, bridging suggestions from Petříček and Evink in order to foreground how negative Platonism conceives appearing and freedom as mutually dependent, such that the theoretical aporias that threaten Patočka's phenomenology are *existentially* resolvable on the basis of 'care for the soul'.

The operative theme here is solidarity, and corresponding claims are made by Domenico Jervolino with respect to the philosophy of translation, and by Johann Arnason at the level of 'civilizational analysis'. Of particular interest is the contribution from Kwok-Ying Lau, which explores Patočka's attempt to develop a non-Eurocentric conception of humanity. Lau argues that Patočka's radicalization of Husserl consisted in unpacking the intentional structure of the lifeworld more deeply in order to recover its ultimate *mythical* stratum. Approaching it at this level, Lau contends that Socratic 'care for the soul' is shared with other traditions—his example is Mencian Confucianism—and that such anthropological universality alone is what makes genuine 'intercultural dialogue' possible.

But would an appeal to myth repudiate enlightenment? Discussing religion, Ludger Hagedorn considers the prevalence of Christian motifs in Patočka's thought, but also considers how they point paradoxically toward a more authentic *post*-Christianity that would, in sublating the tension between faith and knowledge, surpass the dichotomy of myth and enlightenment. Hagedorn contends that such an orientation lies at the heart of Patočka's thought and that it implies a notion of kenotic sacrifice as a condition of truth, justice, and human salvation in general.

This idea of sacrifice may be considered most auspiciously in the context of Patočka's reading of Heidegger on technology. Thus approaching Patočka's phenomenology, Marcia Schuback shows that it is methodologically dependent on self-denying freedom as 'a profound force of differentiation' that 'push(es) negativity to its extreme limits' (31f.), and that the productivity whereby appearing itself is brought to appearance is a matter of what she terms 'phenomenological sacrifice'. Ľubica Učník argues similarly in her reflections on the 'sacrificial victim', claiming that by showing the futility of an exclusive focus on objective knowledge, the phenomenon of sacrifice challenges the techno-scientific calculus lying at the root of the crisis of contemporary society.

Concerning this crisis, Michael Staudigl's effort to apply Patočka's phenomenology to the question of violence is extremely insightful: 'violence ruptures phenomenality (by) objectif(ying) the constitutive horizonality of the life-world' (149), thereby destructively violating 'intersubjectively founded possibilities to elicit a meaning from the world' (143). This broad conception of violence links to Patočka's thesis—examined by James Dodd—that in the twentieth century 'war became a culminating spiritual moment in the history of humanity' (203)—that force and will became constitutive of an everydayness which, because it strives constantly to break from 'the given situatedness of life' (211), is inherently violent. For Patočka, this pattern is disrupted in the limit case of front-line experience, where the possibility of responsibility and solidarity can be reopened—but Dodd questions the current plausibility of this hope.

Such misgiving may stem from a narrow construal of what can count as 'front-line experience'. For it need not literally involve military combat, and could include dissident political activism. What is essential, as Ivan Chvatík put it, is that an 'epochal shock' (275) occur as a generalization of the phenomenological epoché, and that this shock prompt the experience of what Patočka called 'shakenness', the recognition of living in 'problematicity', i.e., without metaphysical absolutes. This clarifies how one might 'resume and continue' Patočka's thought today (266)—an ideal that is also addressed by three sets of reflections on Patočka's involvement in the Charter 77 movement, including two by other participants: Petr Pithart and Martin Palouš. Focusing on the political texts that Patočka wrote shortly before his death in 1977, these reflections (the third is by Marc Crépon) are concerned with the vital bond between philosophy and politics—how Patočka's dialogical style and his unwavering moral conviction imparted an ethos of pluralistic solidarity to the movement that enabled it to contribute successfully to the Velvet Revolution of 1989, and which by the same token grounds its 'universal significance' (183) in the twenty-first century.

Overall, this volume provides a very stimulating overview of Patočka's work, and it will be of substantial value to anyone with a serious interest in phenomenology—in its past but especially in its future. For even if some of the more approving discussions of Patočka's work are skewed by an almost hagiographic esteem, the extraordinary provocativeness of presenting phenomenology in the heretical figure of a latter-day Socrates and secular philosophical martyr should help to reinvigorate forcefully some of the fundamental methodological and metaphilosophical debates that remain disquietingly open within the tradition—notably, what a phenomenological practice that is at once both critical and transcendental would look like, and just what the dual desiderata of truth and justice would demand of it today.

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