

## INTRODUCTION

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The Czech philosopher Jan Patočka (1907–1977) published only a few larger works during his lifetime – most notably his habilitation thesis *The Natural World as a Philosophical Problem* (1936),<sup>1</sup> the work *Aristotle, his Forerunners and Successors* (1964),<sup>2</sup> the book of essays *On the Meaning of Today* (1969),<sup>3</sup> and the samizdat edition of *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History* (1975).<sup>4</sup> But beneath the published works, the volume of the manuscripts that were found after his death surprised even Patočka's close friends and students, who decided to save, order, and publish his heritage.

As a co-founder, signatory, and spokesman of Charter 77, Jan Patočka publicly supported the protest against the Czechoslovak authorities in favour of human rights, and met with the Dutch minister of foreign affairs Max van der Stoel. Their joint press conference was held on the 1st of March 1977 at the Hotel Intercontinental in Prague. After the event, Patočka, despite being ill,

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<sup>1</sup> Patočka Jan, *Přirozený svět jako filosofický problém*, Praha, Ústřední nakladatelství a knihkupectví učitelstva československého, 1936. See the English translation (tr. by E. Abrams): Patočka Jan, *The Natural World as a Philosophical Problem*, Evanston (Illinois), Northwestern University Press, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Patočka Jan, *Aristoteles, jeho předchůdci a dědicové*, Praha, Nakladatelství ČSAV, 1964. See the French translation (tr. by E. Abrams): Patočka Jan, *Aristote, ses devanciers, ses successeurs*, Paris, J. Vrin, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Patočka Jan, *O smysl dneška: Devět kapitol o problémech světových i českých*, Praha, Mladá fronta, 1969. The book was banned shortly after its publication. See also the Italian translation (tr. by G. Pacini): Patočka Jan, *Il senso dell'oggi in Cecoslovacchia*, Milano, L. Nigri, 1970.

<sup>4</sup> Patočka Jan, *Kacířské eseje o filosofii dějin*, Praha, Edice Petlice (samizdat), 1975. See the French translation (tr. by E. Abrams, preface by P. Ricœur, epilogue by R. Jakobson): Patočka Jan, *Essais hérétiques sur la philosophie de l'histoire*, Lagrasse, Verdier, 1981.

was interrogated to exhaustion by the Czechoslovak secret police. On the 4th of March, his health deteriorated – he was visited by a doctor at his home and subsequently taken to Strahov hospital, where he remained until the end of his life, the 13th of March.

Since 1977, Patočka's writings have been collected in the Czech samizdat edition (1977–1989), and the publication of the Czech edition of his *Collected Works* began in 1996 (edited by I. Chvatík, P. Kouba and a number of co-editors). But at the same time, Patočka's work has been already published abroad, most notably in French (since 1981, all important works are edited and translated by E. Abrams), selectively in German (*Ausgewählte Schriften* 1987–1992, edited by K. Nellen, J. Němec, I. Šrubař, P. Pithart, M. Pojar), Italian (two books in the 1970s and 1980s translated by G. Pacini) and English (one volume in 1989, translated and edited by E. Kohák; three volumes between 1996 and 1998, translated and edited by E. Kohák and J. Dodd). Subsequently, Patočka's writings have been translated, edited and published by many editors all over the world.<sup>5</sup>

Despite all the thematic richness of Patočka's work – which covers ancient Greek philosophy, the philosophy of history, Comenius studies, Czech philosophy and history and many other research topics –, there is no doubt that its core lies in the field of phenomenology. However, especially in recent years, scholars have also increasingly emphasised the political dimension of Patočka's legacy. A recent attempt to further develop philosophical as well as political aspects of Patočka's legacy is presented in James Mensch's book *Patočka's Asubjective Phenomenology: Toward a New Concept of Human Rights*.<sup>6</sup>

The book was introduced during the conference *Life and Environment in the Philosophy of Jan Patočka* (2nd–4th of November 2016, Prague)<sup>7</sup> and represents an important point of departure for this issue, to which some of the articles presented below explicitly refer (see especially the articles by Hans Rainer Sepp and Jakub Homolka). More precisely, as James Mensch himself states, “philosophically and personally, Jan Patočka left a double legacy” – on the one hand, he developed

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<sup>5</sup> See the list of all of Patočka's publications and their translations online: Archiv Jana Patočky v Praze, *Bibliografie*, <http://ajp.cuni.cz/index.php/Bibliografie> (20. 12. 2017).

<sup>6</sup> Mensch James, *Patočka's Asubjective Phenomenology: Toward a New Concept of Human Rights*, Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, *Orbis Phaenomenologicus Studien* 38, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> The conference and the publication of the present issue were organised within the research framework of the project “Life and Environment. Phenomenological Relations between Subjectivity and Natural World”, 2015–2017, supported by the Czech Science Foundation (GA ČR), project n. 15-10832S. We also thank the project Q 21 “Text and Image in Phenomenology and Semiotics” of the Progres programme at the Faculty of Humanities, Charles University, Prague for further financial support.

the heritage of Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology; on the other hand, he also left a political legacy, which was expressed through his participation in Charter 77.

Following this approach, this issue of *Interpretationes* is focused on both of the two strands – i.e., Patočka's philosophical work and his political legacy –, with an emphasis on the former. More precisely, the issue gradually uncovers selected concepts of Patočka's thought – from his early analysis of the “natural world” to his final, yet only outlined concept of “asubjective phenomenology” – in order to link Patočka's philosophy to the problem of human rights and politics.

The roots of Patočka's thought are introduced by Karel Novotný and Emanuele Soldinger. Both authors focus on the concept of the “natural world”, which was a crucial concept in Patočka's early thought, most notably introduced in his habilitation thesis. Yet their approaches are different. Whilst Novotný focuses on the first revision of the Husserlian concept of the “natural world”, i.e., on Patočka's early philosophy of life, Soldinger shows how the Husserlian grounds of Patočka's philosophy were later confronted with the Heideggerian influence.

Consequently, as Martin Ritter's article shows, even Patočka's early writings, namely the analysis of the term “inwardness” which he elaborated in the 1940s, provide at least some links to the main motifs of his thought developed in the 1960s and 1970s, most notably characterised by the term of the “movement of human existence” and by the idea of “asubjective phenomenology”. Patočka's phenomenology then provides links to multiple problems and topics – such as the problems of “liberation”, as discussed by Marion Bernard, who compares Patočka's approach with that of Chakrabarty, or “animality”, as discussed by Riccardo Paparusso. But what is of crucial importance is what Gustav Strandberg's analysis of the idea of “asubjective co-existence” suggests – i.e., that Patočka's development of phenomenology leads to and therefore cannot avoid the problem of politics.

The topic outlined by Strandberg is elaborated further, though in a different manner, by James Mensch, Hans Rainer Sepp, and Jakub Homolka. What they all have in common is that they explicitly link Patočka's philosophy to the problem of human rights. More precisely, Mensch's article focuses mainly on Patočka's development of phenomenology, in which Mensch sees the grounds for a new concept of human rights. In this light, Sepp follows Mensch's approach and, by giving the example of the Aborigines, shows that such understanding of human rights can also be applied to intercultural analysis. The whole issue is then concluded by Homolka, who, linking Patočka's concept of the “spiritu-

al person” to the socio-political circumstances of Czechoslovakia in the 1970s, shows that Patočka’s engagement in Charter 77 can be understood within the framework of so-called “non-political politics”.

In this way, this issue contributes to both of the strands of Patočka’s heritage mentioned above – it elaborates his development of phenomenology as well as his political legacy. More precisely, it outlines the links between both topics, which should help us see Patočka’s political engagement in Charter 77 within the broader framework of his philosophical thought.