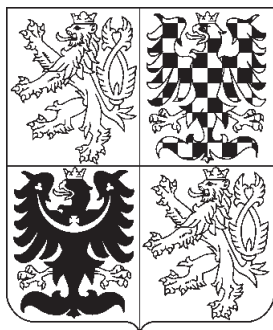




Erazim Kohák

Hearth and Horizon

Cultural Identity and Global Humanity in Czech Philosophy



Published under the auspice
of the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic
and in cooperation with
the Office of the Government
of the Czech Republic

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FILOSOFIA - ΦΙΛΟΣΟΦΙΑ

Praha 2019

The volume was made possible by the support of the Centre of Global Studies
at the Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic
and the Faculty of Philosophy of Charles University in Prague (LC06013)

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FILOSOFIA at the following postal address and e-mail:
Filosofia, Jilská 1, Prague 1, Czech Republic
filosofia@flu.cas.cz

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Second edition

Cover © Václav Pišoft, 2008
Photo © Alexandr Hudeček

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publishing house of the Institute of Philosophy
of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic

ISBN 978-80-7007-402-2 (print book)
ISBN 978-80-7007-587-6 (e-book)

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*Dedicated to all who shared
my life but not my language*

Preface

In this somewhat unconventional volume I should like to offer an intimate introduction to the philosophic struggles which shaped our Czech band of *pilgrims through time* into the cultural community we call a *nation*. I am not concerned with “nation” in the Anglo-Saxon sense of a state with its government, territory, inhabitants and political passions. I am concerned with a people who, by shared memories, struggles and hopes, have forged a distinctive cultural community, regardless of the jurisdiction under which they may reside in any given period.

Because I am convinced that my people, as much by accident of history as by any virtue, drew heavily on philosophy in forming their self-understanding, I found myself speaking about Czech philosophy rather more than a casual reader might expect. That philosophy, however, is no idle speculation but an earnest coping with the vicissitudes of turbulent times. It is intelligible only against the background of Czech history. Consequently, I found myself speaking about Czech history rather more than a professional philosopher might expect, telling the story of Czech wandering through the centuries since our mildly miraculous rebirth some two hundred years ago. The result of that double need is inevitably unconventional, drawing on the skills of a philosopher and of a narrator, a teller of tales. A challenging blend, for writer and reader alike.¹

¹ About the explanatory notes: The purpose of this book is to offer the reader an insider’s view of our grappling with our Czech identity, normally hidden behind the curtain of an impenetrable language. It is an essay, not a textbook. Accordingly, I have sought to make the text as self-explaining as possible, weighing it down with a bare minimum of footnotes, scholars’ joy and the bane of readers. For the curious, there is always the excellent and urbane Peter Demetz, *Prague in Black and Gold* (New York, Hill and Wang 1997) or Derek Saver’s eminently readable *The Coasts of Bohemia* (Princeton, Princeton University Press 1998). Both are readily available in paperback, both new and used, to satisfy the inquiring reader. – However, for readers who are interested but *not that interested* – Peter Demetz’s book is 455 pages long – it seemed a matter of common courtesy to offer some fragments

I was drawn to the task proximately by a wish and a need to share something more than our slick tourist image with those who enrich our lives but do not share our intimate language. I sought to open for them something of my land and my people, of what we have lived, hoped and lost. Not the *outward and visible* manifestations, Prague Castle and the University, our throbbing capital Prague and the peaceful baroque squares of our provincial towns. Those are familiar enough. I wanted share the *inward and invisible* reality, the many conflicted meanings which have gone into making us who we are.

My second need was personal – to straighten it all out in my own mind. I have coped with the meaning (if any) of Czech identity for three score years and ten, a lifetime that included wars, revolutions, exile but also the tangible goodness of the most ordinary of everyday love and labour. We, our land, our people have lived all that. How to make sense of it, if at all? At times it did seem, in Shakespeare's words, as *a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing*.² What does it all *mean*, if anything, and how does that meaning flow and flex in the vicissitudes of history?

That ever changing, ever living meaning is for me the reality of who we are, much as the word is the meaning of these marks on paper. It is inward, but not, I think, altogether invisible, or my task should be vain. We can overlook it amid our busyness, as we overlook a forest for the trees. If, though, we change our focus from all the many manifestations to the rhyme and reason embodied in them, their meanings can begin to emerge before us with increasing clarity. Then we can set about the business of philosophy – clearly seeing and critically articulating the meaning structures of what we live. Truth for me is not a matter of mystic uncovering or *a-letheia*, as the heirs of German idealism would have it. In the tradition of Masaryk's Austrian – and specifically Czech – positive philosophy, I think it a matter of *seeing* that ongoing, ever changing process, though of seeing made possible by a shift of focus from particulars to the meaning structures embodied in them our particular words and actions. Only by seeing can we *see*, not phantasise; only by so shifting focus can we not only know but understand.

Not, to be sure, once and for all. Life is not a steady state, it is a dynamic process, ever changing, ever passing like the snows of yesteryear, ever re-

of what Czech calls, quaintly, the *realie* and English rather problematically *facts*, even though the focus and substance of this book are ideas rather than instances. Ignore or use them as you will: this really *is not* a textbook!

² *Macbeth* Act 5 Scene 5

born like the crocuses peering up through the melting snow. Were we to seek the one *meaning of Czech history*, as our historians were wont to do a century ago, it would slip through our fingers like the days of our years. We need to tell the story of our pilgrimage through history ever again, renewing it with each telling.

Thus Jan Patočka, together with Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk one of our two great thinkers in modern times, wrote two books about it. One, *The Meaning of Today*,³ reflects the turbulent hope of democracy and social justice in the late 1960's. A few years and one Soviet occupation later, he wrote a very different account, in German, *What are the Czechs?*⁴ He wrote, perhaps, in both cases with the same motivation – to offer a privileged view of our intimacy to those ordinarily excluded by the barrier of our challenging language. Yet the view was dramatically different in each of the two readings. In a flowing, changing world, it would be hard to live but one life.⁵

Pavel Tigríd, writing in exile in Paris, wrote a similar extended essay in Czech, *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Her Own Destiny*.⁶ Meanwhile in Prague, writing under the pseudonym Podiven, Milan Otáhal, Petr Pithart and Petr Příhoda wrote their series of interpretative historical essays, *The Czechs in Modern History*.⁷ Perhaps it is a sign of the times that after I offered a still different though no less intimate view of our self-understanding to my students, I was urged to prepare an English mutation. The intent, though, is the same: to open ourselves to others – and in the process to come to a clearer understanding of ourselves. Anyone who compares those four very

³ Jan Patočka, *O smysl dneška (The Meaning of Today)*, in: Jan Patočka, *Češi I (Czechs I)*, edited by Karel Palek and Ivan Chvatík; Praha, OIKOYMENH 2006), pp. 231–338.

⁴ Jan Patočka, *Co jsou Češi? (Was sind die Tschechen?)* (Czech translation by V. Jochman and J. Sokol), in: Jan Patočka, *Češi II (Czechs II)*, edited by Karel Palek and Ivan Chvatík; Praha, OIKOYMENH 2006), pp. 253–324.

⁵ One of the most perceptive contemporary commentators, Karel Skalický, speaks of the *meanings of Czech history* in the plural. My thinking about these matters was profoundly affected by his presentation at the conference of Czechoslovak (exile) Society of Science and Art in Interlaken, 17.–18. 9. 1976, reprinted in: Karel Skalický, *Za nadějí a smysl (Hope and Meaning)*; Praha, Czech Catholic Publishers Zvon 1996), pp. 143–179, and I welcome this opportunity yet once more to express my gratitude for it.

⁶ Pavel Tigríd, *Kapesní průvodce inteligentní ženy po vlastním osudu* (Toronto, 68 Publishers 1988).

⁷ Podiven (pseud.), *Češi v dějinách nové doby* (Praha, Rozmluvy 1990).

different interpretations with Masaryk's *The Meaning of Czech History*,⁸ will see how difficult a task it is. It can, however, be a rewarding one as well.

More prosaically, I first presented these reflections in my native Czech, as a course of lectures at the Philosophical Faculty of Emperor Charles IV's venerable University in Prague in the summer semester of the academic year 2003/2004. A similar though rather reworked course of lectures followed the next year. After that I laid my *scripta* aside, promising myself some day surely to write them out as a book. Ah, the best laid plans! Yet as the mischief of history would have it, in the spring of 2006 I was asked to lecture on Masaryk, Patočka and Czech philosophy for an excursion of forty two Slovene students, using the new panslavic language, English. My colleague, dr Jakub Čapek, encouraged me to write up the lectures in that language. Remembering all the people I loved and sought in vain to teach Czech, I did so, rather more extensively than he expected. To compound my debt I followed that with rather more rewritings than my long-suffering publishers appreciated. And, speaking of *long suffering*, I owe most special thanks to Mrs Dorothy Koháková, beloved companion of my years, for putting up with me for two long years of intensive labour. Surely we all live by grace.

I should also like to thank all friends and colleagues who helped me with their comments, saved me from being prematurely satisfied with their criticism and sustained me with judicious praise along the way. I should like to thank especially to dr Jakub Čapek for the initial impulse to Mgr Matěj Novák for an appreciative and critical response to an early Czech draft, to Darren Crown, who saved me from writing the wrong book when I agreed to prepare an English version, to prof. Ian Angus for his Canadian reflection of the same problem and, most of all, to my fellow philosopher, Jakub Trnka, for the ongoing dialogue that shaped the final text. Most of all, I wish to thank all those who, week after week, came to my lectures and office hours and by their lively interest convinced me that the cultural historical community I loved has not dissolved entirely in the acid bath of consumer affluence.

Finally, I owe a special debt of thanks to the Centre of Global Studies at the Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic and the Faculty of Philosophy of Charles University in Prague and most especially to the Centre's director, dr Marek Hrubec, without whose unfail-

⁸ T. G. Masaryk, *The Meaning of Czech History*. Edited by René Wellek. Translated by Peter Kussi (Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press 1974).

Preface

ing and generous support I could neither have undertaken nor completed this task. May the result justify the investment and serve its readers much as the process of writing served me upon my return after forty two years in exile – as an entrance to the strange and wondrous world of matters Czech and matters philosophic. My home world.

Erazim Kohák
Prague, March 7th, 2007

INTRODUCTORY

Ideas of Philosophy, Dreams of a Nation

*Out through the fields and the woods
and over the walls I have wended,
I have climbed the hills of view
and looked at the world, and descended;
I have come by the highway home,
And lo, it is ended.⁹*

A life-time later, I returned to a homeland from which a wrinkle in history drove me as a lad of fourteen. For forty two years I cherished it as a dream, for I left too young to carry many memories. I cherished it as a forbidden place where I would not be a stranger. My native language, my homeland, my nation. It seemed as if my life were about homecoming. Then the Iron Curtain was rent. I could come home. I stood on the weary tarmac of a sleepy little airport which only weeks ago was forbidden land, *behind the Iron Curtain*. I was home?

No, I was not a stranger. I was just an anachronism, a skansen of an age when the purity of our language, the beauty of our land and the meaning of our history mattered terribly. Enough so that my parents unhesitatingly risked their lives in war-time resistance and ended as prisoners of the Gestapo in Mauthausen and in the *kleine Festung* at Terezín. Now all that seemed so long ago that it was not even true any more. Has the idea of a distinctive *cultural identity* in this globalised age really become a provincial anachronism,

⁹ I have long since given up the attempt to translate the songs and poems that set the mood of my journey. Translations do not resonate. Instead, I have sought English (or Irish or Scottish or American) lays which evoke an analogous mood. In this case it is Robert Frost, "Reluctance", in: Edward Connery Lathem, *The Poetry of Robert Frost* (New York, Henry Holt and Company 1975), pp. 29–30.

a dank and stagnant eddy in the margins of the wild and rushing stream of boundless affluence?

It does tend so to appear, at least to those observers who speak a world language as their mother tongue. For them, globalization means simply that all the *lesser breed without the law* will learn English, adopt their ways and buy their products. They tend to take their cultural identity so much for granted that they think it superfluous to speak of it. If anything, they tend to feel quietly superior without it, world citizens on whose domain the sun never sets. The world, after all, is their oyster.

The community of *pilgrims through time* with whom I identify – the people of the Czech lands¹⁰ and of Czech cultural heritage – could seldom take their national identity for granted. Our land is an enclave in the far flung German *Kulturgebiet, von der Maas bis an die Memel, von der Etsch bis an den Belt*.¹¹ More nationalistic among our historians and our tabloid journalists were fond of describing that sober reality as *the German threat*. Adrenalin always sold copy. Yet far more it was a perennial temptation. To preserve our distinctive language and culture took a prodigious effort and exacted no small toll. It would have been rather less laborious had we opted for the strategy of the Irish toward their English conquerors. Though not for want of trying, they failed to preserve their forbidding Celtic language, yet pre-

¹⁰ Goethe called our land Böhmen, Shakespeare Bohemia, both drawing on its Latin designation derived from a long ago Celtic tribe that happened to be living there when the Romans first encountered it. For ourselves, we call it *Čechy*, the land of Czech culture and language. The problem is that the designation Bohemia or *Čechy* is ambiguous. In its strict and narrow sense, it designates only the western-most of the three historic lands of Czech culture, Bohemia/Čechy, Moravia and a sliver of Silesia. I shall use the term Bohemia/Čechy in its narrow sense. For the entire Czech cultural and linguistic region (once called *the Lands of the Crown of St Wenceslas*, today *Czech Republic*) I shall use the time-honoured term *the Czech lands*. Concerning the political designation *Sudetenland*, see Chapter 6 footnote 101 below.

¹¹ Such was the description of the area of German culture, then fragmented into some two dozen petty principalities, which German patriots of the revolutionary year 1848 set to the music of Haydn's hymn celebrating the coronation of Emperor Franz II. In old Austria, it was sung in all eleven languages of the Empire, including the Czech, *Zachovej nám, Hospodine, císaře a naši zem*. English speakers know the words *Glorious things of thee are spoken, Zion, city of our God*, German speakers sing of *Deutschland, Deutschland über alles...* For Austrians it remains Grillparzer's *Haydn'sche Hymne, Gott erhalte Franz den Kaiser, unsern guten Kaiser Franz*.

served their identity with an ethnic flourish and went on to blossom forth in the world language and rich culture of their neighbours, presented them on a silver platter. German represented a like rich and tempting offer – ease, fame and riches in exchange for our soul, the patriots would say. Less biased observers contented themselves with noting the cost of ethnic distinctness and the advantages of global outreach.

So toward the end of the nineteenth century, a minor literary critic and occasional columnist, Hubert Gordon Schauer, published an anonymous article entitled “Our Two Questions”, provoking the wrath and indignation of all self-professed *true patriots*. He asked, in effect, *What does it mean to be Czech?* and added a second, unthinkable question, *Is there any point to it?*¹² He left his question unanswered. Or not altogether. In print, he insisted that only a person of a base character and defective breeding could even entertain such a question. Perhaps consistently with that analysis, in his final years he adopted German cultural identity, or, in the language of the time, *Dal se k Němcům – He joined the Germans*.

Today all of us, especially our young people, overwhelmed as they are by the debris-laden flood-tide of English-based consumer culture, face the same question. *What does it mean to be Czech?* and, in the colourful phrase of long-ago gamblers playing for farthings and ha’pennies in the dark recesses of some Hogarthian tavern, *is the game worth the candle?*

To begin to answer that question we need step past the polished image prepared for tourists and visiting scholars and plunge into the intense and turbulent soul searching which normally remains well hidden yet is there none the less. Repeatedly, we have preserved our distinctive identity solely by the sheer intensity of our commitment. *Being Czech* has not been something we could be thoughtlessly, as Americans can be American without giving it a second thought or as the British could be British before they launched upon their transition from an imperial to an ethnic identity. At the core of our na-

¹² Schauer’s essay, whose title means “Naše dvě otázky” (Our Two Questions), appeared in the first issue of Masaryk’s new review, *Čas* (Čas I.1 (December 1886)). The exact phrasing of his questions which I have here paraphrased rather freely was “What is the task of our nation?” and “What is our national life like?” Cf. also comments of prof. Miloš Havelka, “Spor o smysl českých dějin” (The Debate about the Meaning of Czech History), in: Miloš Havelka (ed.), *Spor o smysl českých dějin 1895–1938* (*The Debate about the Meaning of Czech History 1895–1938*; Praha, Torst 1995), pp. 12–14.

tional identity there is an ill defined, ever changing and largely unacknowledged question, *what does it mean to be Czech?*

Our philosophers have spoken of it as the *idea of Czech nation* or *the meaning of Czech history*, though few others would phrase it that formally. It is less a result than a process of unending reflection, casting doubt ever anew on what we thought obvious and of reassuring ourselves on wholly new grounds. It is a process of answering ever anew the perennial question of what it was all about and where it is we want it to lead.

Jan Patočka, arguably our most remarkable philosopher in the twentieth century, spoke of it as our *national philosophy*. In two rather different attempts he offered two different readings of it while criticising our most remarkable philosopher of the nineteenth century, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, for his *Attempt at a National Philosophy and Its Failure*.¹³

To designate such ongoing striving for critical self-understanding as *philosophy* may be well and good among people familiar with the field but is hopelessly misleading for readers who, for forty two years, had been bombarded daily with propaganda both crude and subtle, presenting a dogmatic ideology as a *philosophy*. To them, the word *philosophy* tends to suggest a series of strident claims presented for fanatic assent, a doctrine rather than an enquiry, rather like the official “philosophy of Marxism-Leninism” of a generation ago or the present neoconservative “philosophy” of exporting *the American way* to uncooperative oil-rich countries with tanks and bombs.

Yet philosophy is not a doctrine, it is not an ideology. It is an attempt to raise human consciousness from mindless acceptance of the familiar to the level of critical reflection. Ever since the days of Socrates, philosophy has confronted blind belief with the three questions of critical reason – *what does it mean? whereon is it based? whereto does it lead?* When Patočka speaks of *national philosophy*, he is not speaking of a dogma but of the critical self-awareness in which a given national community articulates its self-understanding. He is most emphatically not speaking of an ideology or a programme.

Perhaps that is why the Czech “national philosophy” of which Patočka speaks has been largely a labour of love of poets, philosophers and historians rather than of social scientists or politicians. It is philosophy in the tradition of the Renaissance humanists, spirited *amat-eurs* in the most literal sense of *lovers* of understanding, much as their ancient predecessors thought them-

¹³ Jan Patočka, “Pokus o českou národní filosofii a jeho nezdar”, in: Jan Patočka, *Češi I (Czechs I)*, op. cit., pp. 341–366.

selves *lovers* of wisdom, (*philo*)*sophia*. That critical reflection upon the meaning of our being and doing was not the work of professionals devoted to the study of and commentary upon a time-honoured body of texts, as were the professional philosophers of the Middle Ages, scholastic philosophers and theologians, or as the *professional philosophers* who dominate academia today pride themselves on being. Philosophy, as Patočka uses the word in conjunction with the adjective *national*, is not an attempt to construct *cunningly devised fables*, theoretical constructs out of equally theoretically delimited “facts”, allegedly concrete and particular. It is an experiential endeavour, evoked by problems of meaning arising in the context of lived experience, seeking to make them intelligible – and so amenable to reasoned solutions while various *voices of the deep* know no resort but cudgels. Or, in more traditional terms, it is the attempt *to see clearly and articulate faithfully the meaning patterns of lived experience*,¹⁴ with the practical question of experiential demands ever in mind. It aspires to universality while seeking to address particular time and place. Or, eschewing obfuscation, we could say it is *an effort to see meaning in the stream of experience*.

Can we, though, legitimately speak of the self-reflection of the Czech cultural community as a *Czech philosophy* at all? Undoubtedly, there have been philosophical thinkers writing in Czech all along, from Tomáš of Štítné¹⁵ in the fourteenth century to the Czech Hegelian Augustin Smetana¹⁶ in the

¹⁴ I am consciously paraphrasing Edmund Husserl’s definition of phenomenology as *descriptive Wesenslehre der reinen Erlebnisse* to point out a parallel without committing myself to the full Husserlian project. Cf. Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie (Ideas Pertaining to Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy)*, Erstes Buch, *Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie* (Karl Schuhmann (ed.), Dordrecht, Kluwer Academic Publishers 1995), pp. 156–157.

¹⁵ Tomáš of Štítné (circa 1330–1401) was one of the numerous lay writers in the latter half of fourteenth century who earnestly reflected on religious and moral issues. They represent the democratization of the faith: plain believers, mostly from the lower strata, taking into their hands the matters of *faith and morals* which the Middle Ages regarded as exclusive preserve of the church hierarchy. Early reformers like Jan Hus articulated rather than launched the broad popular movement which was to become the Reformation.

¹⁶ Augustin Smetana (1814–1851), a romantic Young Hegelian, excommunicated by the Roman Catholic church for his reform views.

nineteenth. Similarly, there have been, in the Czech lands, philosophers dealing with technical philosophical questions in other languages, Latin in the Middle Ages or German in more recent times, as the logician and social thinker Bernard Bolzano,¹⁷ one of the key figures of the Austrian (and Czech) tradition of positive philosophy, sharply divergent from German speculative idealism. Can we, though, speak of a *Czech philosophy* in the sense of a critical reflection which uses the universal tools of philosophy to focus on the particularity of the Czech cultural community and asks about the meaning, if any, of its journey through history?

Though the misleading term, Czech *national philosophy*, may introduce most unfortunate undertones of ideology, I believe we need – and, indeed, must – speak of it, though we might do well to choose terms less heavily laden with assorted extraneous connotations. Once there emerges, among the ethnically Czech population of what used to be called *the lands of the Czech crown*,¹⁸ that distinctive type of cultural community Czechs call a *nation*, we cannot avoid the term. For, in our usage, a nation is a community constituted by an *idea*.

Here the opportunities for misunderstanding abound. In American and largely also in British usage, *nation* is a political term designating a government with its territory and its inhabitants so that the United States can be called a *nation* – and *national philosophy*, were we to speak of it at all, would tend to suggest a state ideology. In Czech, a *nation* means a cultural and historical reality, a community of humans drawn together by shared memories and hopes, shared home and language, in sum, by *an idea* of that community. It is something humans forge in the course of history, an *ongoing activity* constituted as a meaningful unity by a fond of ideas shared by its members. Here

¹⁷ Bernard Bolzano (1781–1848), pioneering thinker in logic and mathematics, is remarkable in our context for his Enlightenment Czech (Bohemian) patriotism. For him the Czech lands were the basic reality, German and Czech just the languages of two equal *stems* of the Czech/Bohemian nation, territorially and historically conceived. Jan Patočka uses him as a prototype of an Enlightenment *national philosopher* in contrast with romantic language-based philosophers like Josef Jungmann.

¹⁸ See note 10 above. The term was introduced by Emperor Charles IV (1316–1378) to designate the lands he ruled directly as Czech King, crowned with the Crown of St Wenceslas. In an age when rulers were expected to handle a sword, not a pen, Charles IV took pride in writing his autobiography himself, in Toušeň, where Jizera flows into the Elbe, and not in Latin, but in Czech.

the idea of *national philosophy*, if we were to use it at all, would indicate not an ideology or a programme but rather a common endowment entrusted to all and every one of us. Czech speakers would be likely to say that the United States is a country whose population is drawn from many nations but in which, in the course of history, a distinctive *nation* is being born. They would be likely to say, by contrast, that the Czechs are a nation which, at various times in their history, had constituted various states. Those states come and go, but the nation persists. There is no difference in fact here, but a basic difference in linguistic usage.

Our concern here is not with a state or a country. It is with a cultural-historical reality and with the idea which constitutes it as a distinctive cultural community or *a nation*. A simple ethnic kinship entails no idea. It can be and usually is just a fact of nature. Literally *as a matter of fact* there has been a Slav population inhabiting the Czech lands and Slovakia ever since the great migrations of the third, fourth and fifth centuries. *As a matter of fact*, in the course of the tenth and eleventh century a part of that population became sufficiently cohesive to be considered a distinct entity. Its language of common discourse, *lingua vulgaris*, became a liturgical language and came to resemble what today we call Slovak and Czech. What was more important at the time, it had a more or less recognised common chieftain with whom rulers of more advanced societies to the west could deal as well as a shifting but recognisable territory. That is the kind of community which writers of the time, writing in Latin, occasionally designated as *natio*, literally a community of common birth.

However, as we have just noted, the modern Czech word *národ*, rendered as *nation* in English, has come to mean something rather different. It evokes, first of all, a community of *individuals* – and, in an ill-defined yet persistent sense, a *community of equals* – bound to each other by a sense of belonging. The late mediaeval *natio* was nothing of the sort. It was a community of clans and families, bound together externally by a hierarchical network of obligations and expectations appropriate to a family's higher or lower social status. A person here was not an individual, much less equal with others. Rather, a person was *ab initio* an integral part of a community of kinship, integrated in a pyramidal structure of relations of higher or lower standing. Neither one individual subject nor any set of subjects, acting in accord but individually, could be said to have been the subject of history. Only the community in its intricate interrelations could be said to have been that.

A *nation* in our modern sense represents a rejection of such an organic or tribal community – or, more accurately, a *nation* in a modern sense can arise

only upon the collapse or loosening of such organic bonds. The time-honoured relations of loyalty and obligation, based on tradition, no longer appear as self-evident eternal verities. Individual humans now become aware of themselves as individuals, alone in their freedom and anxious for a new community. That, however, starts as a community of equals, not of subjects to a hierarchy of masters. The fervent slogans of *Liberté, égalité, fraternité!* did not so much bring down *l'ancien régime* as acknowledged its passing and so the need for a new common bond.

It is amid this breakdown of traditional structures that a new kind of a community emerges, one based no longer on family and clan, but on the decision of freed – or perhaps *orphaned* – individuals to recognise each other as kin, sharing memories, hopes and values. Ernest Renan,¹⁹ the perceptive nineteenth century commentator of such matters, described a (modern) nation as a daily plebiscite, a daily renewal of individual commitment to that community. That is clearly an overstatement, vastly underestimating the force of habit and the power of inertia. In principle, though, it is accurate. In central Europe, the word *nation* in its modern use designates *a community of individuals who share a sense of belonging with each other* – and choose so to belong. It is not a “fact” of nature. It is a product of artifice, a human *achievement* in history, albeit often unwitting and unintentional.

The process is straightforward enough. That recognition of mutual belonging necessarily finds embodiments in habits of thought and action, creating a distinctive reality. Though the nationalist rhetoric of *national character* was as unfortunate as it was misleading, it did seek to express, however unfortunately, the reality of kinship. Members of a community may not have a national identity encoded in their blood or their genes, as the romantics would have it, but over the years they do come to share common habits and attitudes which create that impression. After all, though a *nation* in the modern sense is not some higher order – or “*meta-physical*” – organism, it is a historical reality and as such something that hardens and persists in time. The integrity of its identity depends to a great extent on a common reading of its history or, more precisely, on a shared interpretation of its meaning. That history might in fact be as conflicted as the War of the Roses in English

¹⁹ Ernest Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* (*What is a Nation?*), a lecture at the Sorbonne on 11 March 1882, many times reprinted, incl. in: Henriette Psichari (ed.), *Oeuvres complètes de Ernest Renan*, Vol. I (Paris 1947). Renan, a rationalist in the tradition of the Enlightenment and a critic of all myth and superstition, was concerned to reject the romantic conception of nation as a metaphysical reality.

history or the Hundred Years' War in the French. Still, the community *shares* the memory and needs agree on the broad outlines of the story it tells about it. It needs, likewise, to share a common reading of its hopes and anticipations. A *nation* in the modern sense of the word can be as ethnically diverse as the Swiss or the American as long as *it shares a common story, celebrating shared memories of grand deeds past, sharing the present proximity of a shared homeland and shared language, and facing the future with a sense of a common obligation, a common need or task.*

It is such reflective self-awareness, articulated as the ever changing yet continuous meaning of its identity (or, in older usage, of its *history*) that constitutes a community as a *nation* as that word is used in central Europe where passports distinguish *citizenship* from *nationality*, the first referring to formal allegiance, the other to ethnic identity. So understood, *a nation* is born of legends, maturing as critical reason sees clearly and articulates critically a commonly acceptable version of the meaning of a community's shared hope and heritage. It is this shared self-understanding that constitutes what we call a *nation*. It is also the reason why a nation will always be a philosophical task, never simply a fact.

For reasons already mentioned, the term *national philosophy*, introduced by Jan Patočka in the late 1960's, may be rather unfortunate. It suggests a particularly destructive perversion of philosophy, an *ideology*, a body of doctrine which would dull the critical cutting edge of philosophical thought. The role which philosophy plays here is not one of ideology but one of critical self-reflexion which helps constitute what we have called a national identity. Once we recognise that such identity is not a fact of nature but an achievement of human freedom, that critical self-reflection becomes necessary. However, because it is not an abstract intellectual exercise but, metaphorically speaking, an incarnate one, embodied in a tangible coping with a particular historic flux, it can never be separated from the questions and possibilities that arise in it. Perhaps that is why in the nineteenth century an examination of our national identity presented itself as an enquiry into the *meaning of our history*.

At the same time, such ongoing critical reflection and ever revised understanding is what philosophy is all about. At least in the modern sense of the word, the very idea of a *nation* is inseparable from the idea of a collective self-reflection or, in the time-honoured though unfortunate terminology, from a *national philosophy*. It is this collective self-understanding we wish to examine, as it grew out of the life, labour and thought of the people of Czech culture. So, not unreasonably, as the first step we need to ask when and in

what sense we can begin to speak of the ethnically Czech population of the Czech lands as the kind of cultural and historical community we can identify as *a nation*. Philosophy is as closely linked with history as a person is with time. When we shall now plunge into history, we shall not be leaving philosophy.

CHAPTER ONE

The People of the Chalice

A hundred years ago, we might well have entitled this chapter with a flourish as “The Birth of Czech Nation out of the Spirit of the Hussite Chorale”. It would not have been altogether true or particularly original but it would have been dramatic, patriotic and suited to the mood of the time. The Czech cultural community, long dormant, badly needed memories of heroic deeds past to bond it into a coherent unity. The legend of the Hussite wars when the Czechs defended their faith literally *against all* played an important role in the rebirth of the nation, even though to speak of a nation in the early fifteenth century is somewhat anachronistic.

The question really is how did Europe, long a continent of empires and kingdoms, come to be a continent of nations? Traditional – or “natural” – social organization was rather different, based either on kinship or conquest, possibly some combination of the two. The distinctively European cultural and social groupings we call *nations*, whatever their origin, are neither. They are, as we have noted, social groupings based on an *idea*, on a shared fund of verities which seem too obvious to require argument, articulated more or less clearly as the *idea* of a nation. A nation in the modern sense is not a *natural* “fact”. It is a cultural achievement.

The putative “natural” communities of our tribal beginnings are usually said to have been qualitatively different. On such a reading, households, clans, tribes, even the great empires of the ancient world simply happened as accidents of nature and history, not as conscious achievements of human effort. In antiquity, only the Jews, many times scattered, driven from their land, yet clinging to the idea of kinship before God and his Law, approximated a nation in the modern sense. Jan Patočka dismisses even the great empires of antiquity as no more than *households writ large*.²⁰ Only in the Eu-

²⁰ Jan Patočka, *Kacířské eseje o filosofii dějin* (*Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*; Praha, Academia 1990), p. 34.

ropean cultural tradition, he assumes, do we find communities based on an idea, communities which are conscious achievements, not merely natural events.

Patočka, to be sure, liked to give Europe credit even where little credit was due. Critical historians like the late Dušan Třeštík²¹ would be more likely to consider precisely ancient empires as cultural achievements. In more familiar terminology, they would be *states*, communities of an idea rather than of kinship. So the Roman Empire could be said to have been the community of *ius imperiale*, the imperial law, considered by Emperor Justinian to be the product of pure reason, not of blind custom like the *ius gentium*, the legislation of a community of a common birth, a *natio*. The contrast between *nature* and *culture* is here, though applied rather differently. Such reflections may lead to no conclusion, but they do suggest that Europe needs be more circumspect in claiming primacy in practically everything.

Either way, though, the point is that the crumbling of traditional identities based on kinship creates a need for a new common bond. In the quest of such a bond ethnicity is an obvious recourse. Ethnic communities become aware of their tacit assumptions and so reconstitute themselves as communities of a shared self-understanding, or, in modern usage, as nations. Such was the sequence in the rise of nations in recent European history, whether in the initial rise of nationalism or, in a more recent instance, in the peoples of Yugoslavia turning to murderous nationalism upon the fading of the remaining tatters of Communist ideology. In each case, with the fading of traditional identities there arises a need for a critical articulation of that self-understanding and so for the *idea* of a nation – or, spoken with Jan Patočka, of a *national philosophy*.

For most of central Europe, this came about in the wake of the French revolution and of the Napoleonic wars, riding the tide of the newly emerging French nationalism. That great democratic revolution swept away both the shackles and the securities of late feudalism in one sweep. Unwittingly, it also created a lonely crowd of atomised individuals and so the need for a new communal bond.

The ideals of the Enlightenment, embracing all humankind, combined with a new ethnic self-awareness in a national fervour that provided such

²¹ Dušan Třeštík (1933–2007), brilliant *infant terrible* of recent Czech historiography, regrettably recently deceased, is author of numerous iconoclastic works, including *Češi a dějiny v postmoderním očistci* (*Czechs and History in Postmodern Purgatory*; Praha, Nakladatelství Lidové noviny 2005), pp. 19ff which I have in mind here.

a bond. The many and varied subjects of the King of France reconstituted themselves as *le peuple français*, the *French nation*, bonded by the memory of a great achievement – the Revolution – and by the great mission of carrying its ideals to all humankind, at bayonet point, if need be. French invasion of petty German principalities engendered a German nationalism in turn. Subsequently, in a classic example of the domino theory, that provoked a defensive nationalism of smaller ethnic groups, as of the Czechs against the Germans, and most recently of the Slovaks against the Czechs.

The story is as weary as it is familiar. But is it really so in a particular case? Is that the story, for instance, of the vaunted Czech *national rebirth* or *národní obrození*, one of those facts that have become legends? In the course of one generation at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the legend has it, a handful of patriotic *literati* awakened the long dormant ethnically Czech inhabitants of our lands to self-awareness. In the process, they either “awakened” or constituted *the Czech nation* and with it the need for a national philosophy. Or did a Czech people emerge first in the demographic change brought about by the abolition of serfdom? Though we all love the legend of a nation born of pure patriotic fervour, we might need return to it later.

In any case, contrary to the Romantic legend, it does appear that the Czech nation did not lie dormant inside a magic mountain, awaiting its chance. Nor does it seem to have sprung full grown out of patriotic fervour like a Barthian bolt out of the blue, as some historians of our national revival would have us believe. Whether or not it had a *history* in the later Hegelian sense, it definitely did have a past. The Slavic population in what we today call the Czech lands very early produced a number of capable chieftains who were able to form entities bearing the hallmarks of states. Some of them accepted baptism, probably as much for reasons of prudence as of piety. With their conversion to Christianity, the rulers of the Czech lands lost some of their anarchic independence, becoming in some vague sense subject to the Pope and the Emperor, but they gained both international respectability and a more stable ideology for their rule. Christianity, however then understood, was a major factor in the gradual self-definition of the people of the Czech lands.

With Christianity there also came the Church, gradually claiming autonomy from its secular patrons. The rise of the cities in the thirteenth century together with intensive colonization of arable land helped provide a demographic and an economic base for a state. A thirteenth century King from a

native dynasty, Přemysl Ottokar II,²² came within a hair's breadth of becoming the master of all of central Europe. A century later, King Charles IV did in fact become the Holy Roman Emperor,²³ the nominal head of all Christendom, by dint of kinship and diplomacy. Thanks largely to his efforts, by the waning of the late Middle Ages the *Crown of Bohemia* had acquired an impressive history and had won recognition as a major player in central European politics. We can legitimately speak of a Czech state at least from the high Middle Ages onward.

For all its achievements, though, a Czech state does not mean a Czech *nation*. As in all of mediaeval Europe, the potential nation, the *body politic* – active participants in the life of the community, people whose personal, dynastic, religious or ethnic preferences mattered – remained severely restricted. By far most men and women did not live even the *petty history* of local communal decisions. Their lives remained a mute cycle of survival – birth, some pleasure and much toil, death. Most of them still spoke a Slavic – and gradually specifically Czech – language, though in the course of the colonization of arable land a large number of German settlers did change the ethnic complexion of the Kingdom.

Not that it much mattered, at least then. Latin remained the language of learning and administration. While King Charles IV did pride himself on his knowledge of Czech, most rulers cared little what language their subjects spoke, as long as they satisfied the wants of their lords in cash, kind and labour. Nor does it seem to have mattered overly to the subjects. Their social identity, if any, was that of the subjects of a particular lord. So it would remain in most of Europe until the Enlightenment and the rise of that most uncommon of beings, the *common man of les philosophes*, in the late eighteenth century. That, though, was yet to come and long in coming. Till then

²² Přemysl Ottokar (Přemysl Otakar) II (1233–1278) managed by judicious marriages and purposeful conquest to extend his rule over most of present day Austria and Hungary. Ironically, he died in the Battle of Marchfeld because his vassals felt no national loyalty to him as a Czech King. One of them, Milota of Dědice, switched sides for personal advantage and turned the tide of the battle. It was a heinous betrayal of his feudal lord, but not until the nineteenth century did it occur to anyone to consider it a betrayal of his *nation*.

²³ Charles (Karel) IV (1316–1378) achieved by diplomacy what Přemysl Ottokar II failed to achieve by force, the title of the Holy Roman Emperor of the German Nation. His pride in writing his autobiography in Czech suggests an awareness of ethnic identity as significant in his claim to the Czech Crown or at least in his struggles with the rebellious Czech nobility. See also note 1 and note 9 above.

we can say, in a wild oversimplification, that Europe remained a culture of a privileged nobility and clergy, cushioned by a stratum of merchants and burghers, all sustained by a vast mass of mute drudges. Late Middle Ages just were like that.

In the Czech lands, though, there was a wrinkle in time, a late mediaeval preview of what was not to come until the onset of modernity, some four centuries later. That wrinkle in time, a twinge of modernity a hundred years before Luther, was the Hussite reformation.

That was an upheaval as major as it was transient. Though revived later as legend, it passed away as fact, together with the Middle Ages, scant two hundred years later. Most sociologists and many historians tend to agree that any effects of that long-ago episode were definitively erased from Czech memory by the long ideological normalization²⁴ that followed the Habsburg conquest of Bohemia at the start of the Thirty Years' War in 1620. For the most part, they claim that if the roots of present day Czech identity do reach deeper than national revival in the nineteenth century, it is no farther than the time of the Baroque Counter-Reformation. The conventional wisdom of our time has it that the Hussite era – which we have not celebrated even as a legend since the break-up of Czechoslovakia in 1992 – has left no marks on modern Czech consciousness.

Hasn't it, though? Perhaps not altogether. Certainly, our young no longer thrill to the tales of Žižka and know very little of the Reformation. Post-Communist historiography no longer extols the achievements of Jan Hus²⁵ and

²⁴ The term *normalization*, interweaving the ideas of a *norm* and of *normality*, was introduced into the language by the Communist regime after the Soviet occupation to designate the restoration of an ideological monopoly in place of the plurality of thought during the Czechoslovak Spring of 1968. The Communists considered such sole permissible ideology both the norm and normality. Here we are using the term in a generic sense to describe the forcible restoration of a single orthodoxy after 1620.

²⁵ Jan Hus, burned at stake in Constance in 1415, a Master of theology, once the rector of Charles University and popular preacher at the Bethlehem Chapel in Prague, triggered the first round of religious reformation by articulating the unrest long building up among the faithful. His followers, who came to be known as the Hussites, represented the majority of the Czech speaking population who were to continue receiving communion in the Hussite manner (in both kinds, hence *the utraquists*) until the Habsburg conquest in 1620. In the religious normalization that followed, the utraquists were absorbed by the only church permitted by the

his contemporaries. Jan Žižka²⁶ no longer decorates Czech banknotes. Yet the modern resurgence of our language could succeed in great part thanks to reformation-era translation of the Kralice Bible.²⁷ It was that codification of literary Czech that made possible the linguistic revival in the early nineteenth century, a time when people no longer cared much for the Bible but were beginning to care a great deal about their language. The Czech we speak – and shamelessly abuse – today is grounded in the Kralice Bible. That is a very tangible and lasting impact.

Then, too, while revived as legend the Hussite reformation may have been rather less tangible than it had been as history, that legend had a major impact on the Czech national revival. Historically and theologically the Romantic glorification of our Hussite past was rather less than accurate. Still, it provided the arising Czech nation with the most stirring images of a common past.

Nor that only. The reformation legend also provided the Czech nation-builders with a socially progressive symbolism for the nation they sought

victorious Emperor, the Roman Catholic. Only some remnants of the Union of Brethren, translators of the Kralice Bible, survived the hundred and sixty years of repression. Today, the Czech Brethren Protestant Church considers itself heir of the Hussite reformation and the Union of Brethren. – The contemporary *Czechoslovak Hussite Church* invokes Hus' memory, but actually originated as a patriotic protest movement within the Roman Catholic church in 1918.

²⁶ Jan Žižka (cca 1370–1424), a small free landholder who acquired military experience in the service of King Wenceslas IV, proved a brilliant strategist in command of the armed peasants resisting crusades called by Rome to suppress heresy in the Czech lands. Reviled as a brigand by the imperial regime, he was treated as a national hero by the nineteenth century nation builders. Since the “Velvet Revolution” of 1989 he is more likely to be condemned as a brigand since his peasant warriors used the same tactic as did their opponents serving the Catholic nobility, supporting themselves by plundering private property of their lords religious and secular. Anyway, since history is said to be written by the winners, the dramatic transvaluation of our Hussite past throws an interesting light on the Velvet Revolution.

²⁷ Kralice Bible is the Czech counterpart of the English King James Version. It was prepared only a generation earlier by a pietist offshoot of the utraquist – originally Hussite – church and printed in a semi-secret printshop in Kralice. A literary gem, it spread rapidly, helping make Bohemia the most biblically literate country in Europe. Banned and burned by the authorities after 1620, it was treasured by secret Protestants and continued in use until mid-twentieth century when it was supplemented, though not wholly displaced, by an ecumenical translation.

to create. Romantic traditionalism, the other source of our national revival, was inherently conservative, bringing to the fore national antiquities, complete with traditional superstitions and privileges. The reformation stressed universally human ideals. In shaping the new nation, the memory of the Reformation provided even secularised and Roman Catholic Czechs with a conceptual bridge to modernity, represented by the progressive optimism of American democracy which European liberals made their own. That may well be why modern Czech patriotism, alone among its central European counterparts, had not only a traditionalist and conservative strand, but also and even more prominently, a democratic and a social one. Masaryk expressed it in his conviction that the democratic and social orientation of Czech patriotism was a heritage of the Hussite reformation.²⁸

Perhaps that is history as interpreted by poets, or perhaps it is simply legend. Yet in either case it is a good and sufficient reason to start our reflections about Czech national philosophy, not with the national revival in the nineteenth century, but four hundred years earlier with what we have called its mediaeval prelude, the fifteenth century Hussite reformation.

That reformation erupted at a time of discontent in the age of faith, at the turn of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. A great many political and economic changes were then taking place, enough to gratify future materialist historians, including Karl Kautsky,²⁹ assuring them that the true causes of the Reformation were social and economic. That, after all, is always true

²⁸ This may be the key to one of those *bon mots* with which Masaryk liked to sum up his lengthy analyses, *The Czech question is a question of religion. Prima facie*, that is inherently problematic. Most Czechs then, and even more today, were religiously indifferent. The claim makes sense when we remember that, while ordinary Catholics tended to be as patriotic as anyone, the Church was closely linked with the Habsburg monarchy as one of the pillars of the state (along with the Army and the bureaucracy). On the other hand, Masaryk was convinced that Czech striving for self-determination was based on ideals derived from the Reformation. The conclusion seemed to follow. Still, it seems not one of Masaryk's more fortunate slogans.

²⁹ Karl Kautsky (1854–1938), a prominent social democratic theoretician known for his statement that *When socialism is not possible democratically, it is not possible* (Karl Kautsky, *Proč nejsme komunisty a proč musíme být sociálními demokraty* (*Why We Are not Communists and Why We Need Be Social Democrats*; translated by Míla Gramichová, Praha, VV ČSSD 1932) and was castigated for it by V. I. Lenin as *Renegade Kautsky*. Earlier, he had written an extensive historical study, *Vorläufer des neueren*

in a trivial sense. Cultural events inevitably have their material counterparts. That humans eat as well as think is hardly an earth-shaking discovery.

However, humans also think before they act and their thought affects their actions. Finding retrospective causal explanations of historical events is always easier than trying to understand the perceptions and motivations of long-ago agents. It can also be misleading, since it blinds us to the profoundly religious metaphor through which our mediaeval predecessors lived and reflected their lives. An antecedent causal condition does not exhaust the meaning of an event. It may well be a cultural event's material counterpart rather than its cause. Thus whatever appears to us as the "real cause" of the events of the Reformation, we need to recognise that, in the eyes of its contemporaries the fundamental issue was religious. Their choices and acts need be understood in religious terms.

Nor was religious faith in the late Middle Ages simply a matter of assenting to some theoretical claims about the existence of certain extra-natural beings as nineteenth century scientific perspective would have it. Sources literary as well as historical attest that for Bohemian peasants in the 1390's life still had a firm religious framework. It extended horizontally from the Creation to the Last Judgement and vertically from Heaven to Hell, with the two lines intersecting in the Cross of the Christ. Church paintings, sermons and customs all confirmed it. The story of human dwelling on Earth – what the existentialists would much, much later call somewhat dramatically *the meaning of human existence* – was readily enough told by every country preacher. God created the world and humans in perfect harmony with god-self. Human disobedience cleft that harmony in twain. Separated from God, humans dragged all creation with them into a life of toil and trouble. If proof be needed, look about: such indeed is the world after the Fall in which we live and there is nothing humans can do about it.

In the late mediaeval perspective, God alone can save the world. The sole task of humans in this life is to pray, do works of charity and prepare themselves for salvation, understood increasingly not as a personal transformation but as a transition into a better world after death. The alternative

Sozialismus (Precursors of Modern Day Socialism), whose first volume, *Kommunistische Bewegungen im Mittelalter (Communist Movements in the Middle Ages)*; Stuttgart, JHW Dietz 1920) included a study of Hussite communism. Kautsky himself was of Czech origin but wholly free of any trace of national feeling.

is damnation, consignment to a hell which the mediaevals pictured in most lurid terms and rather expected for themselves. Nothing in this transient world really matters except as it directs humans after death to an eternity of bliss in Heaven or of agony in Hell.

That framework remained unchallenged for centuries. So did the one central concern – assuring that after this brief and not very important earthly interlude we should be judged fit for Heaven, not doomed to eternal damnation. That is what really matters. When the Hussite warriors exhorted each other not to fear those who would kill the flesh, within this frame of reference they were offering realistic prudential advice. Given this conception of reality – and it did seem a simple given – nothing much matters other than the eternal destiny of a person's soul.

The problem of the late Middle Ages was that while most Europeans still firmly and vividly believed in the Last Judgement, in Heaven and in Hell, they were rapidly losing faith in the ability of the Church to assure them of the former and protect them from the latter. Over the centuries, the Church convinced them that the conditions of salvation were diligent partaking of the means of grace – the sacraments, the Word of God – and a chaste and sober life. However, itinerant preachers, including revered members of mendicant religious orders, notably the Franciscan minor brethren, increasingly pointed out that Church practice belied its preaching. The Church with its three Popes and all too worldly clergy withheld half the Sacrament – the chalice, *the cup of salvation* – from the laity. Worse still, it locked the saving Word of God in an incomprehensible language. Worst of all, it led a life of decadent luxury, in some cases of mortal sin, casting doubt on the efficacy of the means of grace it claimed to provide. The complaint of the peasants was not just that the Church exploited them mercilessly – actually, that the age tended to take for granted – but that by its corruption it was endangering their eternal salvation. The faithful might well have seen themselves condemned to poverty and oppression in this world and to hellfire in the next by the ostentatious luxury of a corrupt clergy.

Not surprisingly, those believers identified with the message of mendicant preachers who shared their poverty while calling for Church reform. They were a familiar enough sight throughout Europe. Their call for justice in place of rites, for poverty and purity of life for the clergy, had a solid basis in the Scriptures, ever more frequently translated into popular languages. The Church was overripe for one of its periodic reforms. This time, though, the concerns involved not only clerics, but laity, the common people hitherto confined to praying and labouring.

In the Czech lands, the pressure for reform enjoyed in addition tacit support of the King and Emperor,³⁰ who, not without reason, resented the ever expanding demands of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. It was he who, in 1391, endowed a chapel in a poorer district of Prague, on the fringe between a generally well to do, predominantly German neighbourhood and a predominantly poor Czech one. The King charged it with the task of preaching the Word of God to the poor in the language of the poor, which at the time was Czech. In 1402, Jan Hus, the popular rector of King Charles' University and a fearless preacher, was appointed to its pulpit. Under the King's benign eye, Jan Hus attacked the morals and manners of the rich but did not hesitate to criticise the vice and corruption of the Church as well, very much in the manner of the pre-exilic Old Testament prophets. To the common people, his voice sounded as the voice of one proclaiming salvation, finally speaking out the truth they long had known.

When, however, Jan Hus attacked the sale of indulgences, from which the King drew significant income, the King withdrew his protective hand. Hus was bade to the Church council then sitting in Constance where, in spite of the Emperor's safe conduct, he was arrested, tried on a charge of heresy – which he stoutly denied, had anyone bothered to listen – and was burned at the stake on July 6th, 1415. Ironically, his most serious offence may well have been being an anachronism. Nearly six centuries later the Second Vatican Council reached for the most part the same conclusions as he had. To the conservative mind, being an anachronism seems to be a crime more heinous than even a sin against the Holy Spirit.

The news of Hus' martyrdom, spread swiftly throughout the Czech lands by his friends, shook Hus's followers to the core. They, having venerated him almost as a holy man, were certain that now the end of the world must be at hand. Throughout the land, they gathered in silent protest, hearing the Word, praying – and being slaughtered in their hundreds by armed retainers

³⁰ Wenceslas (Václav) IV (1361–1419), the unfortunate son of Charles IV, inherited an explosive situation. His father won a reputation as a great ruler in part by resisting change rigidly. Wenceslas became Czech King (and for a time Roman Emperor) at a time seething with accumulated unrest. Hopelessly unprepared for rule (and a heavy drinker even by royal standards), he struggled strenuously with an arrogant Church and a restive nobility – and sought support among what then passed for *the people*, for the most part yeoman farmers and minor nobility. Unwittingly, he may have thereby helped make the Hussite reformation possible. Therein he may have served his people well.

in the service of higher nobility and wealthy burghers (both, incidentally, largely German speaking).

After four years of hopes betrayed and slaughter silently borne, Hus' faithful, hitherto for the most part pacifist by persuasion, revolted at the news of an insolent pretender, Sigismund of Luxemburg,³¹ invading the Kingdom to claim the throne vacated by the death of Wenceslas IV and to eradicate what Rome saw as the Hussite heresy. Led by a veteran of marked ability, Jan Žižka, and armed with home-made weapons, they fought off four crusades called against them by the Pope. Finally, after the fourth military fiasco, Rome chose to negotiate. In 1436, the Council at Basel agreed to grant them what they had fought for – the chalice for the laity, scripture preached in the language of the people and church reform, with clergy subject to secular jurisdiction in criminal cases.³² The point had been made: Rome does not have a monopoly on the interpretation of the faith. More than one reading can be legitimate. The seamless robe of Christ, long used as a straightjacket, was rent at last and, in the eyes of Hus' followers, the Grace of God set free of institutional constraints.

To many Czechs then and now, this was their finest hour. The people of the soil, represented by the seals of virtually the entire yeoman class attached to their protest letter to the King, all rising in the name of God's truth, defending their faith and their land against the whole world – and all that spontaneously, not at the behest of their lords. It was another Czech anachronism – the people, for centuries mute serfs, had spoken and made

³¹ Sigismund (Zikmund) of Luxemburg (1368–1437), younger brother of Wenceslas IV, inter al. also King of Hungary, had himself crowned Czech King upon his brother's death, though the Czechs would not recognise him as such until the defeat of the Hussite radicals in 1436. Today many historians consider him less a fanatic Catholic than a moderniser, trying to reshape Charles IV's rambling feudal domain as a (then) modern centralised state. Either way, he trod upon the cherished Hussite religious faith of his potential subjects, who would not recognise his sovereignty until he recognised the legitimacy of their religious reforms. The Czechs remember him mostly for his flaming red hair as the *red fox*, not a term of endearment.

³² Basel Compacts were an agreement hammered out by representatives of Hussite moderates and the Basel Council of the Roman church in 1436. In the Compacts the Council agreed to the Czech practice of communion in both kinds and accepted the Czech (Hussite) church as a legitimate part of the Church universal, removing the odium of heresy from it. Though the Pope never confirmed the Compacts, in the Czech lands they were accepted in 1485 as one of the basic laws of the land and honoured even by the Catholics – or at least the Czechs among them.

their lords secular and religious listen. The people took into their hands what hitherto had been the exclusive possession of the Church, the means of salvation. Share that faith or not, that, surely, is such stuff as legends are made on.³³

A legend, though, it was not. It was a continuation of a civil war that plagued the land for ten years of Wenceslas IV's reign, cruel as all such wars are, marred by fanaticism and petty vendettas. Amateurs, including amateur social and religious reformers, may abound in enthusiasm but seldom abound in skill or sophistication. In their indignation at the ostentatious luxury of the church, the aroused poor destroyed untold cultural treasures, much like the Communists vandalising castles five centuries later, and inflicted vast damage on the economy and the privileged higher nobility. First, though, the revolt disrupted trade and husbandry. The Hussite field armies, though innovative in strategy and armament, only too readily adopted tactics of their former masters' feudal armies, plundering and killing like they. Perhaps the only difference was that the Hussites plundered monasteries and castles, not the hovels of the poor, as was then common. High nobility and high clergy together with most of the German-speaking cities had much justification for regarding the Hussites as rebels against divinely ordained order, Žižka as a brigand and the Hussite standing armies as a marauding band. Whatever its justification, war, as gen. Sherman once put it, is hell.

Yet it is also true that this was a war of the sorely oppressed against their oppressors, in defence of a new found human dignity against an arrogant luxury. The fruit it bore enriched the Czech lands and Europe. It gave the Czech lands something unheard of at the time, two hundred years of religious toleration. Those two hundred years provided room for the Union of Brethren³⁴ to grow and flourish. Its schools would provide the fertile ground

³³ There is a Museum of the Reformation in Tábor, an easy hour by train from Prague. Though sadly neglected since the Velvet Revolution, it is well worth the trip.

³⁴ Czech Brethren or *Unitas fratrum* originated as a protest against what it perceived as laxness of the official ultraquist church tolerated by Rome. Strongly influenced by the moral and pacifist ideas of a self-taught folk thinker Petr Chelčický (cca 1390–cca 1460), the Brethren built up a network of communities, a school system, a social welfare system and impressive scholarship, producing inter al. the Kralice translation of the Bible. They became known for their religious earnestness and strong sense of community. In the sixteenth century they tended to lean to the Calvinist side of the Reformation. Jan Amos Komenský, better known in English by the Latin form of his name Comenius, served as their last bishop. Remnants of the

for a literary flourishing that lasted until the expulsion of Protestants after the Battle of White Mountain. As with the equally ambivalent French revolution, we can condemn its excesses, yet regard the Reformation as a noble moment of civic courage. The figurative jury of Czech historians is still out and likely long so to remain.

Whatever the flaws of the revolution, the intermediate result was remarkable. In taking up arms, the peasants, hitherto simply subjects and little better than cattle, asserted their humanity. They claimed their faith, defended it against four crusades, acted as subjects of history. The radical Hussite wing, to be sure, was soon defeated by an alliance of the Catholic nobility and of the more affluent, largely urban and moderate wing of reformers. Still, the reformers proved too strong to suppress, though not strong enough to suppress their opponents. As a result, the Czech lands became an anomaly in a Europe marked by ideological monopolies: a land of a pluralistic culture. The plurality may have had its limits. Both Protestants and Catholics periodically joined hands in persecuting the Union of Brethren, fearful lest its clearly biblical emphasis provoke Rome and endanger Rome's fragile toleration of two faiths in one land. With the introduction of serfdom, the peasants, once the mainstay of the radical wing of the reformation, became a mute mass once more. All that is also true.

Yet, though limited, the plurality of the two hundred reformation years was real. It attracted immigrants in quest of freedom of worship who contributed not only economically but significantly also to the flowering of arts and letters in Renaissance Prague. At one point, both Tycho de Brahe and Johannes Kepler worked at the court of Rudolf II in Prague. For all its ambiguity, it would be difficult to condemn the reformation era as nothing but an outbreak of heresy. Masaryk may be overstating the case when he sees the Czech reformation as a precursor of nineteenth century humanism. Still, it was a period which, in retrospect, invites overstatement. It was remarkable two hundred years.

Those remarkable two centuries came to an abrupt end at the start of the Thirty Years' War. After the forcible restoration of Habsburg rule and of the ideological monopoly of Roman Catholicism in the seventeenth century, official Habsburg historiography offered an unambiguously negative read-

Brethren survived the normalization after the Catholic conquest and reemerged as present day Czech Brethren Protestant Church, our largest Protestant denomination. America's Moravian Brethren are one of the off-shoots of Czech Brethren during their seventeenth century exile.

ing of the Hussite reformation. Compared with the devastation wrought by the fifteen years of Hussite wars, the flaws of the Church paled, especially for those who had not borne their brunt. The rising Counter-Reformation denied the Reformation any redeeming virtues – and many Czech conservatives still tend to treat the Counter-Reformation perspective on the Hussite wars as The Truth. After the fall of the Communist regime, treating Žižka and his Hussites as brigands became a badge of anti-Communist legitimacy. The Czech pendulum swings wide.

During the national revival in the nineteenth century and the first republic, the pendulum had swung in the opposite direction. Subsequently, the Communists officially interpreted the Hussite wars as an early version of the proletarian revolution with a nationalist undertone and gave its heroes a place of honour. When the Communist regime collapsed in 1989, the images of Hus and Žižka were largely displaced by representations of saints like Agnes of Bohemia much as St Wenceslas Day supplemented the birth of the republic as the national holiday. History was being rewritten once more, as after the Communist coup, only this time with opposite marks. For all the years that passed, *sub limine* the division of progressive and conservative in Czech politics is never quite free of tangled roots reaching far deeper than the French revolution.

To be sure, already in the fifteenth century passion cooled in time, as passions will. In 1458, the Czech Estates elected as their king one of their midst, Lord George of Poděbrady,³⁵ who had been administering the land as regent. To qualify for the office, Lord George had to swear to Pope's representatives, that he would turn his people away from beliefs incompatible with the Ro-

³⁵ George (in Czech Jiří) of Poděbrady (1420–1471) was our one king selected on the basis of ability rather than of *blood royal* – and amply justified the choice. Under incredibly averse conditions he managed to pacify the country, long torn by religious and civil wars, stabilised the currency and the economy and with his scrupulous impartiality between Catholic and protestant became a founding father of our pluralistic modern state. He also made history by proposing an early version of the European Union. The EU in fact honours him as one of its founding fathers. It took over five hundred years for his vision to come to fruition. In Prague, few reminders of his reign remain. The Royal Court, where he took his oath to the Pope and where he resided, an urban palace near the Powder Tower, rich in memories, was torn down in a shocking act of historic vandalism at the beginning of the twentieth century to make room for the *art-nouveau* Municipal House much admired by tourists. The Royal Court, its glory miniaturised, can be seen in the Langweil model of Prague at the Municipal Museum.

man faith. However, since in the Basel Compacts of 1436 Rome had accepted the Utraquist confession as (also) orthodox, the new king could in good faith swear to the estates that he would protect the freedom of the Chalice and the Word in worship. In truth, he treated the two parties, the Roman Catholic and the reforming Utraquist, with most scrupulous impartiality. He also moved, albeit none too vigorously, to suppress the Union of Brethern as sectarian. Thus he kept the oath he had given to the Pope's representatives and yet became the *king of two peoples*, one Catholic, other protestant.

However, the Popes had serious misgiving about the Basel Compacts and about the religious plurality they sanctioned in the Czech lands. When in 1464 Pope Paul II condemned King George and called for yet another crusade against Bohemia, a group of Catholic lords swore to depose him. The conspirators found ready support in the largely German Silesia and Lausitia as well as among some largely German cities in Moravia. However, among the Czech cities and nobility many Catholics remained loyal to the *King of two peoples*. Thus the effect of the abortive revolt was to give the division between the King's *two peoples* a distinctively ethnic undertone.³⁶

There was the one *people* who took communion in the Hussite manner, in both kinds, earning the designation Utraquists, or simply *Kališníci*, *calixenes* or literally the People of the Chalice. Many of them were veterans of Hussite wars, all of them supporters of the Hussite reformation. For the most part, they were squires or yeoman freeholders, petty nobility and lower clergy, possibly tradesmen and small merchants in cities like Písek, Prague New Town or Tábor, which had become both ethnically Czech and Protestant. These were people first individualised and then fused by the Hussite revolt. Though they never challenged the feudal *doctrine of triple people*, nobility, clergy and peasantry, they thought and experienced themselves as brethren and equals before God. They were bound by the glorified memory of having defended their faith against the whole world as well as by a sense of a calling to bring that faith to all Christendom. Though for instance in Žatec, strongly Hussite and heavily Germanised, there may have been German speaking Hussites, for the most part their Czech language set them apart from central

³⁶ English language historians have not, for the most part, paid much attention to the maverick King. The best reference in that language is a monograph by a foremost Czech Protestant historian, exiled by the Communists, Otakar Odložilík, *The Hussite King: Bohemia in European Affairs 1440–1471* (Rutgers, State University Press 1965).

Europe's contiguous German population. Though living within the mediaeval framework of life as a quest for salvation in a world bounded by heaven and hell, they bore the marks of a *nation* in the modern sense of the word, at least in promise and in power.³⁷

All that would suggest that in early fifteenth century there emerged a community bound by ethnic and religious ties which acquired many of the characteristic of a *nation* in a modern sense. Two hundred years later, as the land was reconverted to Catholicism, albeit forcibly, this Protestant proto-nation dropped through the trap door of history and disappeared from its stage. That, as we shall see, was indeed the accepted reading after the Battle of White Mountain. The trouble is that already in the days of King George there was *the King's other people*. These were Catholic, taking communion in the traditional manner in one kind, trusting their salvation to the faith and rites of the Church of Rome. For the most part, they belonged to higher strata of the nobility or among the wealthier burgers, often were skilled master craftsmen or more prosperous landowners or higher clergy. They had much in common with the largely German supporters of the pretender, Mathias Corvinus. Yet in spite of difference of class and faith, they remained largely loyal to King George and to his other *people* with whom they seemed to share only a common language.

Though in an age of ideological monopolies it was a total anachronism, it does rather seem that this was King George's twin people. It was largely protestant, but in part also Catholic. It was largely Czech speaking, but in part also German. It was a community bound by an idea – that of religious plurality as a fact of life – and as such in token and in promise a nation in a modern sense. Formally, it was a convention of the Estates of Bohemia and Moravia, meeting in Jihlava in 1436, who declared the principles of the Basel Compacts the law of the land. Informally, it was the determination of large part of the population, German and Czech, Catholic and Protestant, to accept plurality as a basis of a shared community. No one then living would

³⁷ František Šmahel, the outstanding historian of the Hussite era, makes this point with care and learning in *Idea národa v husitských Čechách* (*The Idea of a Nation in Hussite Bohemia*; Praha, Argo 2000), pp. 223–229 and 250–259, unfortunately though understandably never translated. See also his comprehensive five volume study, *Husitská revoluce* (*The Hussite Revolution*; Praha, Karolinum 1996), especially his treatment of the Tábórite social teachings, “Tábórská vize společnosti bez pánů a poddaných” (Tábórite vision of a society without masters and subjects; vol. II, pp. 114–134).

have described it in these very modern terms. Yet the reality is that, in token and in promise at least, the Czech lands had become a *kingdom of two peoples*, a community constituted by the will of its members as a pluralistic society in which two confessions lived in mutual tolerance.³⁸ The heritage which the Czechs can claim from the Reformation period is thus not that of a Protestant national ideal, dead these four hundred years. Nor is it that of a Catholic nation, for all the efforts of the Church to make it so. Rather, it is the heritage of a pluralistic nation, committed to mutual respect and good will in difference. Its future struggles, down to our time, were not to be between Catholic and Protestant – or, for that matter, between Communist or Fascists or between Communist and (anti)Communist – but between an authoritarian and pluralistic conception of our national community. The ideal of toleration – and the ideal of Europe-wide cooperation – are the bequests of our one King George of Poděbrady.

The Czech lands remained the *Kingdom of Two Peoples* for two hundred years. However, though a great majority of the population took communion in the *utraquist* manner in both kinds, they were not a *Protestant* land. It was another Czech anachronism: a pluralistic society in a Europe where ideological monopolies were the rule. In the Czech lands, the dominant Catholics and the majority *utraquists* lived side by side, *de facto* and *de iure* – and *de facto* even the *Unitas Fratrum* was able to function and develop.

However, the Church was changing as well. For centuries it had been literally catholic, universal, with room for a wide range of opinion, including the Hussite. In the years 1545–1563 the Council of Trent tackled the task of church reform in earnest. In a series of dramatic moves, it eliminated much of the gross immorality against which the reformers protested. At the same time, however, it defined church doctrine rigidly to exclude and preclude any protestant views, Hussite, Lutheran or Calvinist. Henceforth, dissent within the Church became treason – while the Church ceased being universal, catholic in the original sense, and, in protestant eyes at least, became a particular, Roman Catholic Church.

³⁸ The toleration was limited by King's oath not to tolerate heresy, understood as sects other than the two confessions, Catholic and *utraquist*, recognised in the Basel Compacts, but the principle of plurality created a far more tolerant atmosphere than was common. The Union of Brethren was sporadically persecuted: its bishop in Bohemia, Jan Augusta, spent many years in prison, but his Moravian counterpart, Jan Blahoslav, was able to function, the Brethren were able to establish a school system, translate and publish the Bible.

In addition, in the Czech lands 1526, for a tangle of reasons as petty as tragic, the estates elected a Habsburg to the throne. The Habsburgs were traditionally militantly Catholic and committed to building a modern centralised state, bonded by no less militant state church in whose perspective error had no rights – and heresy was grievous error indeed. The first Habsburgs, as Ferdinand I, Maximilian II, the art loving Rudolf II and his sickly successor Mathias, made Prague their residence and generally recognised that in Bohemia religious tolerance was the price of civil peace. However, their successor, Ferdinand II, was made of sterner stuff. As something of a religious bigot, committed to absolutism and centralization, he had no intention of tolerating what he regarded as heresy and what, in any case, eluded modern centralised rule. Under his rule, the breathing space for the non-Catholic majority shrank rapidly.

The Czech cities had tried to revoke their unfortunate choice of King already in 1547 – and lost most of their privileges for their pains. Then in 1618, the Estates, the high nobility, constituting the ruling body of the Kingdom, including a number of Catholics, revolted in earnest. They exercised their time-honoured right of electing the King which long had been but a formality. They refused to elect Mathias' heir, Ferdinand II, electing instead a candidate of their own, a German Protestant, Friedrich V, to the throne, convinced, not unreasonably, that they were acting within their traditional rights. In Habsburg eyes, that was a travesty. The Habsburgs were committed to hereditary primogeniture, at the most rubber-stamped by the Estates. To choose their own King, as the Czech Estates had done, appeared to the Habsburgs as rebellion pure and simple – and a welcome excuse for stamping out at last the hated heresy in what they regarded as their hereditary lands.

The Czech estates had the same handicap as the Huguenots in France, as later the nobility in Poland or later still the southern Confederacy in America. They were defending a decentralised, looser government in a conflict which demanded resolute, centrally directed action. In 1620, after two years of shifting fortunes of war, the Emperor's Imperial army decisively defeated the royal army of the Czech estates in the Battle of White Mountain. The fighting triggered by the conflict – the Thirty Years' War – would continue for another twenty eight years, but for the Czechs it was over. The (hereditary) Holy Roman Emperor prevailed over the (elected) King of the Czech lands, efficient centralism over the ineffectual loose rule of the aristocracy. In the Czech lands, absolutism prevailed over feudalism, Roman Catholicism over Czech Protestantism but, most of all, a monolithic society enforcing a monopoly of faith and worship prevailed over the pluralistic society

that had been the one lasting achievement of the Hussite reformation and of Jiří of Poděbrady, the *King of Two Peoples*.

Seen through Protestant eyes, what happened after the Battle of White Mountain was nothing short of cultural genocide. Rural population dropped by a third, if not more. The land, devastated by thirty years of warfare, lay fallow, with none to till it. Several hundred villages just vanished, plundered, burned, their people killed or scattered. Given the desperate shortage of agricultural labour, country people had no hope of being released by their lords to go off in search of freedom of worship. The cultured stratum – small freeholders, lower nobility and lower clergy – had in turn no hope of staying, yet keeping their faith. They had to convert or flee for their lives. Most chose the latter. Nor would another cultured generation arise. The triumphant Counter-Reformation banned the Kralice Bible and wiped out the Union of Brethern's school system, providing no substitute. The Emperor was taking revenge – and taking no chances. He awarded the confiscated estates to his faithful, for the most part Italian and Spanish noblemen and adventurers. He was making sure that the land would never again have the leadership or the means to challenge the monopoly of his power and his faith.

For some three generations, Bohemia remained a sullen conquered land, ruled by an alien nobility and peopled by a desperately impoverished and largely illiterate peasantry. The Czech proto-nation of the time of the *two peoples*, an approximation of what today we would call a *civic society*, bonded by shared memories and hopes, effectively vanished. What remained was a rural population, in part still Czech speaking but wholly devoid of any remnant of national consciousness. The active segment of the population, its *polis*, representing at the very most one fifth of the population, was entirely German speaking.

One of the earliest representatives of the linguistic revival, František Jan Vavák³⁹ in the late eighteenth century, provides a clear example. He was a prosperous farmer, a petty official in the service of his lord and a self-taught commentator of his life and times. Though he clearly loved his Czech lan-

³⁹ František Jan Vavák (1741–1816), a prosperous farmer and a prolific self-taught writer, was a man of his time, almost a caricature of what in American usage came to be designated as an *Uncle Tom*, obsequiously subordinate and eagerly imitating the prejudices of his masters. However, his genuine devotion to Czech at a time when it had largely fallen out of use as a language of culture, learning or policy earned him a place of honour as one of the early contributors to the Czech linguistic revival.

guage and took pride in it, he never questioned the supremacy of German or the legitimacy of the German-speaking nobility. The only patriotic sentiment to be found in his diary is rather obsequious loyalty to the Emperor and love for his homeland, understood as all the Emperor's domains. Truth for him meant tradition, combined with fear and loathing of reformers and "Lutherans" as enemies of his Emperor.

The glory days of Žižka's Hussites and the civic virtues of the Czech Brethren had not just been forgotten. They had been repressed, utterly expunged from memory, as if they had never been. To the exiled Protestants, for whom Bohemia stood for that European anomaly, a pluralistic society with relative freedom of conscience even for peasants,⁴⁰ it could not appear other than as *Finis Bohemiae*.

And yet, though the anachronistic Czech proto-nation of King George's time had vanished, there remained the Kingdom of Bohemia. To be sure, its new rulers saw a different history and a different reality. They told a different story about their coming, not one of conquest but of salvation. For them, the Reformation had from the beginning been a heretical outbreak led by marauding brigands – and a rebellion against social and moral order that needed to be suppressed for the good of the land and the souls of its people. Though the Roman church played a crucial role even during the two hundred pluralistic years, in Catholic eyes the very presence of heresy endangered Czech souls and isolated Bohemia from the entire (Roman Catholic) Christendom. Sooner or later, that damage had to be undone. Seen from this perspective, the defeat at White Mountain, though painful for the vanquished, freed the Czech lands from heretics and rebels, restoring the King lawful in hereditary terms and returning the land – within the limits of possibility – to the time-honoured order before the Hussite uprising.

⁴⁰ A moving testament to the lost dream of Czech exiles is Pavel Stránský's testimony, *O státě českém* (*About Czech State*; Praha, Evropský literární klub 1940), a mixture of memories, historical scholarship and hopes fused by a fervent love of homeland. It testifies incidentally also to the vitality of the Czech proto-nation of the centuries of the reformation. The work, written in Latin to reach international audience, remains invaluable for understanding the perspective of Czech Protestants which, in a grossly simplified reading, strongly affected the historical perception of the Protestants of Masaryk's time, hardly contributing to national reconciliation. Perhaps Stránský unwittingly anticipated as much, since he concluded his work with a prayer – *Confirma, Deus, bene cogitata* – Confirm, God, what is well meant.

To the Czech Catholic historians and their German colleagues there seemed nothing legitimate about the action of the Estates in 1618. It was simply a rebellion, led by an illegitimate usurper and suppressed by the Emperor who was the hereditary and so in their eyes the only legitimate King of Bohemia. A positivist historian at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century, Josef Pekař,⁴¹ even claimed that the Emperor's intervention not only saved the souls of the Czechs, endangered by heresy, but actually saved their language from Germanization. According to Pekař, the virtual elimination of Czech literary strata, writers and readers alike, had not threatened the nation. Only Protestantism did, not theologically, but because it was almost entirely German. As he saw it, Roman Catholicism was supranational. The influx from Italy and Spain may have reduced the peasantry to semiliterate poverty, but it produced a flourishing of Baroque art, music and architecture. In the multinational Austrian empire the Czechs, though stripped of their school system, could allegedly retain their cultural identity once they purged themselves of heresy and rebellion. Their identity, now enriched by (Austrian) Baroque culture, argued Josef Pekař, would have dissolved in (German) Protestantism. Hence the conclusion cited earlier: Catholicism, though introduced by force, saved not only Czech people's souls but also their language with the implicit coda that the Czech nation owes its being to Roman Catholicism.

In citing Pekař, though, we are no longer in the seventeenth century with its defeat of pluralistic Bohemia and its triumph of the centralised Empire and its ideological monopoly. We have found ourselves squarely in the middle of a much later debate about the meaning of Czech identity, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the time of Masaryk, of Rádl, of Pekař, when the past became legend rather than reality. The seventeenth century reality, heavily overlaid by the religious imagery of its time, concerned a con-

⁴¹ Josef Pekař (1870–1937), a contemporary and opponent of Masaryk, of whom much will be said later, was a narrowly positivist historian who considered the category of meaning in history illegitimate, allowing only careful generalization on basis of factual observation. Czech history, he claimed, can be described most accurately as an effort to preserve ethnic identity against a far stronger German culture. Some of his works were published abroad by refugees from the Communist regime (so *Bílá Hora: její příčiny a důsledky* (*White Mountain: Its Causes and Consequences*; Praha, Historický klub 1921) or *Smysl českých dějin* (*Meaning of Czech History*; Praha 1929), (Rotterdam, Stojanov/Accord 1977)), unfortunately only in Czech.

flict between a vaguely feudal, decentralized and so pluralistic society and a modern centralism demanding ideological monopoly. At the time, centralism prevailed throughout Europe, modern and efficient, in Catholic France as much as in Lutheran Prussia. For better or for worse, as Hegel would point out, after the loosely woven feudal period Europe had to go through a phase of centralization before it would be ready for a modern individualistic plurality. Seen through that prism, the Czech defeats, though dialectically, yet represented progress.

It was against this unspoken coda that the late nineteenth century Czech nationalists aimed their protest. One of the most durable nationalist legends, persisting in modern-day Czech lands, sees the tragedy of Czech history in the Catholic victory and the Protestant defeat at the battle of White Mountain. The obvious consequence of that reading seems to be that if only we could *undo the battle of White Mountain* – as, alternately, we had earlier been asked utterly to expunge any memory of our Protestant past – our national soul would be healed. Otherwise our further history is doomed to be an ongoing battle of two irreconcilable creeds. When today those creeds are assigned latter day political significance as well, the rift comes to appear fatal. Perhaps Czechs cannot have a coherent identity because they do not have a coherent history.

That, though, seems far too facile a reading. It takes as normative the moment of conflict when Count Schlick's Moravian *Landsknechte*, the last remnant of the Czech Estates' army at the Battle of White Mountain, fired their last volley and, as Karel Kryl⁴² sang, nobly died in the blood-stained mud by the hunting lodge wall. That, though, is legend. Those mercenary *Landsknechte* were hardened professionals, not fanatics, and professionals do not indulge in dramatic gestures. Both surviving pay rosters and archeological finds suggest that after their historic volley the last Moravians simply clambered over the wall, reassembled and, for want of further orders, returned to Moravia to claim their pay. The legend of irreconcilable conflict in our alleged *psyche* ignores that, much as it ignores the two hundred previous years

⁴² Karel Kryl (1944–1994), the “poet with a guitar”, sang out Czech despair and defiance in the wake the Soviet occupation. More than anyone else, he embodied the life experience of the younger generation of his time on his records. The song here cited, *The Last Moravian*, dramatizes the final act of the Battle of White Mountain somewhat as the Czech version of *The Dying Gaul*. The young responded with fervent love, their elders with embarrassment. The elders, it seems, respect fact, the young have an instinctive feel for the truth of the legend.

when Catholics and Protestants lived side by side in the Kingdom of two peoples. Conflicts have to be *assumed* to be irresolvable, a *clash of civilisations*, in order to become so in fact. For readers who like clear black/white presentations, Czech history is dreadfully blurred, though hardly *prima facie* irreconcilable.

Actually, such lessons as we can legitimately draw from that anachronistic emergence of something rather resembling a *nation* in the modern sense already in the Reformation period are far more modest. We can legitimately claim that the Czech cultural heritage is not homogenous. Historically, the Czechs cannot claim to be a Catholic nation as the Poles can. Nor can they claim to be historically a Protestant nation, as the Netherlanders. The Czech heritage is irreducibly dual, genuinely Hussite and genuinely Roman Catholic – and today thoroughly atheistic, which is the usual outcome of forcible conversions. Any Czech self-understanding will require a philosophy of dialogue, recognising an irreducible plurality as a trait of our heritage.

That is a conclusion to which we shall need to return in other circumstances, whether in considering the Czech and German component of our culture, or, most recently, the traditionalist and the democratic component of our society. It means, however, that we cannot take our nation for granted, like the Poles, the French, even the Slovaks. Our identity, such as it is, was not bequeathed to us effortlessly by a continuous history and a unitary culture bequeathed to us by history. It is an achievement of critical reason, of self-aware reflection. Perhaps that, too, is why our nation has a tradition of what Jan Patočka defines as a *national philosophy*. Though we cannot quite paraphrase Descartes and say that *We think, therefore we are*, we might legitimately come to the conclusion that our national identity is the product of critical reflection and contingent on it, a cultural achievement rather than a natural event.

Perhaps that is why Jan Patočka needed to write his *What are the Czechs?* and Tomáš G. Masaryk his *Czech Question*. I rather suspect that may be part of the impetus behind this book and the reason for what to outsiders appears as our graphomania. Our national identity in more than a metaphoric sense depends on our writing. We cannot just be. We need to think. Our peculiarity may well be that we tend to think pen in hand.

CHAPTER TWO

Reason and Romance of Nation Building

For all the robust romance of Žižka's battle-wagons and the discrete charm of Renaissance Prague, most contemporary writers place the effective birth of Czech *nation* in the modern sense of the word much later, at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. That was the time of great changes, of the great democratic revolution throughout Europe. Simultaneously, it was a time of the Napoleonic wars. At the time, they seemed apocalyptic, making up in ferocity what they lacked in ordnance. Today they seem like a dress rehearsal for the World Wars that turned the twentieth century into a war. Amid those a new Europe, an Europe of nations, was born.

There was little national awareness prior to that, and even less so in Baroque Bohemia. Gone was all memory of the anomalous excursion of *the people of the chalice* into modern nationhood. That became painfully evident in 1781, when Emperor Joseph II issued his *Patent of Toleration*, more out of embarrassment than out of tolerance. In it, he extended some limited toleration to Protestants who would declare allegiance to one of two officially tolerated confessions, either the Lutheran or the Reformed. Only a handful of secret Protestants came forward, seeking to reclaim their faith in spite of this limitation.⁴³ Times had changed. Austria had become Catholic, and not

⁴³ That is not altogether fair. Given the intensity of repression lasting hundred and sixty years, it is a wonder the faith survived at all. In addition, the authorities did everything to make registering as protestant as difficult as possible, in no small part by permitting only the Lutheran and the Reformed confession, not the old Czech confession or that of the Union of Brethren. For all that, thirty two Reformed and sixteen Lutheran congregations emerged and built their prayer houses – they were not permitted churches, towers or bells – within three years of the Patent. In some cases, as in Moraveč or Křížlice, entire villages reclaimed their old faith. See the excellent account of the Protestant historian, Eva Melmuková, *Patent zvaný toleranční* (*The Patent of Toleration*; Praha, Nakladatelství Mladé fronty 1999).

in name only. Perhaps more fundamentally, both religious questions and religious answers had come to seem strangely irrelevant. Another two generations after the *Patent of Toleration*, nineteenth century historians did begin to rediscover the Hussite era. For them, it became a rich source of metaphors and inspirational stories, though now as a legend, not a faith revived.

Altogether, to claim a historical continuity between the nation slowly emerging in the first decades of the nineteenth century and King George's *other people*, the Hussites and the Union of Brethren, would be rather far fetched. At the time of the Czech national revival, the Czech lands were the domain of Baroque Catholicism laced with traces of early modernism of the awakening Enlightenment. The Hussite glory days were covered by a shroud of forgetting.

For better or for worse, the first generation of Czech nation builders – called *buditelé*, literally *awakeners* – had to *invent* a modern Czech nation rather than just *awaken* a dormant one. In so doing, they had to draw on the resources of their own age, the Age of Reason, the Age of Romance and, most of all, the Age of Progress. Only so could they sketch the framework, the problems and the answers of an awakening Czech national identity. For all the long history of the Czech state and its ethnically Czech population, the Czech *nation* in a modern sense is genuinely modern, born with and of the idea of Enlightenment modernity.

Though not of the idea only, but of demographic realities as well. In a sense, it was Austria's enlightened Emperor Joseph II who unwittingly created the conditions for the Czech national revival. With a stroke of his quill, he launched a demographic revolution as far-reaching as any feat of arms or muses. Internationally embarrassed by Austria's backwardness, Joseph II not only issued the Patent of Toleration, but also abolished the crudest forms of servitude – and thereby gave rise in the Czech lands to a demographic base for a revolutionary new nation in place of the docile Baroque aristocracy and its obsequious servants who hitherto represented the active population of the Czech Kingdom.

That situation grew gradually out of a series of failed uprisings, of which the Estates revolt in 1618, ending tragically at the White Mountain, was only one. After each defeat, the Emperor would restrict the traditional rights and privileges of the rebels further. By the latter half of the eighteenth century, only the higher nobility and some more affluent burghers, both almost entirely German speaking and representing at the very most twenty percent of the population, could be said to constitute the *body politic*, actively participating in matters public even in the tenuous Baroque sense. Many of them were

heirs of the Spanish and Italian adventurers who had won the Thirty Years' War for the Emperor. The Emperor, chronically short of cash, had rewarded them with confiscated lands of exiled Czech nobility. Though they needed the Czech speaking rural population as a source of free labour, few of them had any sense of solidarity with their villagers. Their chief concern was to defend their privileges against the centralising efforts of the imperial government in Vienna. Understandably, they tended to be strongly conservative and rather docile, though, as it turned out, not very loyal to the Empress.

The bulk of the population, largely peasants and urban labourers, were virtually the property of this or that great landholder. The country serfs could not even marry without the permission of their lord, much less send a son to school, change residence or by any stretch of the imagination think of themselves as free.⁴⁴ Though great majority of them were Czech speaking, few of them could be considered Czech in any but an ethnographic sense. Their landholder, lord of the manor, represented the law, the judge and the jury, with no appeal against his judgement. Not surprisingly, that disfranchised population tended to share the common traits of drudges everywhere, compliant, passive and resentful yet resigned to their lot.

As a consequence, the Czech lands could appear as a German land. The active *body politic* that spoke in its name was small, German speaking, highly privileged and committed to defending its traditional and increasingly obsolete privileges. As a whole that active handful tended to be deeply conservative with little tolerance for change or even variety. By freeing the serfs while introducing rudiments of independent judiciary – the *justiciár*, a justice of the peace who was not in the lord's employ and to whom even peasants could appeal against the lord's judgement, if they dared – the Emperor with a stroke of the pen created at least potentially a far wider *body politic*. With the inclusion of former serfs it tended to be far more democratic in a rough

⁴⁴ The term used at the time was *Leibeigenschaft*, literally bodily ownership. The lord owned not only the peasants' labour, but also their body, that is, their life. In practice it meant that the peasants could not move, marry, educate their children or dispose of their land without the Lord's arbitrary permission. To the distress of the great Protestant historian Palacký, it was not the Habsburgs who imposed it on their subjects, but rather the Czech Estates themselves in 1462, perhaps explaining in part why the descendants of the legendary Hussites of 1420 showed so little interest in defending their faith in 1620. This form of subjection was not removed until 1789, compulsory labour on the lord's land not until 1848, and last remnants of subjection in 1860 with the fall of the absolutist regime of the minister of the interior. See note 54 below.

and largely populist way. It was largely Czech speaking and it was only a matter of time before it began chafing under German dominance. Though the effect did not make itself felt overnight, the Emperor had created a potential Czech speaking majority, underprivileged and eager for change, in place of the conservative German speaking privileged caste.⁴⁵

It took nearly two generations before yesterday's serfs actually came to think of themselves as the Emperor's free and equal subjects, especially since Joseph II's successors did not share his radical views and did their best to thwart his efforts. Yet the sons and grandsons of those freed serfs gradually did take up their new status. They were young, articulate, educated in German schools – there were none other – and ready to assume a corresponding place in society. Instead, they encountered discrimination as Czech speakers in a German dominated land. Their peasant fathers, toiling on the land, did not have an occasion to run up against national discrimination. Their sons, eager to reach out beyond their villages to the newly open world, experienced it keenly. Some adapted, assuming a German ethnic identity. Others set out to win an equal place not only for themselves but for their language which had largely disappeared from offices, schools and salons by the middle of the eighteenth century. To regain that place, a revival of Czech as the language of art, enterprise and administration was needed. The Czech national revival was not only from below, from the needs of the sons and daughters of newly liberated serfs, but specifically from the efforts of those of them for whom common good was more important than private gain. It was not a bad heritage.

Here there is a marked difference between the Czechs, democratic in a rough populist way, and the conservative, aristocratic Polish and Magyar movements of national revival. The reason may well have to do with demographic make-up more than with cultural heritage or some putative “national temperament”. Both the Poles and the Magyars were what Patočka⁴⁶ designates as a *Herrenvolk*, a population in which aristocracy – the *Herren*,

⁴⁵ This account passes over the contribution which the Empress Maria Theresia unwittingly made to Czech revival. In losing rich and populous but solidly German Silesia to the King of Prussia in 1763, she dramatically changed the ethnic balance in the Czech lands by restricting them effectively to their original ethnically Czech base.

⁴⁶ Jan Patočka, *Co jsou Češi? (What are the Czechs?)*, originally a series of letters in German, *Was sind die Tschechen?* of which more will be said later. Here Patočka rather uncharacteristically and misleadingly employs the vocabulary of the

lords – were the *arbiters elegantiae* and subsequently the sole bearers of the national idea. Such aristocracy understandably sought first of all to preserve its traditional privileges. The national revolt against Habsburg rule in Poland and Hungary expressed basically a conservative protest against the limitations represented by any rights accorded by the Emperor to their subjects. Magyar patriots fought for the rights of Magyars – and so against any claim to the status of citizens for their Slovak, Romanian or South Slav subjects. When in due course they would claim their independence, their states would reflect the prejudices and preferences of the privileged, in Admiral Horthy's Hungary just as in Marshall Pilsudski's Poland – and so strikingly unlike in Masaryk's Czechoslovakia.

The Czech society, as it took shape at the time of the Napoleonic wars, had no such aristocracy to which it could look for style and leadership. Its native aristocracy had been largely impoverished and dispersed in the wake of the Habsburg conquest. Such aristocracy as there was, was predominantly German-speaking, with family roots in Spain or Italy, and so alien to their subjects. With few bright and honourable exceptions, an aristocracy so constituted was largely irrelevant to the national aspirations of the new *body politic*. The bearers of the national idea were common people. Even the *arbiters elegantiae* of the new national community, the intellectuals, writers, journalists, poets, were most frequently the sons of farmers or tradesmen, seeking to break the constraints of tradition in a quest for opportunity in the name of freedom and equality.

The first task of the Czech nation builders was to revive the Czech language and to create a Czech culture, attracting the urban lower middle class to join its efforts. That required first of all refurbishing the long-disused Czech language, fortunately preserved in the Kralice Bible, and setting about using it outside the kitchen, the barn and the workshop. From modest beginnings, these pioneers managed in two generations to create a literature, a science – including even an ingenious Czech chemical nomenclature – a theatre to

German far right. In: Jan Patočka, *Češi II (Czechs II)* (Praha, OIKOYMENH 2002), pp. 255–324, esp. 259, includes only a Czech translation. The German original is filed in the Patočka Archive of the Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic in Prague and was reprinted in a bilingual edition, *Was sind die Tschechen* (Praha, Panorama 1992). A bilingual critical edition may well have appeared ere this volume will do so. We shall argue that while this text cannot be excised from the Patočka corpus, it should not be considered representative of it.

which marionette plays made a major contribution and a thousand other building blocks of a cultural identity.

It was a miracle, made possible in part by the long forgotten cultural treasury bequeathed to the young enthusiasts by the faded interlude of a pluralist Czech society of three centuries earlier. Though a new nation was being born, Václav Matěj Kramerius⁴⁷ could reprint a range of old Czech books, from treatises to travelogues, which first appeared in the sixteenth century. By the 1840's the task was largely accomplished. The erstwhile mass of inert serfs, representing roughly two thirds of the population of the land, had effectively reconstituted itself as a *body politic* and as a modern *nation* with all its attributes. It had a shared memory of great deeds, albeit partly fictitious, it had a common land and language in the present and a forward-looking sense of a mission. That mission, in direct conflict with the Romantic quest of preserving and reviving past glories, represented its Enlightenment commitment to a quest for reason's new horizons. It was the task of sweeping away the cobwebs of tradition and privilege alike in the name of freedom and justice. Or more accurately, sweeping them away in the name of liberty, equality and brotherhood, though, given the realities of Austrian imperial police, those were hardly the terms to use.

That contraposition of the Romantic love of the old and the Enlightenment quest for the new was integral to the very birth of modern Czech nation. That birth grew out of an effort to preserve and revive an ancient language and with it a memory of old glory. As such, it was intrinsically conservative. Yet at the same time that birth was possible only as a revolt, not only against an alien aristocracy, but equally against an alienated past. It was, as we shall see, most unfortunate that nineteenth century thinkers interpreted that inherent tension as a conflict of Catholicism and the Reformation. That it was at most only marginally. The basic tension was one between the Romantic impulse to preserve and revive and the Enlightened impulse to revolt and build anew. Modern Czech philosophy, following modern Czech history, can be read as a conflict in which victory cannot mean the triumph of one over the other but only transcending both, rising above them and giving a new

⁴⁷ Václav Matěj Kramerius (1756–1808) published a weekly newspaper and a broad range of popular literature which helped move Czech, once the language of culture in central Europe, from the role of spoken communication of the semi-literate back to that of a literary language. His store is still in Míchalská street at the corner of Hlavsova alley in Old Prague, though of its original furnishings only the broad floor boards remain.

meaning to both. The legendary three Fates standing over the figurative cradle of our national community must have quarrelled rather badly.

What we have been calling the Czech national awareness arose largely in response to that quarrel of the Fates. A philosophy which is not merely an idle game inevitably so arises – in response to a *practical need*, even if that need is as basic as explaining how we can speak of two distinct individuals, be they cloth pins or the persons of the Trinity, as “the same” and yet distinct. A national philosophy arises in response to the need to orient in life and the world. It demands a conception of “the world” – more generally, of reality – as well as a conception of the role of a given cultural community within it. The specific need of the Czech nation builders, uncritical in their patriotic fervour, emerged acutely when Karel Havlíček Borovský’s wrote his scathing critique of J. K. Tyl’s 1844 play, *The Last Czech*.⁴⁸ It was actually a rather bad play, even by the undemanding standards of the time, but it was naively nationalist and stirringly patriotic. Havlíček criticised it both because it was that – and because it was nothing more. The new challenge was no longer simply to assert *that* we are but to answer the question *who we are – and why*.

H. G. Schauer, whom we met earlier, was to pose it sharply later as the question of what, if anything, justifies the effort of reviving an ancient language and giving up the advantages of merging with a great neighbouring nation, speaking a language that opens the world rather than one that closes us upon ourselves. Schauer phrased it cautiously and did not sign his name – Masaryk got the blame – yet the pressing philosophical need was to answer the question about the meaning of human history in general and about the place of the Czech national revival within it.

In Poland, religion could provide an answer. There Catholicism is not just a religious creed. It is also a national credo, even for Poles of little religious fervour. As we have noted, something analogous was the case in the Czech

⁴⁸ Karel Havlíček (1821–1856), who adopted the *patriotic name* of Borovský, was a journalist in the spirit of the Enlightenment, using satire as his tool for arousing his compatriots. Josef Kajetán Tyl (1808–1856) was a dedicated patriot, an actor and a playwright. The episode is memorable solely because it marks a transition from the phase of the revival focused solely on reviving our language to a new phase which wondered what to say in it, asking about the meaning and purpose of our linguistic revival. After all, we could have been speaking German, a world language of art, science and industry, instead of struggling to revive a long dormant minor language! Today many students ask the same question with respect to English.

lands in the fifteenth century. At that time, the Czech confession, symbolised by the chalice as much as Catholicism by the crucifix, was both a religious creed and a credo of King George's *people of the chalice*. However, after nearly two hundred years of intense recatholicisation, that creed had been largely forgotten, replaced by Roman Catholicism. That Catholicism, invoking national saints as St Adalbert, St Wenceslas or St John of Nepomuk, laid a claim to representing a new national creed. For some, it did so. However, it was too closely linked with the Habsburg monarchy. The Habsburgs established it. For centuries it served as their ideological arm and as the bulwark of the tradition that sustained the throne. After the defection of the Estates in 1740, fervent Catholic piety, genuine or affected, came to serve as a surrogate of loyalty to the House of Habsburg.⁴⁹ Even if the Church could have overstepped its mediaeval shadow, it could hardly provide an ideology for a nation seeking to reassert itself against the Habsburgs.

At the time of the national revival we were not a Protestant nation, even if we were not exactly a Catholic one, either. Yet for better or for worse, what was distinctly national in our feudal past was linked to the Protestant period of our history. In great part for that reason, both the national revival and our first republic (1918–1938) made extensive use of Hussite symbolism. Unfortunately so, since the conscious heirs of the reformation, the Czech Brethren, represented a relatively small segment of a predominantly Catholic population. The very lukewarm response to the Patent of Toleration made that painfully clear. Besides, by the nineteenth century the conception of humans and their place in the world in which the Reformation was grounded proved no less antiquated than the Catholic. The emerging Czech nation could not look to religion as the foundation of its national identity. It had to build from the ground up, with whatever inclusive resources philosophy could offer. The *local*, long bereft of philosophy, had to turn to the resources of the *global* to forge its self-understanding.

⁴⁹ It was one of the more piquant episodes of the period. When in 1740 Maria Theresia, then all of twenty three years old, had to assume the throne after the death of her father, Karl VI, all neighbouring monarchs closed in for the kill. The Prince-electors Karl Albrecht of Bavaria claimed the Czech crown – and the Catholic estates of Bohemia, once brought in by Ferdinand II, acclaimed him their King. After their bid failed, Maria Theresia was in no position to treat them as Ferdinand II had treated the Czech estates in 1620, but the would-be rebels were still anxious to appease her. Ostentatious manifestations of religious devotion, especially of the cult of St John of Nepomuk, were a favourite means of so doing.

Such was the situation in which our early patriots found themselves. Of all the rich stores of the history of the Czech Kingdom and the Czech state little was available for the building of a *nation*. There were legends, yes, and Hájek of Libočany was put to diligent use.⁵⁰ Basically, though, after seven generations of normalization under the strict supervision of authorities imperial and ecclesiastical, our *awakeners* had precious little to draw on for the ethnic modernization of the Czech *body politic* at the turn of the eighteenth and the nineteenth century which we fancy our *národní obrození*, our *national re-naissance*. It is fortunate that rather than to dark tribal legends they turned to philosophy.

Czech national awakening is in fact closely linked to philosophy. Demographically, it may in great part well have been a product of the expansion of the body politic, hitherto restricted to high nobility and high clergy, to include what the Enlightenment liked to call *the common people*. Philosophically, though, it was the product of another dramatic shift, from tradition to Reason as the ultimate arbiter of truth.

All through the Middle Ages, custom and received tradition played the role of such an arbiter. Though men – women scarcely got a word in edgewise – may have appealed to God, later to Nature, it was always tradition that decided what God commands or what Nature teaches. Perhaps the most basic dictum of mediaeval philosophy was that *whatever all men at all times and in all places have believed, God himself (or Nature, later Reason, itself) must have taught*. That dictum sanctified as Truth whatever was traditional, most notably the hierarchical ordering of mediaeval society. As thrones began to shake, it came to include the dubious *divine right of Kings* but not that only. Actually, anything that *was in fact the case*, as long as it had been so

⁵⁰ Václav Hájek of Libočany (†1553) was a rather uncritical chronicler of Czech antiquities who made them eminently readable by embellishing fact with flamboyant fancy. His legends of old Bohemia in his *Czech Chronicles* retained their popularity well into the nineteenth century and, in Alois Jirásek's modern version, strongly influenced still my boyhood ideas about pre-Reformation Czech history in mid-twentieth century. Needless to say, their factual accuracy, criticised already by the father of Czech historiography, Gelasius Dobner in the eighteenth century, leaves much to be desired. – The other source was forgery: much of our early national awakening drew on counterfeited documents said to attest an ancient Czech culture. More about these putative *Královédvorský* and *Zelenohorský Manuscripts* below.

long enough, came to be regarded as also *what ought to be the case*, by divine (or natural or moral) law. It was a mind-set which the Enlightenment challenged but which lingered *sub limine* and reemerged in the most unlikely contexts. Most notably, when after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev sanctified as *real socialism* the peculiar Soviet version of it because it was the only actually existing one, he could invoke a strong precedent. He was, in fact, leaping over the Enlightenment right into the Middle Ages, though I rather doubt he was even aware of it. Yet the governing principle was the same. In Hegel's words, whatever is real, is rational – or in time honoured mediaeval phrasing, whatever is, must be God's will and so also *ought to be*.

The Enlightenment called into question most basically this automatic sanctity of the actual. It perceived the actual as *merely* actual, and reserved the role of the *real* for that which Reason so finds. Not, to be sure, reason as the power of empirical generalization. Rather, what Enlightenment thinkers considered Pure Reason was the ability to grasp not only contingent fact but also the intrinsic meaning structure of a given reality. Thus the actual world may be one of very imperfect actual triangles, but true reality is the normative ideal of a triangle, a three sided plane figure the sum of whose angles equals two right angles and the ratio of whose sides is the same as the ratio of angles opposite them. For the men and women of the Enlightenment, that is rational and therefore real, whatever may be true of merely actual triangles. Those empirical triangles are *merely* actual, and must be judged in terms of what is truly real, the ideal triangle. The Enlightenment invoked the ideal as the norm of the actual.

When our one Enlightened ruler, Joseph II,⁵¹ officially the Holy Roman Emperor, came to reign over the varied Habsburg domains, he found them actual but dreadfully irrational, a product of historic accidents. Feudal social

⁵¹ Joseph II (1741–1790), one of the many sons of Maria Theresia, brought the ideas of the Enlightenment to the Habsburg domains. Since Habsburg rule was based on forcible domination even more than most European regimes, it was also even more fearful of any change and so rigidly conservative. This, though, was true throughout Europe. Our reforming Emperor was only one of the rulers who became aware that in the second half of the eighteenth century the traditional late mediaeval order, forcibly restored by the Counter-Reformation, was no longer tenable. His reforms sought to break the stranglehold of the privileged nobility and so, almost incidentally, benefited the peasants and tradesmen. In the Austrian domains, it led to the abolition of bodily servitude. Alas, the outbreak of the spontaneous revolution-from-below in France terrified the would-be controlled

ordering may have been traditional but it was hopelessly irrational indeed. It reduced to chattel humans who were capable of reason and who could contribute far more to the state as citizens than as serfs. Joseph II's solution was simple: Abolish serfdom. The traditional customs and privileges of individual parts of the Empire, leaving justice in hands of local whim, were no less irrational. Introduce a uniform centralised administration! The entire all too short reign of Joseph II carried on in this spirit of rational renewal with little regard of the sensibilities of the victims or of the intended beneficiaries.

The saving grace of the Enlightenment, which in the short term seemed to have failed tragically in the French Revolution, was that its Reason really was not arbitrary. Though most of them would have vehemently denied it, *les Lumières* or the Lights, as the French call the leading thinkers of the Age of Reason, took over from Christianity the conception of the world as rationally ordered and governed by a rational law, both natural and moral. For the most part, they would have denied God any part in it, except perhaps a deistic Big Bang at the beginning, but the sense of an orderly universe was there – and so also the confidence that Reason could discern that order. Rejection of tradition did not mean licence. It meant a non-arbitrary rational Order.

The second safeguard against what John Milton, the great poet of the Enlightenment, would call *thy dread enemy, chaos*, was in the microcosmic reflection of the cosmic order, in “Man”, which the age used unabashedly to designate both female and male members of the species *h. sapiens sap.* For “man” now appeared not as an individual only but as an instance and bearer of *manhood* or, in less biased language, of *humanity*. The word was not new, the idea was. While for the ancients *humanity* was basically a cultural concept, the cultivation assumed in a cultivated Roman, the *homo humanus*, for the Enlightenment it represented a structural, not an empirical reality. In virtue of

reformers-from-above. After the brief reign of Joseph II and even briefer reign of his brother Leopold II, for two years our other Enlightened Emperor, all subsequent Emperors followed a rigidly conservative policy, strenuously resisting any hint of change. They were so successful that, by its break-up in 1918 the Habsburg Empire, by then Austro-Hungary, was a skansen of mildly modified Baroque feudalism. The Czechs by and large remember Joseph II as the enlightened monarch who brought a glimpse of human dignity to his subjects, introduced limited toleration and eased rural servitude. Few are aware that Joseph II also introduced the notorious Austrian censorship, originally to suppress the hide-bound reactionary voices resisting his reforms.

bearing the spark of reason, of being rational, humans intrinsically and necessarily bear certain modes of comportment. They can act freely: their actions are not forced upon them by natural necessity; rather, they are the result of deliberation and decision. Consequently, humans themselves are responsible for them. Not destiny or determination, but each individual human bears the responsibility of his freedom. In that freedom and responsibility, they are intrinsically equal, but, not being omnipotent, each needs the support of others and owes it to them in turn. The French revolutionaries, not given to philosophical niceties, summed it up in the outcry of all the oppressed, *Liberté! égalité! fraternité!* Only an utter cad could fail to thrill to the sound.

It was an ideal philosophical foundation for a national philosophy for an ethnic group like the Czechs of the time. To forge a nation – and a new one at that – the Czechs had to reject the standing social order, based entirely on custom and tradition, including the putative *divine right of Kings*. They had to establish a new *body politic* of free and equal citizens, in contrast to one constituted by traditional privileged strata. Their need was to challenge custom in the name of Reason – and that, in a nutshell, was Emperor Joseph II's strategy of Enlightenment. Not surprisingly, together with the very different strategy of love of homeland and care for the old, it was to become one of the two strategies of the national revival that were to mark Czech fortunes for more than a century and a half.

Still, though this strategy was philosophically well suited to Czech needs in practice, there were problems applying it. One was the rigid conservatism of old Austria. Emperor Joseph II may have been an Enlightened ruler. His successors from Francis II on,⁵² however, were badly frightened by the revolution in France and its repercussions in Vienna. They adopted a rigidly conservative policy of opposing all change and suppressing any ideas that might lead to it. If the rule of evolution is *adapt or die*, it was a suicidal policy. Indeed, the Habsburg Empire would ultimately die of its refusal to adapt. The immediate effect of that rigidity was effectively to block overtly political attempts at social change.

⁵² Francis I (II) (1768–1835) ruled Austria after the death of Leopold II in 1792 as Holy Roman Emperor Francis II until 1806 when, under Napoleon's pressure, he extinguished that title, reigning on as the Emperor of Austria, first of that name, Francis I, until 1835. At his funeral, an anecdote has it, a government official sought to comfort weeping Viennese, "Weep not, nothing will change" and received the answer "That is why we are weeping!" The story is apocryphal but graphic, as most Viennese political anecdotes.

The proximate effect of that blockage was to channel the energies of the Czech nation-builders into tasks that were not overtly political. Especially in the first two generations, national revival activities were almost entirely literary and scientific rather than overtly political – and that proved rather beneficial. Czech as a language of culture had been largely dormant since the expulsion of the People of the Chalice after 1620. Certainly by the mid-eighteenth century it had sunk to the status of the language of peasants and paupers. As a language of elegance and learning it had a great deal of catching up to do. Beside, the attempt to revive Czech as a full-fledged national language, though officially reluctantly sanctioned,⁵³ was in itself revolutionary, bringing about a major change. Even the newly democratic Austria after the fall of Alexander Bach's⁵⁴ absolutism in 1860 was not ready for that. The Czechs had much to lose by challenging that fragile system outright. They had much to gain by turning to what Masaryk and much later Havel would call *unpolitical politics*, to nation building bypassing the corridors of overtly political power.

The other problem with using the Enlightenment and the democratic revolution as a foundation for nation building was structural. The pioneers of the Czech revival sought to create *a nation*, a very particular local reality, with a particular history and particular interests of its own. They shared the problems of all nation builders, whether of the struggle for Irish independence or of Martin Luther King's struggle for the civil rights of African

⁵³ Ironically, it was the military, faced with the need to train and command a mass of illiterate peasant recruits, that pressed for Czech language instruction for its company-grade officers. Early German-to-Czech phrasebooks feature useful sentences like "Bring me a clean collar, Jean!" – Miroslav Hroch, *Na prahu národní existence (At the Threshold of National Existence)*; Praha, Nakladatelství Mladé fronty 2002) provides a delightful overview, alas, in Czech only.

⁵⁴ Alexander Bach (1813–1893), Austrian minister first of justice, then of the interior (presiding over the police) 1849–1859, was last of the adamant enemies of all change. He presided over a rigid rule of tightly linked state and church supported by ever-present secret police. His fall marks the beginnings of Austrian constitutional monarchy and of democracy gradually growing, though more thanks to tolerance from above than to pressure from below. Still, after 1860 Austria finally permitted full freedom of worship, freedom of press and freedom of association, providing its nations in effect with a training ground for independence. To limit modern Czech experience with democracy to the twenty years of the First Republic is inaccurate. Far rather, it extended over eighty years from the fall of Bach in 1859 to the fall of the First Republic in 1938.

Americans. Such movements invariably evoke the most powerful popular response by their appeal to ethnic particularity and ethnic pride. Yet Reason is not particular. It is not national. Reason is (or claims to be) universal, declaring universal truths. Its point of reference is the *humanitas* which all humans are said to share. How do you establish a nation *in its particularity* by appealing to Reason *in its universality*?

That is a problem the Czechs perennially confronted but never solved. It reemerged in the tension between the philosophical heirs of Masaryk's Enlightenment humanism and the fervent nationalism of his popular followers. It was those plain folk who had flocked to the colours, aflame with a love for their land and language, and made the birth of Czechoslovakia possible. At the same time, the fervent particularity of the Czech national revival, hostile to anything "foreign", could not but alienate the other ethnic groups in future Czechoslovakia's population – Slovaks, Germans, Magyars, Poles, Ruthenes. Paradoxically, it was their reaction to the fervent love of Czech nationalists that was largely to contribute to Czechoslovakia's demise less than twenty year after its birth. The problem would even reemerge after the totalitarian interlude, in 1989, this time contributing to the definitive split of Czechoslovakia into its Czech and Slovak components. In the Czech Republic, it simmers on in the tension between the European rationalism of the social democrats and the festering conservatism of much of the Right, from its euroscepticism down to downright racism. Though the Czechs use a standard terminology of *the left* and *the right* to describe their politics, the conflict of Enlightenment humanism and of Romantic conservatism may well be far more accurate.

Therewith, though, we have far outrun our narrative and need return to the birth of the nation at the dawn of the nineteenth century. At that time, the conservative stance of the traditional elites did not seem a problem to patriots who saw their task as one of preserving and revitalizing the language of their ancestors. Rather, alongside the forward looking Enlightenment, it seemed to offer another resource to the dedicated men and women who thought their task one of awakening a dormant nation rather than creating a new one. They encountered an articulation of that conservatism in the officially sanctioned version of Hegelianism, ironically the chief philosophic resource of the opponents of the French revolution as well as of its most radical supporters a generation later.

Crucial to the social uses of Hegelianism was Hegel's conception of history as the dialectical return of Spirit unto itself as Actual Spirit, after a de-

tour through its dialectical opposite, Matter. So stated, it may sound like idle speculation. However, it embodies the central insight which made it possible for the nineteenth century to fuse an optimistic vision of open-ended *growth* with a realistic recognition of history's cruel reversals. We can retain our faith in the rationality and benevolence of the cosmic order embodied in the faith in *growth* and integrate the apparent reversals as an integral part of a dialectical process. On that scheme, history's various conflicts can be understood not as reversals but as dialectical steps forward within a grand dialectical scheme. There are no defeats. There are only dialectical victories.

It is a rather neat scheme and can present as rational a history which otherwise might well appear as a mere vulgar brawl. History's seemingly chaotic conflicts can be explained as dialectical encounters in which the negation of negation, as Engels would later describe it, would assure progress. The initial negation is the conflict which arises as a given reality evokes its opposite, much as the organic *ancien régime* with its oppressive practices provoked the individualistic French revolution. The resolution (or "negation") of that conflict is likewise not chaotic. It seeks to resolve ("negate") the original conflict ("negation"), subsuming both opposites in a higher unity, as the Napoleonic state putatively subsumed both the organic *ancien régime* and the anarchically individualistic revolution.

Since the common need of all the movements of national revival was to explain the place of a particular community in the flow of history, the dialectic appeared the ideal tool. It is a scheme so general that it cannot be falsified, yet, precisely because it is so general, it can seem to explain neatly individual national histories. Nations here appear as moments in the historical dialectic, their conflict as their contribution to history's progress to the full actualization of the Spirit. For Hegel, to be sure, it was not individual nations but rather entire ethnic entities like "the Greeks" or "the Slavs" that functioned as the building blocks of history. He also left it unclear whether the apex of historical dialectic is one that history approaches only asymptotically or whether Hegelianism is that full actualization of the Spirit. Patriots of various nations, eager to provide their emerging national awareness with a philosophical justification, would not be stopped by such niceties. Fichte in his *Addresses to the German Nation* provided Germans with a national philosophy within a Hegelian framework, and Herder provided a similar service for the Slavs. Among those, the Czechs accepted him eagerly, seemingly unaware of the inherent contradiction between Herder's romanticism and the Enlightenment sources of their political ideals. With the honourable ex-

ception of Havlíček and Masaryk, the Czech national revival was marked by patriotic fervour far more than by critical scholarship.

In Herder's romantic perspective, nations appear as embodiments of Spirit, in a sense anticipating the Will of which Schopenhauer would speak later. The spirit of the nation – in Romantic iconography, its *angel* – was not thought identical with any finite set of individuals or a specific body of culture and folklore. It was thought to have a life of its own; could be said to be born, to go through an exuberant youth to maturity and could even be said to die, though Kamil Krofta deemed the Czech nation immortal.⁵⁵ The nation, so conceived, is rather like a great invisible organism. It is a-rational, constituted and guided by a vital drive which true patriots are said to feel in their hearts (or “blood”, making transfusions problematic but producing the German myth of *blood and soil*, *Blut und Boden*). So conceived a nation is driven – and in turn drives individual patriots – to fulfil their nation's historic mission, such as the German *Drang nach Osten* or America's alleged *manifest destiny* to subdue the continent *from sea to shining sea*. A stirring vision indeed – and a living nightmare for its involuntary beneficiaries, from Jews and Czechs in the days of the German *Reich* to America's original inhabitants and most recently the Iraqis and other involuntary recipients of a high explosive version of *the American dream*.

Since a nation so conceived is an a-rational or perhaps supra-rational emotive entity calling out of the Depth to those who *listen to Being*, negotiations between nations are impossible. Their encounter can only take the form of conflict, classically called the *Kulturkampf*, though today updated as *clash of civilizations*. Understandably. As a matter of daily experience, only individuals can reason critically and converse with others in communicative

⁵⁵ Kamil Krofta (1876–1945), a Czech historian of the Hussite and Baroque period, in some ways a democratic counterpart of Josef Pekař. Krofta was no less thorough a scholar, but his works articulated Masaryk's national philosophy. After the First World War, he entered the new Czechoslovak diplomatic service and served with distinction. During the Second World War, when some of our most celebrated thinkers dared at most an ambiguous word or two as protest, Krofta wrote a statement of faith in his nation, originally titled *Foundations of National Tradition*. The book helped foster Czech confidence in the darkest years of the German occupation. At a time when the physical survival of the Czech nation was at stake, Krofta changed its title to *The Immortal Nation*, and that unfortunate title is all most readers are likely to remember today of what was one of the significant contributions to the search for a national philosophy.

contact. In the romantic conception, however, those individuals appear as *merely actual*, able to claim at best a derivative reality as embodiments of the deep historic force. The primary givens are said to be wholes like *das Volk*, national wholes driven by their destiny and sweeping all their members along with it. An individual can only arm – or train, as nineteenth century gymnastic associations like the German *Turnvereine* or the Czech *Sokol*⁵⁶ did – to be ready to serve national destiny, whatever History determines it to be.

Generally, in such a perspective an individual is of value only as the bearer of a national spirit. The nation is both itself the highest value and the source of all other value. Serving the nation, including dying for it – preferably dramatically, on *the field of valour* – is said to be the individual's highest fulfilment. Becoming alienated from the nation is the worst possible fate – emigration is treason, if not death. Consistently enough, a popular Sokol marching song of the time proclaims, in what may have been a reference to H. G. Schauer, *As for those who grow estranged, thrust a blade through that trech'rous heart!* So beware of cosmopolitan tastes that might not be national enough. The patriots were in earnest. To many, only beer and pork with cabbage seemed safely Czech enough.

Such a romantic conception of the nation evidently owes as much to Jean-Jacques Rousseau as to Hegel. However ominous its undertones, it suited the needs of the new-found patriots of central Europe. A nation conceived as a mystic reality, superior to its individual members, can be said to have “slept”, to have been “awakened” and even to “be immortal” in a serial sort of way. Since it requires no rational thought, only an emotive *listening*, it is open even to the most humble with minimum effort. Most of all, it can give

⁵⁶ *Sokol*, literally *The Falcon*, was a gymnastic organization, founded in 1862, which fused gymnastics, nationalism and enlightenment ideals in a blend which attracted a mass following with a programme of *healthy mind in a healthy body*. Nicknamed *the army without weapons*, it represented a flowering of the national revival. Its members became the backbone of the Czech legions fighting alongside the allies in the First World War as well as of the institutions of the new state after it. Banned by the Nazis and subsequently the Communists, it withered to insignificance when, after the fall of the Communist regime in 1989, it attempted to revive a by-gone era together with its perennially valid ideals. Yet more than anyone or anything else Sokol combined a romantic conception of a nation with Masaryk's idea of democracy. With its genuine fusion of those two unlikely components of Czech national identity Sokol trained a generation of Czechs who made both independence and democracy possible.

grand meaning even to the humblest act, humblest life. Cultivating a Victory garden or bearing children can be a *Service to the Motherland*. It is not surprising that converts regularly report a sense of fulfilment, of self-realization as they devote all they are and do to The Movement, whatever it may be.

Perhaps the most ominous note in the Romantic conception is that it makes this rather amorphous reality both the highest value and the arbiter of value generally. Whoever speaks in the name of *the nation* can claim infallibility. Thus no appeal was allowed in French courts from the verdict of a jury with the justification that *le peuple français ne se trompe jamais*. Any dissent from vehemently expressed public opinion, not tested by elections or polls but simply sensed in the air, can be appear as treason. To coerce a deviant into loyalty to the General Will, claims Rousseau, is permissible. It is, after all, his own true will, even if he is blind to it. Devotion to an Ideal which has brought a person out of aimless meaninglessness to a life of purpose and meaning would make it difficult to draw a line between romantic nationalism and its fanatic perversion. Democracy presupposes plurality. When experienced reality shrinks to the *Nothing but nation!* of the nationalists, it becomes difficult to avoid a fateful slide into totality.

The Czechs encountered such all-totalising identity – and largely internalized it – in the Communist government's tacit assumption that dissent is treason and emigration a betrayal of the nation. It was not, however, a Communist speciality. There is a distinct echo of the same in the assumption of infallibility of French juries or in the Code of Conduct of American service personnel during the Korean war. That code, which once I dutifully carried in my wallet, called on its bearer to be ready to lay down his life in defence of *our way of life* – which at the time included shabby segregated restrooms in the American south. Not pretty, but it was so familiar. Ideals are disruptive. Romantic nationalism built on the reassuring effect of the familiar.

After two incredibly bloody and cruel wars of nationalism it is not easy to comprehend how anyone could take such Rousseauesque romantic nationalism seriously. Yet in the nineteenth century Czechs groping for their identity evidently did. Romanticism gave us the patriotic linguist Josef Jungmann and the pioneer romantic poet Karel Hynek Mácha. It also gave us the two great manuscript forgeries, named after the place where they were allegedly found, *Královédvorský* and *Zelenohorský Manuscripts*, both much beloved, treasured and richly used in building up our modern self-confidence. Masaryk spoke out against them, declaring that *nothing can be great that is not truthful*. In the long run, he set a norm for our expectations of ourselves. At the time, he was excommunicated from the nation by the right-wing daily,

National Letters (Národní listy), as a *repulsive traitor (ohavný zrádce)*. Those forgeries played a significant role in the Czech national revival, inspiring much of the national myth and legend which we substituted for the rather unglamorous tribal history of the Slavic settlement of our land. Primary school children used to read their stories, albeit as legends, and many recall them rather more than distinctly than any historical reality. They may not be true, but they sound ever so profound – and is there really a distinction between those in an age which considers appearance reality and rejects truth as “fascism” – without quite knowing what that term means?

Thus we are heirs to a conflicted conception not only of our identity, but of the good, the true and the beautiful as well. Due to an accident of history, we started building our modern identity on virgin ground. The religious normalization after the Battle of White Mountain left the Czech speaking community bereft of intellectual leadership. Arts there were, architecture and music positively flourished among the German speaking upper strata. The Czech speaking lower strata which the Emperor's Emancipation Proclamation transformed into the *body politic* were excluded from it. With the memories of past glory suppressed and largely forgotten, the emerging Czech nation had to draw on the intellectual resources of Europe of its time.

This was the time of Emperor Joseph II and, beyond his domains, the time of the Enlightenment. Enlightenment rationalism was the most readily available resource. Philosophy cutting with the keen, clear light of Reason through the deadening dusty layers of tradition opened new vistas. Through the prism of Reason, the long-accepted social reality of masters and serfs no longer seemed “natural”, a matter of course. The young men and women dedicated to restoring the dignity of their native tongue and land, for the most part without knowing Kant, drew on a Kantian conception of freedom. Though tradition taught them subjection, Reason taught them equality. Perhaps it was the shared needs of the oppressed with whom they identified that taught them solidarity. As a result, the national revival they represented was neither inward looking nor xenophobic. It appealed to universal ideals of humanity to lift its people out of subjection. Though the imperial government, terrified by the French revolution, soon suppressed Phrygian caps and the slogan *Liberté, égalité, fraternité!*, that slogan remained a part of our modern-day national identity and would bear its fruit in Masaryk and the first republic. Somewhat paradoxically, the national identity we forged with the help of romantic nationalism in the nineteenth century was at the same time universally humanistic.

It was also particularistic in its national self-understanding. It may have been the ideal of the Enlightenment which opened new horizons to the pioneers of our revival, but it was the intense Romantic love of our land and our heritage which gave it its emotional impetus. Romanticism taught us to cherish our identity in its national particularity. The young people leaving their village homes for the city and the wide world created a cherishing image of the log cabins of their childhood and a nostalgic illusion of a simple village life of their childhood. To be sure, the first urban generation at the start of industrialization did that everywhere, but in our country it acquired an ethnic dimension as well – the pure Czech village in contrast to the corrupt German city. That nostalgia endowed several generations of urban Czechs who lived with the vague sense that to be truly, authentically Czech they really ought to be peasants.⁵⁷

The Czech ethnic community entered upon its modern day national existence with that double identity, a rationalist mind and a romantic heart, universal in its commitment to human values, intensely particular in its love of our land and language. We are the heirs of the Enlightenment faith in critical reason. We are no less the heirs to an inward looking romantic traditionalism verging on nationalism. That double endowment was to prove the source of our great strength as well as of our critical weakness. Yet all that was still to come. At the end of the first phase of our national revival, we found ourselves standing on virgin land – in Czech we would say, *na zelené louce*, on a green meadow – with a rationalist mind and a romantic heart. We had reassured ourselves *that* we are. Now we needed to ask who we are.

⁵⁷ This romantic nostalgia produced our great literary classics of the nineteenth century, Božena Němcová (*Babička* (*The Grandmother*)), Alois Jirásek (*F. L. Věk*, all five volumes of which I still read once every dozen years), Karel Václav Rais (*Zapadlí vlastenci* (*Backwoods Patriots*)) or a remarkable recorder of old Šumava, Karel Klostermann, born German who became a Czech novelist and suffered double discrimination (*Ze světa lesních samot* (*From the World of Forest Clearings*)). All have one thing common: they are immensely moving and enriching to Czechs of my generation and become flat and boring when translation strips them of their emotional charge. Nor do they find many readers in the post-Communist generation.

CHAPTER THREE

The Edge of Modernity

Throughout the stagnant years of the Metternich era between the Napoleonic wars and the revolutionary year 1848, Czech patriots were almost wholly preoccupied with the overwhelming challenge of restoring their language to use. No wonder. By the late eighteenth century, Czech had ceased to function as a language of art, science and society. The Emperor's unintended demographic revolution provided a demographic base for a Czech nation, but it could not restore a long-disused language. The fervent young enthusiasts of the national revival undertook the task. Perhaps to their own surprise, they succeeded – and confronted the embarrassing question, “So what?” We are Czech. Fine and good. Now what is the point of it? The sons and daughters of the people who restored the Czech language in all its glory now set out in quest of their *national identity*.

As is usually the case with quests for the Holy Grail, their effort was more fervent than focused. True, they set about that task with passion and vigour, but also with an ambiguous endowment, reflecting the double root of the emerging Czech consciousness, in Enlightenment rationalism and in a rather romantic off-shoot of Hegelianism, mediated by Herder. Austrian censorship and Metternich's secret police did not make the task any easier.

The constrained condition of philosophic discourse under those circumstances encouraged those early nation builders in a simplistic reading of their situation, reducing all problems of national identity to the linguistic questions of Czech vs. German. That, however, would not serve, especially in philosophy. Czech philosophic thought could not but bear marks of turbulent Czech history. Nor was nineteenth century German philosophy – in the sense of philosophy done in German – altogether a seamless robe. Its common starting point was Kant, an Enlightenment rationalist and a cautious supporter of the democratic revolution, yet at the same time a philosophical idealist with a strong subjectivist streak.

Kant's thought can be understood as the wellspring of two divergent

philosophical streams. There is, in German philosophy, a persistent difference between the German idealist tradition from Hegel to Heidegger, and the Austrian positivist tradition, looking back to Aristotle and Hume and forward to Bernard Bolzano, Franz Brentano, Ernst Mach, Richard Avenarius and a host of others. It is in the latter list that we could include Husserl and Masaryk, though with a crucial difference. While the later Austrian positivists tended to exclude judgements of value and meaning as meaningless, Czech positive philosophers, including Masaryk and Husserl, tended to follow Brentano for whom *Lieben und Hassen*, loving and hating, constituted a dimension of consciousness on par with cognition and conation. Unwilling in their commitment to positive philosophy to resort to mysticism, they consistently sought to humanise reason to bring the dimension of value and meaning within the scope of rationality.

It is the conception of reason that is crucial here. It is emphatically not reducible to quantification, as that faculty which can be duplicated by a computer. Most generally, it refers to the ability to reflect critically and to understand not only individual sense data, but also patterns which do render them intelligible yet need not be quantitative. The basic contrast here is one between *individual sense perception*, such as seeing red or hearing a tone, and *eidetic perception*, such as grasping the necessary relation between the angles and sides of a triangle. It is the patterns of valuation and interrelation, for the most part not quantitative, which render the phenomena of our enviroing world intelligible, that is, rational, subject to systematic study and understanding without resorting to mysticism. Reason is the ability to grasp such relations – and also the great weapon of the Enlightenment in confronting the crushing burden of instinct, custom and tradition. Humans can break free of that age-old burden because they can pose the critical questions of meaning, motives and implications - and trust Reason to guide them to reliable answers.

Reason here can be viewed both as the intelligibility of reality and as human ability to grasp it, though that distinction is artificial. We are not dealing with the abstraction, “the objective world”, any more than with the opposite and no less artificial abstraction, “the inner reality”. Rather, we are concerned with the one experienced reality which is intrinsically subject related yet with a hardness of its own. Neither the term *subjective* nor the terms *objective* is really appropriate. Experience is more basic than either. Reason conceived as the meaning structure of lived experience, freed equally of mystical intuition and of arbitrary quantification, presents itself as *making sense* and *posing critical questions*.

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There remains, though, the question of how we should conceive of and understand those relations and *patterns of intelligibility*. Already the Pythagoreans recognised numerical relations as such patterns. A melody may seem irrational, but quantification renders it rational. The proportion of the lengths of the strings of a lyre enables us to grasp it as representing a pattern. Natural sciences since the seventeenth century have built on the same discovery, basing their quest for intelligibility on quantification. Where that seems problematic, they resort to *secondary quantification*. Though we cannot quantify fear, we can treat it as rational because we can quantify its secondary manifestations such as pulse, skin temperature, muscular tension.

This vastly successful quest has had a rather negative side effect. It has led, by force of habit more than by rational necessity, to dismissing all non-quantifiable phenomena as irrational. Since quantifiable relations are for the most part relations of instrumentality, while relations which define our goals, values and meanings are intrinsically qualitative, the identification of rationality with quantifiability has emphasised the instrumental and, by default, has propelled irrationality if not to respectability, then at least to importance in human affairs.⁵⁸

Or to put the same less obscurely: how to build a nuclear bomb is simply a question of technology, readily quantifiable. It is also a question of instrumentality: a nuclear bomb is a means, not a goal. However, the question of whether to build such a bomb, whether to drop it or on whom, is a question of value, and intrinsically non-quantifiable. Hence the irony of modernity. We can answer the question of how to build a nuclear bomb with the perfect clarity of instrumental reason. However, we have to ask a medium, turn to our intuition, instinct or custom to know whether to build it at all. The same is true of earning a million euros or of divorcing one's husband. We have created a culture marked by an intense rationality of means and irrationality of ends.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ This is the theme of Husserl's analysis in his monumental *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften* (Edmund Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phenomenologie* (*Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*; Haag, Martinus Nijhoff 1962), esp. Part II, note esp. § 9. g, Die Sinnenentleerung der mathematischen Naturwissenschaften in der "Technisierung".

⁵⁹ Patočka notes as much in his war-time pamphlet *Dvojí rozum a příroda v německém osvícenství* (*Two Senses of Reason and Nature in German Enlightenment*; Praha, V. Petr 1942) where he describes contemporary German thought as a rationalism of means combined with irrationality of ends (p. 5).

The point to note, though, is that in our actual lived experience we do not encounter value or meaning as inherently irrational or a-rational. Some, yes: we experience emotions and desires which we simply cannot understand – though a flourishing depth psychology attests we believe them to be intelligible, at least with greater effort. Yet most of our emotions, values and meanings are not even that obscure. Their relations may not be quantifiable, but they are intelligible, they *make sense*. The love of a homeland *makes sense*. Humans need the security of the familiar. So does, say, the value we attach to loyalty, or the willingness to sacrifice for others. The intelligibility is not a matter of quantifiable relations, but of relations of value and meaning which are an experiential given and accessible to critical reflection. We can *understand* not only *that*, but also *why* a vulnerable social being would value honesty in others. It is not quantifiable, but neither is it a matter of mystic intuition. It *makes sense*, we can *see* it is so, once we think through the structure of meaning relations of that situation.⁶⁰ Phenomenological inquiry is in a great part an attempt to grasp the meaning relations which structure human phenomena. When we spoke earlier of *humanising reason*, we had in mind including relations of value and meaning in rational reflection.

The Austrian philosophical tradition – and the Czech lands were not only politically, but also culturally part of the Austrian empire – was positivist, relying on clear observation and faithful articulation as the basis for all cognition. Czech philosophy at the time drew for the most part on the Austrian positivist rather than the German idealist philosophical tradition. Masaryk learned from Brentano, Hume and Comte. Though in many ways himself strongly Kantian, especially in ethics, he overtly rejected Kant for his subjectivism. In its Czech version, as represented by Masaryk and his followers, Austrian positivism included in its strong positive emphasis on the hardness of reality also the reality of value and meaning as primitive givens.

Jan Patočka sees this as a conflict between the scientific positivism which Masaryk was wont to invoke in support of its seeming opposite, his idealistic moralism. Is that, though, a conflict? Could we not with equal justification read it as an effort to fuse the Austrian philosophical sense of reality

⁶⁰ Compare Husserl's analyses of the world-as-home and world-as-foreign (*Heimwelt/Fremdwelt*) in: Iso Kern (ed.), *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität III (Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity III)* (Husserliana 15) (Dordrecht, Kluwer 1973). See especially Appendices XI–XIII to *Cartesianische Meditationen (Cartesian Meditations)* which did not appear until Husserliana 15, pp. 214–236 and which also provide a fine example of qualitative reasoning and rationality.

with the German philosophical awareness of questions of value and meaning? Much as idealism needs *the hardness of the real*, positivism, as long as it is a working philosophy and not the kind of self-enclosed formal system such as the Vienna logical positivists tended to produce, needs a moral component to save it from learned irrelevance. If a conflict it is, it seems productive rather than destructive.

At the time of Czech philosophical beginnings in mid-nineteenth century, in any case, there seemed to be just one pressing philosophical task: to provide the newly born nation with a critical self-understanding. That nation was fast gaining the self-confidence of its culture and industry. It needed next a confidence of its own identity, not vaguely sensed but clearly articulated.

That required first of all that the Czechs shake free of the traditional claims of the House of Habsburg and of the anachronistic Baroque mentality it defended, though both had become deeply ingrained in Czech thought and life. The Czechs needed, in effect, to legitimize the new demographic reality of a *body politic* constituted largely of the Czech-speaking agricultural population released from serfdom in part in 1781 and fully in the revolutionary year 1848. Rationalism, daring to reject the claims of tradition and intuition in the name of pure reason, was ideally suited to the task.

At the same time, Czech thinkers needed to recast this *body politic* not only on a rational basis but also along ethnic lines, as a Czech *nation*, that problematic mystic entity, presumably long dormant and now awakening, which would give meaning even to life's humblest tasks. What once we had done in the service of God and what became flat and pointless with God's growing irrelevance, would now find new significance in the service of a nation which commanded, somewhat frighteningly, a loyalty no less total than that owed to God. That nation needed not only foster a sense of ethnic cohesion, but also a sense of moral authority which could, quite irrationally, demand of its citizens that they avoid German loan words, marry among themselves and eschew any thought of emigration as base treason, no matter how harsh the conditions at home. Popular marching songs of that safely peaceful time added the *sweet pleasure – slast* – of dying for the motherland. Romantic idealism could justify all that quite handily. The philosophical problem arising therefrom is one that has plagued nationalism everywhere – how to effect a reconciliation of those opposites, of a rationalist conception of freedom's rights and duties with the romantic conception of the sovereign claim of the nation's General Will. Squaring the circle seems simple by comparison.

Help came from a rather unexpected quarter, from the paradigm shift brought about by modernity. That was not so much a philosophical movement as a fad, well suited to the intensely fashion-conscious Viennese. The very word *modern*, spreading to the Czech lands from Vienna, as did all things fashionable in the Austrian empire, retained a tinge of *Mode*, fashion. Pronounced with Viennese condescension and accent on the second syllable, the word *modern* designated whatever was fashionable. A Viennese knows no more devastating condemnation in fashion or in ideology than *Aber, Liebschen, das ist doch nicht mehr modern!* But, darling, that is just not in fashion any more!

Why, though, should it matter so much whether something is so up to date? So *modern*? That, in a nut shell, is a function of the prism through which we encounter reality. Once we assume that the line between bad and good does not intersect the line between beginning and end, but rather runs parallel to it, then *later* appears as *eo ipso better* – and to fall behind in fashion (ie., time) means to fall behind in value. The new is an achievement, the old is surpassed. *Progress* is not only a lure. It is also a merciless judge.

The conception of time and value as running parallel is itself a sign of modernity. For centuries, after the crumbling of Roman civilization, Europeans envisaged a world marked out by Heaven and Hell on the line of value and by Creation and Last Judgement on the line of time, with the two lines intersecting in the Cross of Christ. The line of time seemed largely value neutral. Except for one event, the coming of the Christ, nothing significant happens in time. The decisive events take place on the line of value on which the drama of human salvation is acted out in a tug-of-war of God and Satan for each soul. Time does not change that. Nor is there any point in attempting to change this fallen world. It will never be significantly better. The point is to escape from it to eternal bliss. What happens on the temporal axis between Creation and the Final Judgement vastly does not matter. What matters is a soul's position on the line between Hell and Heaven. To the mediaevals, even to the dissenters among them, such were simply *the facts of life*.

The dramatic change in the European perception of the world, anticipated by Jan Amos Komenský⁶¹ in his works of general emendation, came about definitely with the Enlightenment. Perhaps the fundamental point

⁶¹ Jan Amos Komenský (or, in Latin, Comenius) (1592–1620) is best remembered as a pioneer of modern teaching methods. He was actually a priest of the *Unitas Fratrum*, the Czech Brethren, exiled in 1628 as the Habsburgs solidified their religious hold on the Czech lands. Actively headed the efforts of Czech exiles to re-

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of Kant's Copernican revolution is not just placing humans at the centre of reality, but simply acknowledging the reality and value of this life and this world. But if this life matters, then time becomes the locus of crucial events. The key to their intelligibility is Reason, understood as the ability of grasping perceived patterns of meaning rather than generalizations from individual realities, which wrenches humans free of natural necessity and sets them into the freedom which Luther, quoting Paul, describes as *the glorious liberty of the sons of God*.

For the rationalists did take over the Christian conception of the world as essentially orderly, ordered by a law which is both natural and moral, and which critical Reason can grasp. They set aside the Creator, but kept a created world, that is, a world structured by meaning and value. Viewing it through the prism of Reason, they gave it a new importance. Where reason is absent, the world remains one of mere natural necessity, devoid of meaning and value. However, Reason, they believed, enables humans to discern their true nature, their common *humanitas*. It enables them no less to go on to constitute a world which both conforms to rational humanity and provides a suitable context for each individual human to become a *homo humanus*, realising the full potential of his *humanitas*. The result is a paradigm of the actual as mere potentiality, as raw material, with a possibility of realising its reality. That is the challenge and the task of the individual and of the *polis* alike – to foster the growth of humans to their full humanity. The flaws in the human lot are not fatal. They are simply *not yet* fully what world can be. The task and the hope of humans is to overcome those flaws and realise the full potential of God's creation. Such, at least, is the *humanist* paradigm of the rationalists.

The Hegelian paradigm differs dramatically from the mediaeval because it is historical essentially, not just incidentally. What happens in history does matter. Actually, history is *all* that matters. Reality is not something static, only subsequently brought into motion. It *is* motion. There is no need

store Czech freedom – and wrote consolatory works for his coreligionists when that effort had failed. After the Peace of Westfall definitely consigned the Czech lands to Habsburg rule, Komenský, anticipating the Enlightenment, turned to building a system of unified science which would lead humankind to a better future through learning. As in the first half of his life he strove to preserve the heritage of the Reformation, in the latter half he anticipated the ideas of the Enlightenment. There is extensive literature devoted to him in Czech. Of the works available in world languages, the best may well be Milada Blekastad, *Comenius* (in German; Oslo, Universitetsforlaget Academia 1970), originally a doctoral dissertation directed by Jan Patočka.

here for the God of mediaeval theology, charged with setting an inert reality in motion. Here, as we noted earlier, all history is a story of the dialectical return of potential Spirit to itself as the Actual Spirit through the positing of its opposite, Matter, and transcending both in a higher unity.

The history we live, seen from a Hegelian perspective, is the embodiment of those grand dialectical movements. We can, to be sure, still speak of freedom but it is no more than recognised necessity. No matter how much we speak of loyalty to our King and traditional values, the feudal polity will provoke its opposite, the individualism of the revolutionaries. No matter how loftily we then speak of liberty, equality and brotherhood, the conflict of the two will be resolved by the rising of the modern state, in which citizens retain their individuality – it is a community of individuals, not clans – yet the power of the state brings order to their individual anarchy. The only freedom we have is that of recognising that historical necessity so we do not champion causes lost by History's verdict.

Modernity can in a sense be viewed as a composite of Kantian and Hegelian assumptions. To the men and women who thought themselves *modern* at mid-nineteenth century it seemed too obvious to question that what there is, the world and we therein, is naturally and morally ordered as a process, a progression and a progress. Nor did they doubt that in the course of it significant events take place and that humans are free to affect or at least to influence those events. In spite of their failings, reality is so ordered that each successive stage is an advance over what went on before. The favourite metaphor, provided by technology, is that of an escalator which humans are said to be riding ever upward to individual and social improvement. That is *progress*. We may be approaching perfection only asymptotically, but we are approaching it. The old is bad, outlived, the new is intrinsically better. The line of value, which in the mediaeval conception intersected the line of history, now coincides with it. The Promised Land is not *in the sky when we die*, it is in the future.

As life became visibly easier, drudgery no longer the common lot, hunger a memory, not a daily threat, life richer and more satisfying, it really seemed that way. *Every day in every way we are getting better and better*, both as persons and as cultures. The golden age, be it fully developed Communism or fully developed Capitalism, is just over the horizon. As late as August 4th, 1914, few Europeans remembered that the horizon is an imaginary line which recedes as we approach it. Modernity was a time of incurable historic optimism, confident that squaring circles (or reconciling rationalism and moralism) is just a matter of progress.

3. *The Edge of Modernity*

Positivism, which in the Czech lands became somewhat paradoxically the philosophy of humanistic democracy, was first and foremost a philosophy of modernity. It took entirely for granted its initial tenet, that reality is both causally and morally ordered and is evolving toward perfection. Only so could it assume that clear observation and faithful description of the given was sufficient for understanding, for assume that it did. Observe, describe and be content – whatever is beyond that, is metaphysics, the work of the Evil One.

In some ways, positivism could be said to be an heir of Kant's recognition of the limits of pure reason and, more broadly, of the Enlightenment faith in the intelligibility of the overt without recourse to the esoteric. Reality is intelligible as we experience it, and reason, understood as the ability to grasp patterns of meaning as well as particulars, is a tool adequate to the task.

Such was the basic implicit faith. Most immediately it represented a revolt against the twin plagues of nineteenth century thought. One was historicism, explaining the near present in terms of the distant past. The other was obscurantism, usually identified with metaphysics – explaining the evident by the conjectured. Positivism in effect revolted against the then common metaphysical assumption that truth does not arise in the encounter of subject and object but rather represents an uncovering, an *a-letheia*, of something already there, though concealed by a veil of forgetting. What presents itself *prima facie* is deceptive appearance whose true meaning can be discovered only by uncovering the hidden reality which governs the overt much as a magnet beneath an opaque glass governs metal filings on the surface. At the core of obscurantism is a hermeneutics of suspicion, suspecting that things are not what they seem, that true reality is hidden, not overt, in short, substituting the obscure for the evident in the role of primary given.

Positivism took the courageous step of trusting the evident. That is the significance of what Masaryk called his *realism*, assuming things for the most part to be what they seem. It is not our positive observation, but rather our esoteric speculation that is deceptive. So, eschew obfuscation! Speak not of hidden passions! Carefully observe overt behaviour, articulate your observations faithfully, observe regularities of sequence, formulate a working proposal and test it in practice. That is the vaunted "scientific method" of the 1950's, recited in all seriousness by innumerable teachers of philosophy of science and repeated with a straight face by their students. Three generations earlier it seemed revolutionary, now it seems a *cliché*. Truth is regular correlation. It is overt, not hidden.

Historicism was in a sense the counterpart of metaphysical speculation in the human sciences. It assumed that given individual events are unintelligible in themselves and must be explained by their conjectured causal antecedents. The result was an infinite regress in causal explanation of human events, both in time and in the putative hidden dimensions of consciousness, as in “depth” psychology. Thus social scientists who could not understand religion in and around themselves sought to understand it in long ago religious texts and reported practices long shrouded by a veil of forgetting. Psychologists, unable to grasp behaviour as a way of coping with a present situation as understood – really, as *constituted* – by the acting subject sought to uncover hidden mental causes. Throughout, Europe took to explaining the evident by the obscure.

Positivism rejected all that. Born of a revolt against ecclesiastical obscurantism, it had a stunningly liberating effect on its time. At its finest, it eschewed all speculation, avoided all hidden explanations, content to observe clearly and faithfully to articulate the immediate given. The present is the sole reality. We need explain the past as its antecedent, not the present as a consequence of the past. The observable, popularly called “*the facts*”, is all that is given. We need explain the hidden by the evident, not vice versa.

There is here, to be sure, the seed of a future problem. A *fact*, strictly speaking, is not a *given*. The word derives from the Latin *factum*, derived from the verb *facere* and so something that is done or made. The German term, *Tatsache*, literally a deed-thing, suggests the same. The given is merely the given, only verification makes it into something confirmed as real, a *fact* in the usual sense. Thus the idea of an *objective fact*, so dear to early positivists, is a contradiction, something done without a doer. However, the prophets of a brave new world, which the positivists were in their time, seldom worry about such niceties. Off they charged, to free the world of obfuscation with the sword edge of (allegedly) objective observation and faithful articulation of the given.

The confrontation of positivism, touted as *scientific philosophy*,⁶² with what was rather vaguely called *idealism*, a rather unsystematic grab-bag of all non-positivist views from Kant to Hegel and beyond, structured the philosophical debate which formed the background against which the various

⁶² The classic and still current popular introduction is Hans Reichenbach’s *The Rise of Scientific Philosophy* (Berkeley, University of California Press 1951 and reprints). Reichenbach preaches philosophy of science as a true believer, accurately and clearly, though hardly as a disinterested observer.

national revivals took place. It was also the matrix in which Czech thought first sought a model of self-understanding. In broad outlines, such was the philosophical scene that greeted Masaryk in Prague in the fall of 1882 when he settled there as a *Privatdocent* at the newly autonomous Czech branch of Prague's Charles-Ferdinand university.⁶³

That local scene, however, could not even then be sundered from its global setting. In groping for its self-interpretation, Czech philosophy, as we shall see, encountered the same problems as the philosophy of its time globally. German idealist philosophy, capable of grasping the dimension of value and meaning, found it difficult to find a reliable hold on reality. Masaryk's repeated critique of subjectivism points out the lack of reality testing on the idealist side. Positivism, on the other hand, seemed to offer a firm grasp on reality – but little else. Husserl describes it as *ideenfeindlich*, hostile to ideas – and so unable to grasp the dimension of value and meaning

The result, as Patočka keenly dissects it in Masaryk's writings, manifests itself as a conflict between the lure of scientific positivism and the temptation of a superficial moralism. A less hostile critic might see it as a bridging of two irreducible dimensions of experienced reality, its hardness and its meaning. The need to bridge the two dimensions, both equally undeniable and unacceptable, so characteristic of the microcosm of Czech thought, finds a counterpart in the global macrocosm of European – or really Euro-American – philosophy at the time.

⁶³ Prague's University was not actually new. It had been founded by Emperor Charles IV in 1348, the oldest north of the Alps and east of the Rhine. The language of instruction was naturally Latin, as at all universities, but the masters and students were overwhelmingly Czech until the Habsburg conquest in 1620. Then, with the expulsion of Protestants, the ethnic complexion of the university changed radically, as in the country as a whole. By the time the local languages replaced Latin at the end of the eighteenth century, the educated strata in the Czech lands were overwhelmingly German speaking, and the university became that as well. Following the revival of Czech as a language of letters the emperor divided the university, by then called the Karls-Ferdinand Universität, into a Czech and a German part, in 1882. Masaryk was thus appointed to a newly separate section of an ancient university. The two universities continued to function side by side until 1939, when the Nazis closed down the Czech university altogether. Then, in 1945, the victorious Czechs restored the Czech university and closed down the German university in turn. The Czech Charles University functions in Prague to this day, the German found a successor in the Collegium Carolinum, founded in Munich by Germans expelled from Czechoslovakia after the war.

In ways we noted as well as in others, Austrian positivism was ideally suited to the needs of the Czech quest for national identity because it represented a revolt against the claim of the past on a monopoly on truth. For the positivists, reality was what was given, evidently present, not what is sanctioned by theory and precedent. Look to lived experience, not to the musty writings of schoolmen or the ancients, if you would find the truth! Observe clearly, articulate faithfully the meaning structure of the observed! Or, in less scholarly idiom, *Get real!*

That was precisely what the Czech national revival needed. For all its heavy handed emphasis on history as legend and on legend as history, that revival did represent a revolt against *historicism*, and inevitably so. History belongs to the victors who write it, and Czechs were the vanquished. History belonged to the Habsburgs, to the antiquated aristocracy and its monarchy, to the German culture which had come close to crowding out the remnants of Czech identity from the Czech lands.

For two hundred years, Czech history had been a story of a forcible imposition of an ideological monopoly and of what in another century would come to be called *the leading role* of the bearers of that ideology in state and society alike. The imported and now domesticated aristocracy (and later also the conservative “Old Czech” National party of Palacký and Rieger)⁶⁴ did appeal rhetorically to the “historic rights” of the Kingdom of Bohemia. In practice, though, those “rights”, such as they were, guaranteed at most the privileges of a favoured elite, not the right to self-determination of the newly constituted Czech body politic. The fledgling Czech democracy needed to cast historical precedent overboard and appeal to the “natural rights” of self-determination and of life in its own language.

⁶⁴ National Party was founded in 1861 as Austrian parliamentary democracy took its first timid steps after the fall of Alexander Bach's absolutism, as simply the Czech party, representing Czech interests. Understandably, it took that to mean the interests of the traditional privileged segments, the aristocracy, higher nobility and the (Roman Catholic) Church. Accordingly, its general orientation was conservative, stressing tradition – *historic right* – as the basis for Czech demands. Of the prominent men of the time, historian František Palacký (1798–1876) and politician F. L. Rieger (1818–1903) played a leading role. After its less conservative wing split off to form a more democratic and politically liberal National Free Thought Party in 1863, the National Party loyalists came to be known as the *Old Czechs* as distinct from the new National Free Thought Party, known as *Young Czechs*. In another generation, the *Old Czech* party largely faded from the scene as the Social Democrats pre-empted the left and the liberal *Young Czechs* the right.

Yet was there any such *natural right*? To be sure, those words had been worn smooth by long usage, yet all through the Middle Ages it was only that immemorial usage which determined what was “natural”. Before natural right could become more than a pretentious designation of uncritical custom, both the society and its judges would have to recognise a different basis of legal legitimacy than custom or “historic” right.

That was not an idle dispute. Behind a squabble over words the point was that “historic” right guaranteed the territorial integrity of the Czech lands, based on centuries of history, but not any new-found ethnic self-determination of the varied components of its traditionally multiethnic population. The boundaries of Bohemia and Moravia had been laid out by Charles IV in the mid-fourteenth century and had actually been relatively stable for at least a hundred years before that. That was enough to earn them the designation of “historic” and so protected by historic right.

Ethnic self-determination, by contrast, was an entirely new idea. Since at least the thirteenth century the Czech lands were ethnically mixed, predominantly Czech, but with a strong German element as well as a less numerous but still significant Jewish one. Habsburg rule over them was based on historic precedent, not on ethnic identity. The Czechs could claim a right to ethnic self-determination, distinct from that of the Germans and the Jews in the land, only on grounds other than historical.

The Enlightenment conception of Reason provided those grounds. Reason was now said to bestow a right of self-determination on individual ethnic groupings, regardless of historic precedent, largely on the vague ground that it *stands to reason*, that ethnic identity is a reality which a rational person cannot but recognise. The freedom and dignity of the bearer of Reason, after all, make any form of servitude illegitimate. A rational being, the argument ran, is born free and so by *natural right* ought to be his own (and some cautiously suspected even her own) sovereign master. From that recognition it is but an imperceptible romantic step to the claim that the same is true of the class of sovereign individuals whom we group under the title of *nation*. Though such reasoning might not stand very close examination, for the nation builders it was good enough to bolster their claim that natural right sanctions ethnic self-determination on grounds that the Czech positivists could accept.

It was to prove a double edged weapon. On the one hand, the new-found “natural right” promised to wipe out at a stroke all vestiges of feudal privilege and open the horizons of liberty and equality for hitherto subject peoples. The newly enfranchised Czechs, for two centuries downtrodden, could

demand equal rights in its name – and indeed did so, most vociferously – and, somewhat inconsistently, throughout the historically Czech lands. So, however, could the German speakers among the Emperor’s subjects who at the time represented nearly half the population of the Czech lands. To them it appeared far more reasonable to have the common Czech lands be an integral part of Austria – or, ultimately, after the demise of the Austrian Empire, annexed to the neighbouring German speaking states.

In 1891, the Old Czech deputies in the parliament in Vienna, seeking to minimize ethnic conflict, were in fact prepared to agree to a division of the Czech lands into a mixed zone, in which Czech would enjoy equal status with German, and a German zone, in which German would be the sole language of administration. The proposal was soundly rejected, as in light of the intermingling of the two populations it had to be, and led to a triumph of the Young Czechs⁶⁵ in the next election. However, it did create the illusion that the German part of the population was not a minority spread throughout the land but was rather a distinct territorial as well as ethnic entity which could, in principle, be detached from the Czech lands proper. Fifty years later, that proposal was to become the basis for Hitler’s unique bit of gerrymandering, the creation, in public imagination, of a “Sudetenland”, no longer a German minority but rather a German territorial entity which could be detached from the Czech lands without causing them injury. Once the Czechs took to basing their humanly all too legitimate case for self-determination on the problematic grounds of “natural right”, the territorial integrity of the Czech lands came to be at risk.

In the late nineteenth century, though, the territorial integrity of the Czech lands – and, for that matter, of the entire Habsburg monarchy – appeared such a fixture on the map of Europe, so immutably stable that few could imagine anyone calling it into question it. Europe without Austria and Austria without the Czech lands were just unthinkable.

⁶⁵ The Young Czechs or *Mladočeši* was a designation of a broad movement protesting the conservative stance of the National Party. It tended to draw on liberal intellectuals, lower bourgeoisie and small freeholders. In 1874, it constituted itself as the National Free Thought Party. For the most part, together with a populist idea of democracy it tended to adopt no less populist nationalism. With the rise of the Social Democratic party, the National Free Thought Party lost much of its popular base and tended increasingly to ally itself with the major capitalist strata and, under the leadership of Karel Kramář (1860–1936), mutated into a right wing nationalist formation, drifting into political irrelevance in its turn.

3. *The Edge of Modernity*

By contrast, assuring ethnic self-determination seemed desirable, urgent – and precarious. The Enlightenment concepts of Reason and natural right which the positivists embraced seemed the suitable philosophical tool for that most pressing task. Not fast fading history but tangible present reality mattered and positivism recognised its primacy. The positivists basically affirmed the primary intelligibility of the given and only derivative intelligibility of the remembered. Less obscurely, the positivists commonly claimed that the present given is real and intelligible; the past can be understood only through it. Or more simply still, the present is a given, the past is a construct. For a revolutionary age – and the time of Czech national revival was certainly that – the positivist critique of historicism qualified it as the philosophy for the new age.

Mutatis mutandis, the same is true of the positivist critique of metaphysical speculation. To the young visionaries of the Czech national revival the flights of German metaphysical fancy from Hegel onward appeared as blatant obscurantism. Any attempt to derive empirical consequences from eidetic judgements, both Masaryk and Husserl agree, is profoundly misguided. All too often, eidetic judgements have been used for advancing dubious quasi-empirical claims that could not be justified on positive grounds. Just recall *the sound instinct of the German Volk* which was supposed to determine the decisions of the Hitler-era *Volksgerichte*. Or think of the favourite ploy of all demagogues, *the will of the people*, usually the voice of some leader's fanaticised followers trucked to a football stadium for the occasion.

Democracy needs to appeal to clear observation, faithfully articulated, to factual discussion, to freely formed critical opinion and, in public matters, to the expression of that opinion in free and fair elections. Positivism with its insistence on the clearly given as the sole key to reality seemed to bring clear, liberating light of reason into the murky swirl of Hegelian philosophy. Just as utilitarianism freed ethics from the claims of inherited privilege and prejudice, so positivism seemed to liberate the new age from relics like *the divine right of Kings*, invoked by all too secular rulers. In the mid-nineteenth century it seemed, not unreasonably, that while German idealism provided the philosophical framework for nationalism, Austrian positivism provided the philosophical framework for practical democracy.

In the Czech lands, however, it was a somewhat idiosyncratic positivism, as we have noted already. English and Austrian positivism alike tend to draw the distinction between positive and metaphysical (or “idealistic”) philosophy according to the input either admits to the cognitive process. Philoso-

phy is said to be positive if it bases its judgements solely on the immediate data of consciousness, such as individual sense data or, in Husserl but also Masaryk, on the eidetic structures of lived experience. Anything beyond that is speculation.

Czech thinkers, however, often drew the line according to the product rather than the input of the cognitive process. As the leading Czech positivist of the time, František Krejčí,⁶⁶ repeatedly emphasised, a philosophy is positive only if it deals with matters of science, even on the basis of speculative theoretical constructs. The scientific posture, however, does not exclude moral concerns. It excludes only the irrational. So it is “idealistic” if it deals with matters of religion or, as he repeatedly put it, *seeks to know the transcendent*.

In this respect, the Czech positivists appear to be influenced more by the Free Thought movement which Krejčí consistently supported. Their position might also well reflect their resentment of the role which religion played in the Czech lands under Austrian rule. Given the strongly clerical bent of the Habsburgs and the conservative nature of the Catholic hierarchy in the Czech lands, the way to a clearer, sunnier, freer future seemed to lead through a rejection of religion as an earlier, outgrown stage of human development – and that, after all, was not at all alien to August Comte. The point, though, is that the chief motivation of positivism so conceived is fundamentally moral rather than logical in the sense which Austrian positivism acquired for the Vienna Circle.

František Krejčí's positivism seems to have been in great part a somewhat uncritical philosophy of *sound common sense*, “telling it like it is”. To his common sense it seemed clearly given that humans in principle are and by right ought to be free, regardless of tradition and speculation alike. The privileges which restrict the freedom of individuals are outworn superstitions, with no rational grounding. The justification of all rule is the consent of the governed, and only that. Only a government genuinely representing the people is legitimate; all people have equal rights and owe each other respect and

⁶⁶ František Krejčí (1858–1934), a positivist in the distinctive Czech sense, devoted himself to philosophy and psychology with a strong social and moral emphasis. Thus he wrote inter al. *Demokracie a socialism* (*Democracy and Socialism*, 1917), *Positivní etika jakožto mravouka na základě přirozeném* (*Positive Ethics as Moral Education on a National Basis*, 1922) a *Politika a mravnost* (*Politics and Morality*, 1932) and numerous other texts. A thoughtful moral thinker, Krejčí perhaps best represented the Czech fusion of scientific philosophy with concerns of value and meaning.

good will. In short, prof. Krejčí's *sound common sense* seems to see the political ideals of the Enlightenment as both clear and distinct.

Krejčí found a number of followers and sympathisers, among them Josef Král⁶⁷ and a noble clear thinker, Josef Tvrđý,⁶⁸ a sturdy supporter of Masaryk's democracy who died, unbroken, in the Nazi concentration camp at Mauthausen. For these self-confessed Czech positivists, in direct contradiction to Mach, Carnap and the Vienna circle, meaning and value were no less immediate givens of consciousness than mathematical relations or physical principles. Perhaps because of the demands of nation-building, all regarded ethics as the primary concern of philosophy. One of Krejčí's mature works was his *Positive Ethics*. Josef Tvrđý, determined philosophical opponent of what was then called *irrationalism*, thought confronting the question of the meaning of life the most basic task of positive philosophy. All three, obscured by events after the German and then Communist occupation of Czechoslovakia, deserve further study.

Still, the two perhaps most remarkable thinkers coming out of this idiosyncratically positivist background are Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, who produced the first full fledged attempt at formulating a Czech national philosophy, and his contemporary and fellow student, Edmund Husserl⁶⁹, who went on to become perhaps the most influential thinker of the twentieth century, though his philosophical paths led to wholly different concerns. Neither could be called a positivist in the conventional sense, yet both show marks of that common conceptual matrix, commitment to philosophy as a science, faith in Reason and confidence in moral growth as the keys to the intelligibility of the human situation. Perhaps the most common mark of Czech positivist heritage in Masaryk and Husserl is the one we have just

⁶⁷ Josef Král (1882–1978), like Masaryk a sociologist and philosopher, wrote extensively about Masaryk, focusing on the meaning of his humanism.

⁶⁸ Josef Tvrđý (1877–1942), another of the Czech positivists and supporter of Masaryk, with a strong interest in religion and its possibilities within the limits of reason. His text *Světový názor moderního Čecha* (*A Modern Czech's World View*; Moravský legionář, Brno 1925) offers a perceptive delineation of the superstitions of the onset of modernity.

⁶⁹ Edmund Husserl (1856–1938) surely requires no explanation though we might note that he was born in Moravia, near Masaryk's birthplace, and that Masaryk first tutored him in philosophy while both were students at the University of Leipzig in the academic year 1876/78. See Karl Schuhmann, *Husserl-Chronik* (Haag, Martinus Nijhoff 1977), pp. 4–5 et passim.

noted – an unresolved yet creative tension between the impulse to realism and to moralism.

Edmund Husserl, today associated almost entirely with his phenomenology, in fact set out with what at the time was the positivist slogan of *philosophy as a rigorous science*. He shared the positivist conviction that careful observation and faithful articulation constitute an adequate explanation. He was willing to extend this approach to what, with Brentano, he calls acts of willing and feeling (actually *lieben und haßen*, loving and hating). In *Ideen* He in fact calls phenomenologists *die echte Positivisten*, the true positivists.⁷⁰

Husserl's three "introductory" books, *Ideas Pertaining to Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy*, *Cartesian Meditations* and *Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* reflect a double recognition. First of all, as against traditional empiricism Husserl recognises that it is not enough to describe the putative *facts* of the natural world. Description must include their *meaning* as well, derived not from human preference but from the fundamental structure of reality, its *Wesen*, its way of being.⁷¹ Thus it is not enough to grasp and describe a world full of imperfect actual triangles. Philosophy needs to grasp the necessary idea of a three sided plane figure in principle, not speculate upon it, but to see and grasp it, as given – which Husserl never doubted it is.

That is the point. Philosophy, in one of Husserl's definitions, is a *Wesenslehre der reinen Erlebnisse*,⁷² eidetic science of pure lived experiences. The phi-

⁷⁰ "Sagt 'Positivismus' soviel wie absolute vorurteilsfreie Gründung aller Wissenschaften auf das 'Positive', d.i. originär zu Erfassende, dann sind wir die echten Positivisten." *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie I (Ideas Pertaining to Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy I)*, § 20.

⁷¹ The translation of *Wesen* as *meaning* is unconventional but, I believe, justified. In *Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie 1910/II (Basic Problems of Phenomenology 1910/II; Hamburg, Felix Meiner 1992)* Husserl writes: "In der Welt kann nicht etwas sein, was den Sinn der Rede von Welt aufhebt, weil es ihn eben *als Sinn (als Wesen)* voraussetzt." (41) The conventional translation *essence* suggests something static, contained in or appertaining to an entity. The etymology of the word, however, suggests a *mode of being*, of going about the business of being, and Husserl's usage in later works, with their emphasis on *fungierende Subjektivität*, calls for a translation such as *function, nika* – or, as here, as *meaning*. I have argued as much in "Významy a vrtochy Wesen" (The Vagaries of 'Wesen'), *Reflexe* 16, 2007, N. 32, pp. 65–74.

⁷² Edmund Husserl, *Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie* (Dortrecht, Kluwer 1995), § 75.

philosopher needs see ideas, not only facts, but see them in a lived experience as we can, once we stop worrying whether a given particular “exists” and start asking instead *what it means*. We see, Husserl was convinced, not only individual facts but also ideas – principles – which individual facts contingently embody. There is nothing mystical about it. Eidetic seeing or *Wesenschau* is seeing in the usual sense, only with a different focus, on principles, not particulars. Only thanks to that can experience make sense.

Husserl’s second fundamental recognition is that the world in which we live is not the vaunted “objective” world of the sciences but rather the world of our experiencing, *Sein als Bewußtsein*, reality as experience or *phenomenon*. Not, to be sure, contingent individual experience, but experience *in principle* which Husserl, borrowing from Kant, would designate as *transcendental*. Husserl’s philosophy at this stage can legitimately be seen as close kin to the Czech version of positivism, *a positivism of the meaning-structures of the experienced world*.

The problem is that such positivism of value and meaning, the philosophy of reason, freedom and democracy against superstition and the traditional tangle of privilege, could be credible only as long as the culture’s basic value structures remained unshaken. Only then could values, on careful observation and articulation, appear unquestionable, clear and distinct and, in Husserl’s favourite term, *apodictic*. In the stable world of Austria before the First World War, it might still have so appeared. Yet the historic optimism of the nineteenth century was crumbling already in its latter half, as Nietzsche recognised and himself manifested. With that, the *positivism of value and meaning* – what Masaryk saw as the clear light of common sense – was losing its credibility. Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology, even if we regard it as an adequate response to irrationalism in principle, could not stem the irrationalist tide.

However, neither could any other philosophy. The irrationality which seized Europe after the First World War had become immune to reason. Perhaps the Enlightenment had been only too successful. In the name of rationality it expelled emotion from the realm of the rational. Yet stripped of its rationality, of Pascal’s *raisons du coeur*, emotion turns to blind passion – to resentment and to rage. Passion is deaf and blind, consumed by its own inner turmoil down to its ultimate self-destruction in a *Götterdämmerung*. So in 1945, though the Nazi Third Reich had shrunk to the four blocks around the *Führerbunker*, the young fighters of the Hitler Jugend fought doggedly to the last. Passion does not recede. It explodes until it is spent. For that matter, stunned Czechs witnessed it in the orgy of resentment and rage in the

summer of retribution at the end of the war – and, closer to home, in the viciousness of the forced collectivization in the 1950's. They could also learn, if learn they would, that rage is no less horrible or destructive for being justified, whether by wrong suffered or by an allegedly higher principle.

The metaphor of “expelling emotion from the realm of the rational” may sound general beyond any hope of operationalization, yet it is not. It refers to the systematic exclusion of sentiment from judgements of value. To this day, without even reflecting about it, we assume that the monetary value of lumber or the yield a mountain might produce as a ski resort or a radar base is rational, the love of humans for a woods or a landscape is irrational, merely subjective or emotional. We have learned to think of the human value of a forest, the *raisons du coeur*, as beyond rational calculation, equating rationalization with quantification. In the name of rationality this civilization has taken away from humans their most cherished emotional bonds. The insensitivity of our civilization to value and meaning, quantifiable in terms of specific decisions, is the operational counterpart of our metaphor.

The point is that the emotion to which we so deny its rationality becomes monstrous, truly irrational, and turns into an all destroying, self-devouring orgy. Currently we can observe it in the young generation of those Palestinians whom political rationality of the powerful robbed of their most cherished values, of homeland and human dignity. A string of American administrations were confident that they could force them to accept the unacceptable as inevitable. Now they are reaping an all-destroying, self-devouring whirlwind. History, alas, offers no dearth of such examples. Reason cannot purge itself of emotions without dramatic consequences. Rationality purged of all emotion just as emotion stripped of its rationality raise that whirlwind necessarily. Equally necessarily, they end only in exhaustion and devastation. If hope there be, it cannot be one of a triumph of Reason over emotion or of a liberation of emotion from the constraints of reason. It can only be a fusion of the two, a qualitative rationality.

That quest for fusion may be the key to understanding the conflict of realism and moralism in Masaryk or in central European positivism generally. It may also be the key to Czech national identity. Unlike nations with a less conflicted history, the Czechs cannot do without rational self-awareness, without a national philosophy. But that philosophy cannot simply duplicate the polarizations of Czech history. It needs to rise above them and fuse the contradictory poles in a broader unity. Whether those poles are Catholic, Protestant, communist, democrat or whatever, an adequate national self-

understanding would need bring them into a conflicted unity. Perhaps that is the key task of Czech national philosophy, not victory and defeat but reconciliation and rebirth.

With its distinctive fusion of positivism and moralism Czech thought was ready to enter on the philosophic scene. It had travelled a long way since its mid-nineteenth century beginnings. Once again building on virgin ground – or the proverbial green meadow – it started out open to the Enlightenment and to the romantic Idealism of its time. However, while the minds of young Czech thinkers were open, their situation required a special response. They needed to reject the claims of myth and tradition which the Austrian society of their time invoked in support of entrenched privilege. They needed open access to truth, not through revelation or mystic intuition, but by clear observation and critical reflection. They needed to test the truth claims of tradition and privilege, but also to find their own way in an unfamiliar new world. They could not make do with irony, however useful a tool Havlíček found in it. They needed positive philosophy that could offer a reliable conception of the true, the good, the beautiful on which they could, in Masaryk's words, *stand firm and sleep safely*.

Science seemed to offer all that, science and its philosophy, positivism. Czech philosophical thought was ready to discard speculation for observation, tradition for criticism. It needed to generate an understanding of truth as a reliable hypothesis, one that would not be divorced from practice. It had to take a lead in confronting the ever-new questions which rapid social development was posing. Few Czech philosophers could afford the luxury of pure speculation. The new nation and the new era called for a philosophy which, in Emanuel Rádl's words, is a *programme for reforming the world*.⁷³

Given that practical turn, Czech philosophy could not make do without a dimension of value and meaning. While Czech positivists of the day followed Brentano in rejecting Kant for his idealism, they treated moral law as one of the eidetic givens of lived experience. In the process, they had to modify Austrian positivism rather as Husserl did. In their hands, it turned

⁷³ "Great philosophy," writes Rádl, "was always close to politics and to revolutions. ... A philosopher who cannot roll up his sleeves and plunge into coarse daily work is a poor philosopher." Emanuel Rádl, *Dějiny filosofie I (History of Philosophy I; Praha, Laichter 1932)*, pp. 4, 6. Rádl cites Dewey and James, though his kinship with them is noetic, not metaphysical.

from an empirical to an experiential philosophy, with the full range of experience as datum, not sense data only. It surely would not do to overstate the similarity between Husserl and the Czech philosophy of his time. Masaryk may have been Husserl's first tutor in philosophy, but the two men continued along wholly different paths. Still, the kinship is there in Austrian positivism as the Czechs interpreted it.

By the time Masaryk was appointed as a Privatdozent in philosophy at Charles University, the pieces were all in place. The Czechs had gathered the makings of a national philosophy, romantic love of land and language coupled with a humanist idealism of freedom and justice. They had tried out philosophical tools. Now they needed a *philosopher*, a thinker who would accept the challenge of the time and forge a philosophy that could be a programme for reforming the world. Professor T. G. Masaryk was to prove to be that person.

CHAPTER FOUR

The first philosopher: T. G. Masaryk

There was something reassuring about the nineteenth century that made its historic optimism seem credible. Though individual thinkers may have sensed the coming earthquake, as Nietzsche surely did, Europeans at large retained their confidence in the paradigm of progress right until the fatal shot at Sarajevo in 1914. The Czechs, buoyed by the birth of their republic in 1918, actually retained it until the 1938 Munich Agreement⁷⁴ that set the stage for yet another world war. In defiant flashes, that optimism may have re-emerged in Czechoslovakia in moments of hope like the Czechoslovak Spring of 1968⁷⁵ or Václav Havel's short-lived *Velvet Revolution*.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Munich Agreement (chapter 5 below), signed by representatives of Germany, Italy, France and England on September 29, 1938 and accepted by the then Czechoslovak government the following day called on Czechoslovakia to surrender all its border fortifications on the pretext of transferring "Sudetenland" (see note 100 below) to Germany on ethnic grounds. The agreement left the Czechs a rump state, Czecho-Slovakia, still with a sizeable German minority, economically non-viable and militarily indefensible, and proved a major trauma which left its mark on Czech self-awareness to this day (see Ch. 8 below). Czecho-Slovakia lasted six months before Hitler occupied its Czecho- part and established therein his Protectorate Bohemia and Moravia while establishing a puppet fascist state in Slovakia.

⁷⁵ *Czechoslovak Spring* (also *Dubček Spring*) is a popular designation of a brief period of liberalization when, in 1968, the ruling Communist Party elected Alexander Dubček its First Secretary and relaxed its hold in an attempt to regain popular support. Non-communist opposition both within and without the Party took advantage of it to press for democratic socialist reforms, with overwhelming popular support. On August 21st Soviet army moved in and enabled a Soviet-approved government to launch a campaign of "normalization", restoring a rigidly authoritarian regime designated as "real socialist" for the next twenty years.

⁷⁶ The *Velvet Revolution* is a colloquial designation of the period following the collapse of Communist rule at the end of 1989. Václav Havel and other leading dis-

That lingering of nineteenth century optimism was another Czech anomaly. In the neighbouring Germany, the trauma of defeat, the humiliating peace imposed at Versailles, a devastating inflation and finally a global depression shattered the confidence of the Age of Progress. If it survived in Czechoslovakia, it may have been in great part because Masaryk, whom his triumphant return from exile at the end of the First World War transformed from a political outsider into something of a cult figure, seemed to guarantee it by his very presence and his confidence in the rational and benign order of the *kosmos*.

Masaryk's triumphant return as President-Liberator poses a problem for anyone attempting to approach professor Masaryk, the philosopher, at his philosophical labours. Everything about his war-time triumph was larger than life and laced with a fairy-tale quality. A poor country lad challenges the terrible emperor, raises an army of his friends and frees his people. Substitute a fire-breathing dragon for the emperor and you have such stuff as dreams are made on, a fairytale fit for grandmothers to tell their grandchildren by the stove of long winter's evenings. The story captured the imagination of Masaryk's countrymen. Enchanted, they spun around it the modern version of a fairytale, a genuinely heart-felt cult of personality. And best of all, it was all true!

Masaryk really was a country lad, half Slovak, half Czech, born into rural poverty in 1850, barely two years after the final abolition of serfdom. A kindly priest recognised his talent and helped launch his education. By dint of ability and diligence, he was able to support himself at school as a tutor to the son of a high police official. This position made it possible for him to study, attending along with his charge Vienna's Academic Gymnasium, the breeding ground of Austrian statesmen and diplomats. Thanks to modest expectations and prodigious diligence, he subsequently managed to support himself at the University with occasional lectures and tutorials. When he married an American of Huguenot descent, he adopted her family name *Garrigue* as his middle name, giving rise to the initials that would become famous, TGM. At thirty-

sidents filled the vacated administrative positions, following a policy of political democratization while seeking to preserve the country's social support system. In 1992 they lost the election, due in great part to political inexperience. They were replaced by a nationalist party in Slovakia and in the Czech lands by a neoliberal one, committed to *building unqualified capitalism*, promising the voters quick gain from "privatizing" state assets, over which, somewhat ironically, Václav Havel came to preside in his largely ceremonial post of President.

two, his record was sufficiently impressive to get him an entry-level faculty appointment at the newly opened Czech branch of the university in Prague. He continued to teach there until retirement age, contributing significantly to the formation of modern Czech identity both by his scholarly contributions and by his part in the various controversies of his time. Though widely known and respected, he remained a lone voice on the national scene.

That changed in 1914, when he would have reached retirement age, were he the retiring type. He was not. Over the years he had become sufficiently familiar with Austrian politics to realise that, with the First World War, the old multinational Austria, common home of eleven small nations, was doomed. If victorious, post-war Austria, dominated by its General Staff, would become the spearhead of German expansion to the Balkans, with little patience for ethnic diversity. Were it to lose, it would disintegrate into a no man's land open for German colonisation. Masaryk chose to go into exile to persuade the allies to prevent such an outcome by replacing the Habsburg monarchy with independent nation states. He convinced them in no small part by organising an army of some 120 000 Czech exiles and prisoners of war to fight against Austria on the side of the Allies. In the four years of war, Masaryk and the Czech Legions gained Allied recognition and the status of an ally for future Czechoslovakia to whose presidency he was acclaimed even before his return.

Masaryk's victorious return at the head of those *Czech legions* was truly an overwhelming triumph. His greater life-long achievement, though, may have been his success in nurturing the new Czechoslovak state into a democracy. That was not at all a simple matter. Throughout east central Europe, movements of national liberation tended to have a distinctly conservative cast which fear of the Russian revolution only reinforced. In fact, in all the successor states from Estonia down to Yugoslavia authoritarian regimes with fascist leanings took over, one after another. Only in the Czech lands, for reasons we cited earlier, was the innate conservatism of the nationalists tempered by a democratic commitment in the tradition of the Enlightenment. Masaryk greatly encouraged that commitment in his pre-war work, both by his teaching and by personal example. Then, as President, he managed to prevent a fascist take-over by general Radola Gajda⁷⁷ and preserve

⁷⁷ Radola Gajda (orig. Rudolf Geidl) (1892–1948), a drifter who emerged in Siberia during First World War and, claiming military experience, made a spectacular career in the Czech legions, then forming. In 1926 he was dishonourably discharged from Czechoslovak army for plotting a fascist coup. He became the head of the National

Czechoslovakia as an island of Western democracy amid the fascist-leaning successor states in what once had been the Austrian and partly the Russian Empire. To his death, Masaryk remained the embodiment of what was bright and noble about the new state. After his death and the disintegration of Czechoslovakia, he remained a symbol for the valiant second struggle for freedom in yet another war. The last flash came during the Prague Spring of 1968. Since then, with the passing of another generation under Communist rule, he has become a plaster saint of antiquarians with little knowledge and less understanding of his thought and significance.⁷⁸

The drift of professor Masaryk into venerated irrelevance is understandable. The brilliance and high drama of *President Liberator* made his philosophical career seem insufferably dull by comparison. Yet Masaryk did live a whole life time, until retirement age, as a philosophy professor and a campaigner for the integrity of Czech culture and society. He took an interest in politics, was twice elected to the Austrian Parliament, but was not a professional politician. Year after year, he prepared his lectures at the University. In the long term, his life-long philosophical contribution to building a critical Czech self-understanding, spanning an entire academic career, may well prove as important as his fifteen active years as statesman. Still it remains largely a *terra incognita* for most Czechs, including most Czech intellectuals.⁷⁹

Sodality of Fascists. Though during the Second World War he kept a low profile, he was sentenced to two years in prison after the war, ostensibly for collaboration though the true reason may well have been that he was such an utter rotter.

⁷⁸ Masaryk biographies in Czech are a legion, in world languages the pickings are slimmer. Perhaps the best introductory collection is *T. G. Masaryk, The Spirit of Thomas G. Masaryk (1850–1937): An Anthology*, edited by George J. Kovtun (London, Macmillan for Masaryk Publications Trust 1980) which provides a spectrum of Masaryk's writings sufficient for a basic understanding. Secondary works include the old favourite, Karel Čapek, *President Masaryk Tells His Story* (London, Allan and Unwin 1937); and W. Preston Warren, *Masaryk's Democracy* (London, Allan and Unwin 1941) in English, Ernst Rychnowsky, *Masaryk* (Praha, Státní nakladatelství 1930) in German and Alain Soubigou, *Thomas Masaryk* (Paris, Librairie Arthème Fayard 2002) in French. My personal favourite, Emil Ludwig, *Geist und Tat*, was apparently written in German but I have found only a Czech edition, *Duch a čin (Spirit and Deed; Praha, Čin 1935)*.

⁷⁹ In Czech, Masaryk's writings are widely available, most recently in a critical edition being prepared by the Masaryk Institute of the Academy of Science of the Czech Republic. There are also numerous secondary works, both by philosophers (as J. L. Hromádka, Milan Machovec, Olga Loužilová, Lubomír Nový) and histori-

The problem is not one of intelligibility. It was German idealist philosophers who prided themselves on the obscurity of their pronouncements. Many of their students believe to this day that *if it is intelligible, it cannot be philosophy*. By contrast, in Austrian – and especially Czech – philosophy the emphasis was on clarity and communication, *If it is not intelligible, it is not philosophy*. Philosophy must communicate. Masaryk, just as Rádł or the Czech positivists, sought to write for the intelligent layperson. In his case, clarity rather than obscurity may be the problem. Because his views can be summed up in a clear, intelligible statement, few of his would-be followers – with noble exceptions like J. L. Hromádka or Jan Patočka – troubled to probe deeper, posing the critical questions of *what does it mean? whereon is it based? whither does it lead?* For the most part, Masaryk's followers were content to accept a simplistic summary and write off Masaryk as superficial, at most declaring they “agree” – or more recently “disagree” – with him, as if it were possible to “agree” or “disagree” with something we do not understand.

First, then, what did Masaryk believe? He belonged to the generation which took it as its task to free humanity from the tangled cobweb of superstition in the name of critical reason. In Austria, where history manoeuvred the Roman Church into the role of the ideological arm of an oppressive conservative regime, that was not hard to believe. *Science*, vaguely defined, offered itself as the cutting edge of reason. Masaryk invoked its method and its authority repeatedly in his struggle with superstition. He understood it experientially, as common sense systematized, and treated the turn to science as a turn to the objectivity of living, breathing reality in immediate lived experience.

For Masaryk, that *objectivity* – a term he frequently used as a synonym of *healthy* as against decadent *subjectivity* – was by no means value-free or value-neutral. Value structure appeared to him as build into reality in its primacy. While relying on *science* as a means of access to what is real, true and good, he considered precisely the value-structure of reality, its *meaning*, the most important subject of scientific study. and saw no contradiction therein. The connection between the empirical material on which he relies in books

ans (Jaroslav Opat, Jiří Kovtun). In world languages the translations are unsystematic, in great part hagiographic. Perhaps best of the sources mentioned earlier is in French, Alain Soubigou, *Thomas Masaryk*, op. cit., thorough, reliable and replete with bibliographic references. In English, there is perhaps the only attempt to think through Masaryk as a philosopher, W. Preston Warren, *Masaryk's Democracy*, op. cit., showing its age but still valuable.

like *Suicide and the Meaning of Civilization*, *The Social Question*⁸⁰ or *The Spirit of Russia* and the value structure and judgements in terms of which he understands the meaning of that material is often tenuous. Frequently, he resorts to literary depiction rather than empirical research, perhaps precisely because fiction avoids the temptation to separate particular material and its meaning. For Masaryk, the world is the experienced world, *ab initio* value laden and meaningfully ordered. The sciences need but observe and describe the meaningful ordering given overtly in lived experience.

The mainspring of that meaningful ordering appears to be *progress*. Masaryk's generation saw in the rapid technological change of its time a token of social change as well. For Masaryk, however, *progress* did not mean only or even primarily increasing technological efficiency in releasing energy. The most appropriate metaphor for progress as he conceived of it would be Aristotelean, *growth*, the growth of all things living to their maturity. In a way, Masaryk anticipates process philosophy as it culminates in John Dewey for whom it is *growth* that is both the meaning and the measure of progress. *Growth* is the basis of value and the foundation of morality.

In Masaryk's thought, that has two aspects, one individual, the other social. For each individual human, it is growth to full maturity that is the meaning and measure of value. Maturity means the full realisation of human potential, of the *humanitas* or *ideal of humanity* which figures so prominently in Masaryk's writings. Masaryk understands it in a Kantian sense as living in freedom and responsibility. Human beings remain incomplete, immature, as long as they live under the tutelage of another. The process of full human self-realisation is one of assuming the responsibility of freedom of one's choices and for the impact of one's actions. The aim and measure of a person is growth to full maturity, so understood.

The social aspect is the counterpart of individual growth. Masaryk judges societies by the extent to which they enable and encourage their members to grow to the full stature of their humanity. Just as his life-long educational effort was aimed at helping Czechs grow to personal maturity, so his political effort was aimed at building a society of such persons, living together in freedom and mutual respect. The great value of democracy for him is not just as a bloodless solution for the problem of succession but precisely as a culmination of such growth of free societies. A subject of a ruler who claims

⁸⁰ Excerpts of Masaryk's *Otázka sociální*, literally *The Social Question*, appeared in English as *Masaryk on Marx* (Lewisburg, Bucknell University Press 1972). For other titles, see bibliography.

to rule by divine mandate or by right of revealed truth remains less than free and so immature.

Democracy by contrast means a transfer of responsibility for public matters to the individual citizens in their freedom and responsibility. It is, Masaryk emphasises, a way of life based on a willingness to hear out the other and seek mutually acceptable solutions – or, in his shorthand, based on discussion. Ultimately, it is not a matter of a majority imposing its will on a minority. It is the willingness of the majority to consider and seek to incorporate the needs of the minority. A government with a majority of a single vote which wholly disregards the needs and desires of the other side is no longer democratic, now matter how it was elected. Hence the oft quoted and seldom understood claim that *Democracy means discussion*.

Masaryk bases his interpretation of history on this conception of human growth to the maturity of freedom and responsibility. He sees it as a clash of two alternatives. One assumes humans are not capable of making their own decisions and so need a guardian over them. Such a guardian reigns over them invariably in the name of alleged greater wisdom or higher truth, whether that higher truth is supposed to be a divine mandate or Marxism-Leninism. All such rule claims that it protects humans from error, though at the cost of keeping them in permanent immaturity. Masaryk calls it *theocracy*. With that he contrasts democracy, taken quite literally as *demos*-cracy, a rule of the people as against the rule of a privileged few, a rule in which free citizens assume the responsibility for their fortunes. History makes sense in terms of the growth to maturity which democracy fosters but which needs constantly to overcome the aristocratic – or in Masaryk, *theocratic* – danger and temptation to shed our responsibility and let another take it over for us. That is the struggle of *theocracy against democracy*. In modern history, seen through Czech eyes, it is a continuous development since the Reformation. The crisis of the Great War with its dreadful carnage represented for Masaryk the final, decisive cataclysm, theocracy's last desperate gasp and the final triumph of democracy, of human freedom and maturity. It was in that sense that not only Masaryk, but also Woodrow Wilson could call the Great War the war to end all wars.

Such is the schema, fusing a personal philosophy with a philosophy of history, which Masaryk sees not only as built into the nature of things but as overseen by Providence. Masaryk was not a superstitious person. He did not imagine God as a *deus ex machina* intervening magically in human affairs. He did, though, have a strong sense of the presence of the eternal. His struggle with the decaying feudalism of the Habsburg monarchy inevitably led

him into conflict with the Roman Catholic hierarchy which, together with the Army and the bureaucracy, was one of the three pillars of the Habsburg throne. Yet it never led him into a conflict with religion. Not even his parting of the ways with the Reformed church over the divinity of the Christ did that. Masaryk lived all his life with a sense of living under the eyes of God or, as he liked to put it, *sub specie aeternitatis*, from the viewpoint of eternity. He deeply internalised the morality of the Gospels summed up in the Sermon on the Mount.⁸¹ Emphatically, he was not a petty moralist, as Rádl at times was, yet were we to choose one aspect of Masaryk's thought as a key to the whole, it would definitely be his conviction that all philosophy and all politics alike need be rooted in a *moral point of view*. More than anything else, Masaryk's thought stems from the primacy of practical reason.

Such, in the briefest of outlines, is the philosophy which Masaryk never worked out systematically but presented in fragments throughout his work, as appropriate. His was genuinely an experiential philosophising, always triggered by a problem in lived experience and focused on its resolution. When Emanuel Rádl asserts in his famous overstatement that *philosophy is a programme for reforming the world*,⁸² he could be speaking of Masaryk. When, though, a philosopher looks critically at the collection of fragments from more than a dozen of Masaryk's books written in response to equally many situations, the coherence comes to seem problematic. So do individual claim when no longer supported by a coherent system. For each individual claim – such as the central role of progress, the role of growth in life and history, history as struggle of growth against the inertia of custom or the conception of Providence – come to appear individually ambiguous. Its meaning stands out only when it is supported and interpreted by a network of overarching postulates which Masaryk seldom makes explicit. Perhaps that, too, is why Masaryk's philosophy is little known and less understood. We need to return to the material we have just outlined, though this time critically, inquiring into its unstated assumptions.

⁸¹ Masaryk's religious views attracted more than the usual number of hack commentators with little knowledge of his writings and less understanding of religion. There are, however, two commentators, both theologians, friendly and critical toward Masaryk, who speak to the issue on its own high level. One is Karel Skalický (footnote 87 below), the other Josef Lukl Hromádka (footnote 105 below). Both see not religious but only political significance in Masaryk's negative attitude to revelation, used to justify secular pretensions of the Church.

⁸² Emanuel Rádl, *Dějiny filosofie I (History of Philosophy I)*, op. cit., p. 5.

The notion of *progress*, once acclaimed for its antecedents and discredited today by its consequences from nuclear weapons to the ecological crisis, may well be central. Though Masaryk seldom spoke in those terms, the perennial undertone of his way of encountering the world seems to have been *growth* in almost the metaphysical sense which, as we noted, another practical moralist, John Dewey, elaborated half a century later. Both men make the leap from descriptive to prescriptive for which Patočka reproaches Masaryk. The reality of development in the natural world, here renamed *growth*, acquires moral significance in the world of human freedom. Masaryk's confidence in *growth*, grounded in the science of his day, acquires a distinctive colouring of moral improvement. Science and morality are thus tenuously overarched by the idea of *progress* as the age of steam and electricity understood it. The unstated assumption here is that reality is rather an orderly place, endowed with a law both natural and moral which can be read off in the Book of Nature much as the mediaevals sought to read it in the books of the Bible.

As science reads the book of nature, the entire creation – or, in secular terms, all there is – presents itself as a *process*, developing from primitive beginnings to ever more complex and perfect forms. Emanuel Rádl traced it in his *History of Evolutionary Theories (Dějiny vývojových teorií)*. This postulate, however, was applied rather indiscriminately to nature and to technology as well as to morals. Yes, unlike natural growth, technological and moral progress is human responsibility, but reality favours it, so to speak, *cheers it on*. That we took in with our mothers' fairy tales: whenever humans do battle with the wrong or the bad, the drift of things helps carry their efforts ever onward. J. B. Kozák, another Czech philosopher, captured the faith of the time when he wrote that *nothing humans can do or fail to do can ultimately reverse the growth of the creation to higher and nobler stages of development*.⁸³

For Kozák that was not a reasoned conclusion as much as an ingrained conviction so obvious as to need no further evidence. In Masaryk's nineteenth century, though few would have so articulated it, all still shared it, deep in their bones, convinced that for all the evil in the world the *kosmos* or creation is ultimately benign and guided by Providence to ever greater perfection. Are not the miracles of steam and electricity proof enough? For

⁸³ That is his confession of faith as I remember it from J. B. Kozák, *Podle cesty (Along the Way)*, Praha, Knihovna národního osvobození 1948). The entire book is carried by that sentiment. Compare also his much earlier *Proslovy k neviděným (Speaking to the Unseen)*, Praha, Knihovna Svazu národního osvobození 1935), radio lectures from the years 1929–1934.

most Europeans of the age, they were. They might have had their moments of hesitation, as Rudyard Kipling in his *Recessional*, yet, like Kipling, they went on to preach the gospel of the Empire, much as the Americans do today, heedless of evidence. Surely, just by the nature of things, things *must* be getting better!

Masaryk was born into that optimism at mid-century. More prosaically, he was born into rural poverty in south-eastern Moravia, not more than two hours journey from Prostějov where the Husserl family owned a small factory. He was by eight years Husserl's senior and, when the two befriended each other as countrymen in Leipzig in 1874, could tutor Husserl in philosophy. Thereafter their ways were to part. Both, though, retained something of Masaryk's positivist faith in clear observation and faithful articulation as the way to truth as well as Masaryk's sense of a crisis of certainty.⁸⁴ Husserl's late writings suggest they may have shared Masaryk's moral emphasis as well.⁸⁵ Both, however, saw that crisis as a critical but transient stage on the march of history, reassured by history's drift to perfection or at least to perennial improvement. Masaryk blamed the occasional set-backs on a "subjectivism" which loses all confidence in reality, Husserl blamed it analogously on an objectivism which loses all awareness of meaning. Both, though, shared the conviction that the positivist posture of clear seeing and faithful articulation of the meaning structure of lived experience could be applied to questions of value and meaning as much as to questions of technology and so could cope with the crisis, whatever it was. "Meaning is also a fact," Masaryk was to write, and, like any fact, is simply *there* to be seen and described.⁸⁶

For all the sense of crisis which shows up repeatedly in Masaryk's lectures, a historical optimism breathes from all of his writings and makes

⁸⁴ Jan Patočka's treatment of the topic, "Masaryk's and Husserl's Conception of the Spiritual Crisis of European Humanity", is one of his articles available in English. See Erazim Kohák, *Jan Patočka* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press 1989), pp. 145–156.

⁸⁵ See esp. his *Wiener Vortrag (Vienna Lecture)*, in print as one of the appendices appended as "Die Krisis des europäischen Menschentums und die Philosophie" (Philosophy and the Crisis of European Humanity) to his *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie (Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology)*, op. cit., pp. 314–348.

⁸⁶ Frequently quoted statements such as *meaning is also a fact* or the familiar *Truth prevail* come for the most part from Karel Čapek's *President Masaryk Tells His Story*,

him a great supporter of what the time regarded as sound common sense and of a humanity healthy in mind and body, vigorous, strong, striving to ever greater fulfilment of human promise. Understandably: if the structure of meaning and value is out there in what was then called the “objective world”, then a healthy attitude would be an outward looking one. Truth is not mysterious. It is there to be seen, perhaps unknown as yet, but not unknowable. Truth is overt, not hidden. Humans live well as long as they live with the full vigour of their humanity and do not become embroiled in the convoluted self-examinations of the Romantics. Needless to say, *The Sorrows of Young Werther* were not Masaryk’s favourite reading.

Masaryk fully shared the visionary fervour of the Czech gymnastic movement, Sokol – though he offended more vocal patriots in its ranks by pointing out that it drew heavily on the German *Turnvereine*. Later, he responded positively to the “ideals of scouting” to which Lord Baden-Powell and his Czech disciple, A. B. Svojsík, introduced the young of his era. Though opposed to violence, he admitted to Karel Čapek that he found the light-hearted camaraderie of soldiers appealing. *Mens sana in corpore sano*. After all, if – as Augustine taught and Masaryk firmly believed – evil is no positive force but, ontologically at least, a deformation of the good, really a sickness of a fundamentally good creation, then healthy, full life is the way to counter it.

That is a recurrent theme throughout Masaryk’s life, or actually one of two such themes, complementary yet distinct. One theme comes to the fore most distinctly when Masaryk tries to understand the cataclysmic horror of the world war. In seeking to understand that horrendous slaughter, Masaryk did not seek to justify or excuse the horror, as some of the younger post-modern writers accuse him of doing, but to understand how it was possible at all, in an age of progress and in the most cultured, most advanced nation in Europe.

He offers two kinds of explanation. One is rooted in the conception of life as growth from deprived and depraved beginnings to the fullness of its promise. From that perspective evil appears as a throwback, a left-over of a more primitive stage of development. From Masaryk’s nineteenth century

op. cit., Part 3, “Thought and Life”. Somewhat ironically, that is the only systematic presentation of Masaryk’s philosophical views, unfortunately filtered through Karel Čapek’s rather impressionistic reporting. Čapek has Masaryk saying that his philosophy is contained in his life and his deeds. I should add, also in the margins of his works devoted to concrete problems. That may be a rather more reliable source on which I have in fact largely relied.

viewpoint, the most recent such earlier stage was that of the late feudal society which denied to most humans any standing as free citizens, reducing them to the status of subjects of lords and masters who claimed divine authorization to rule over them, *Dei gratia*. In our time, *TRUTH*, interpreted as the correct ideology, has come to function as such a justification. The Communists based their right to rule on their possession of the one saving *TRUTH*, *MARXISM-LENINISM*. In the West, Science sought to advance the same claim, though without overt police assistance, at least if we overlook the American policy of exporting *DEMOCRACY* by force of arms in recent years.

In Masaryk's time, the religious metaphor was still more common than the Marxist or the quasi-scientific one and so Masaryk described all such authoritarian rule as *theocracy*. That he regarded as the clammy hand of the past holding back presumptively inevitable progress to freedom and equality in which all humans – paraphrasing Kant – can become subjects of their lives, not objects only. That was the promise of participation of all citizens in the affairs of the *body politic* which Masaryk called democracy. The eruption of evil which was the First World War thus appeared to him as a desperate attempt of the past to hold back the future by force – and, in part, it was also that. In any case, one way Masaryk sought to explain the brute, monstrous presence of evil in the world he perceived as fundamentally good was as backwardness. Evil is the inertia of history, a throwback to an earlier stage, perhaps a stage when humans settled their differences on the field of battle rather than in democratic discussion.

It is a powerful conviction, and not at all facile, as it might have seemed on our first reading. More than anything else, it is the confidence in the healing power of progress that enabled Europeans to live with the loss of God's consoling presence. Masaryk speaks of it in religious imagery, as Providence, though he does not seem to understand it in the sense of Baroque superstition as a personified figure selectively interfering in the course of the world. Far more, Providence appears to represent his profound faith in the creation's *drift to the Good*, based on his sense of the primacy of life over death in a profound Augustinian sense. It seems rooted in the conviction that whatever is, would rather be than perish, so that a lean favouring the good is in a sense built into the very make-up of reality. It is the thrust of all things living to life, not to perishing. In such a system, evil is an intruder. Though at times, especially in his old age, Masaryk used the idiom of his time, what we have called his historic optimism was never a facile, superficial confidence that *everything will turn out well*. Readers who so explain him are reading into Masaryk something that simply is not there. Masaryk's optimism is

a sober and profound confidence in the power of life over death, of good over evil.

Masaryk's second explanation of evil makes that clear. It is still Augustinian, regarding evil as a deterioration of the good, essentially parasitic, rather than a reality equiprimordial with the good. In this response, though, Masaryk does not resort to the imagery of progress. The base of his stance, stated in the language of another era altogether, is a profound conviction of the ontological primacy of life over death, of good over evil. Therein Masaryk, though critical of Church dogma in principle, never deviated into Manichaeism. He never dignified evil with the status of positive being, as if there were two primordial realities, one good, the other evil, but equiprimordial. For Masaryk, the good is always primary, the real and the true, as Augustine would have it. Evil is secondary, something that comes about in the process of living and being. Evil can be a reversion to a more primitive stage on the path of growth, as Masaryk explains it on a straightforward positivist model. It can, however, also be a subsequent deterioration of the good, a sickness which comes to afflict a good creation.

Here Masaryk uses a philosophical rather than a religious metaphor. He sees the sickness in what, consistently with his whole outlook on life, he somewhat idiosyncratically calls *subjectivism*, the preoccupation with oneself, turning away from the healthy assurance of outgoing objective life to egoism, narcissism and ultimately solipsism. For Masaryk, the solipsist is the epitome of the sick soul. His sickness is a preoccupation with oneself, health is orientation outward, to the world. Somewhat ironically, though his own moral views were strongly Kantian, Masaryk, under Brentano's influence, rejected Kant precisely because of what he considered his subjectivism. He did not at the time appear to have known Kierkegaard's penetrating studies of the *sickness unto death* but found ample material in Dostoyevski. One of his most perceptive analyses points out that persons who lose touch with the objective world, the world of sunshine, of the work and the joy of living, begin to doubt their own reality – and tend to strike out at the world in order to reassure themselves of it. Subjectivists end up killing, either themselves or others. Murder and suicide, Masaryk is convinced, are equally ineffectual, desperate attempts at reality testing.

The theme of subjectivism, understood as turning away from the world with its challenges and opportunities into a morbid preoccupation with oneself, is one of Masaryk's life-long concerns. It is characteristic of his *Social Question* as well as of his *The Spirit of Russia*; we encounter already in his earliest work, *Suicide and the Meaning of Civilization*. That *modern civilization*

encourages humans to turn within, as, ironically, Husserl with his wholly different conception of subjectivity does at the conclusion of his *Cartesian Meditations*.⁸⁷ For Masaryk, it is the inward turn which leads humans to lose touch with life-giving reality. In his *Suicide*, though, that reality is still represented somewhat surprisingly by religion, complete with the Church as an objective norm of faith and practice. Still, Masaryk's cure for the disease of solipsism is consistent with his life-long work. It is to break out of subjectivity and throw oneself into the full objectivity of living. One of Jean-Paul Sartre's protagonists sums it up succinctly: "Tu t'occupes trop de toi, Henri, tu veux sauver la vie. Bah! Il faut travailler, on se sauve par-dessus de la marche."⁸⁸

Masaryk, however, did not regard that call to manly vigour as an arbitrary outburst of mere will to live. Though a self-confessed Platonist, honouring the transcendently normative truth of Ideas (and so slipping Kant's moral law into the system once more in spite of its overt rejection), he had deeply internalized an Aristotelean conception of growth. Whatever lives, begins life in potency and promise and so bears within it what today we would call a programme leading to its full self-realization. That is the basic dynamic, the basic *movement*, of all there is. In a static reality, *what is* is what is and ought be no other. In such reality, there can be no reality since there is no *might be* or *ought to be* with which we could compare *what is*. *Because* for Masaryk reality is not static, we can make such a comparison, judging *what is* in terms of *what ought to be* and *what will be*.

In the case of humans, what ought to be and will be is the ideal of humanity, the *humanitas*, which Masaryk, though drawing on Auguste Comte, once again visualised in a distinctly Kantian way. It is human reason, enabling humans to place a remove between themselves and whatever happens to be actual. That is what enables them to visualise – really, to *see* – what is thus far only possible alongside of what happens to be actual. Therein lies human freedom, the ability to choose among rationally seen alternatives among which the actual is but one possibility.

The corollary is that once their course of action is no longer thrust upon them by fate or fortune but becomes something they have chosen, humans

⁸⁷ Husserl quotes Augustine: "In te redi, in interiore homine habitat veritas." Edmund Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen (Cartesian Meditations)*; Haag, Martinus Nijhoff 1973), p. 183.

⁸⁸ "You worry too much about yourself, Henry. You want to save your life. Bah! There is work to be done. You save yourself just by the way!" J.-P. Sartre, *Morts sans sépulchres* (Paris, Gallimard 2000), translation mine.

also become responsible for it. That, as we have already noted, is for Masaryk the fullness of humanity: life in freedom and responsibility. The task of humans is to grow from irresponsibility – that is, from a stage when another decides for them and bears responsibility for them – to mature humanity, in which humans claim freedom and accept responsibility. Thus while Milan Machovec's⁸⁹ reading of Masaryk as a proto-existentialist may be unconvincing, given Masaryk's historical optimism and the entire temper of his life, it is hardly groundless.

Given Masaryk's emphasis on a healthy objectivity, a subjectivistic ethic, as the Kantian can become, inevitably appears inadequate. In fact, in his *The Ideals of Humanity* Masaryk draws on Bentham and Mill as well. Since he is confident that beneath the many formulations there is one objective scale of value on which any ethic will be based and that it is there to be *seen*, he can accept a variety of forms as so many diverse perspectives on the Good without falling into relativism. Fundamentally, the values he regards as central are the values of the Enlightenment, values of free and reasonable humanity, derived from personal freedom, from equality of freedom and dignity and from a generous good will toward all. Or, in traditional terms, they are the values of *Liberté, égalité, fraternité!* The great values of the democratic revolution are very much Masaryk's values, too, though he himself derives them from the biblical command of loving one's neighbour.

"My socialism," he told Karel Čapek, "is simply love of neighbour, humanity."⁹⁰ That love, however, must not become something abstract. It needs to find its realization in meaningful, purposeful work, in tangible coping with misery and injustice. Masaryk's stance here may in some sense reflect his memory of the echoes of serfdom and rural poverty. He speaks from experience when he compares the way the unfree toil – he was born only two years after the formal abolition of serfdom – unwillingly, resentfully, under duress, with the work of humans – men who find their self-realization in their labour. That is not an echo of Marx on alienated labour. It is the direct

⁸⁹ Milan Machovec (1925–2003), the sole dissident philosopher to take Masaryk's philosophical bequest seriously, wrote his book *Masaryk* (Praha, Melantrich 1968) during the brief thaw of the Czechoslovak Spring. It was Masaryk's humanism that most distinctly marked his work. In his late years, he recognised that in the environmental crisis humankind stands face to face with its destruction. See Milan Machovec, *Filosofie tváře tvář zániku* (*Philosophy Confronting Perishing*; Praha, Nakladatelství Zvláštní vydání 1998).

⁹⁰ Karel Čapek, *President Masaryk Tells His Story*, op. cit., p. 97.

experience of the toil of serfs and the labour of free farmers, or even of the same people on the lord's and on their own land. That, too, was a part of the joy of objectivity whose obverse was Masaryk's distrust of subjectivity, self-preoccupation, egoism.

Was Masaryk a religious believer? He unquestionably considered religion a crucial component of being human. As a lad, he identified with Roman Catholicism, the official faith of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and personal faith of his mother, strongly religious in the superstitious ways of the peasant. However, in spite of his emphasis on healthy objectivity, he soon found the ecclesiastical objectification of faith unsatisfactory. He transferred his allegiance to the Czech Reformed Church and remained a practicing member for many years. He withdrew only when the Rev. dr Karafiát⁹¹ published an article pointing out that for all his invoking of New Testament morality Masaryk's insistence on the historical Jesus, rejecting the risen Christ of revelation, is not compatible with Christianity.

Karafiát was the author of the much beloved children's classic, *The Fireflies* whose protagonists were, somewhat improbably, Reformed protestant fireflies and for several generations a model of Czech Brethern family life. He was also a rather rigid, dogmatic theologian for whom Masaryk just was not orthodox enough, possibly with good reason.⁹² Masaryk was a fundamentally open person, incapable of dogmatism, with little patience with dogma. In any case, after Karafiát's attack he stopped attending worship services, ap-

⁹¹ Jan Karafiát (1846–1929) never reconciled himself even to the reunion of the two denominations permitted under Habsburg rule, his own Reformed and the Lutheran, in one Czech Brethren Protestant Church. However, his *Broučci* (*Fireflies*) were so genuine confession of Reformed piety that most people were willing to overlook his rigidity. His book was so popular that even the Communist regime permitted it, albeit with all religious references excised, reminding the reader of a high Mass with no reference to God.

⁹² By far the best analysis is by Karel Skalický, "Myšlení krize a negace zjevení" (Thought of Crisis and Rejection of Revelation), *Listy* 37, 2007, N. 4, pp. 26–30, unfortunately only in Czech. Skalický points out that Masaryk's rejection of revelation is part of his struggle against the Habsburg dynasty and its use of the Church for its legitimation, but that in terms of life-long participation in what the Apostolic confession calls *the communion of saints*, his New Testament morality and his profound personal piety Masaryk's allegiance to Christianity is legitimate. Ironically, the Rev. dr Karafiát was a Reformed minister, the Rev. dr Skalický is a Roman Catholic priest and theologian.

parently concluding that the Reformed Church was no less dogmatic than the Roman Catholic. For his funeral service, he chose a rather mystical reading from the Book of Revelation.

The basic truth is that Masaryk continued to live with a constant sense of God's presence, guidance and calling. In his personal practice as well as in numerous statements, his faith was deeply personal, a life lived *sub specie aeternitatis*, seeing, judging, deciding, living every day in the presence of God. This and not a theological dogma is both the source and the meaning of his conception of providence: even history is never devoid of the dimension of the sacred. It was as if his wholehearted living in a world of objective reality created a need of interiority which he could not integrate systematically with his views, yet could sense necessary for growth to full humanity.

Here, as in so many other respects – for instance in his conviction that Austria ought to be preserved but needed to undergo a social revolution – his often rather individualistic views, forged in a genuine personal struggle, ended up sounding rather like social democratic positions on the issues in question. So it was in this case the conviction that religion is a personal matter. Masaryk was a democrat to the marrow of his bones, and a man of keen social conscience. His views could hardly have been other.

Masaryk's understanding of democracy, too, had a strong social and personal aspect. Though a cultured man, accused by some Communist journalists of aristocratic bearing, Masaryk remained a man of the people, a democrat by birth, by conviction and by instinct. His democracy appears to have grown out of his philosophical conviction of growth as the fundamental principle of the reality. In the case of humans, that growth meant for him a progression to moral autonomy. It is, after all, freedom, the ability to choose for good reasons and to accept responsibility for one's acts, that is the defining human trait. Perhaps that is another manifestation of his basically Kantian Enlightenment perspective, but it was in any case Masaryk's deep conviction.

That freedom, though, is something humans as individuals and as a kind inherit only in potency. They have yet to grow into it, become fully what they potentially are. Throughout his writing, Masaryk shows that he treasures in humans the capacity for growing into the full responsibility of freedom. That is reflected in his conception of the human community. As long as it is a community of unfree subjects for whom another decides and bears responsibility – in Masaryk's terms, as long as it remains a *theocracy* – it falls short of the full human potential. It reaches its full potential only as a community of free and responsible individuals who take an active part in the

life of the body politic, not necessarily as politicians, but as members of the *polis*.

This is the source of Masaryk's conception of *unpolitical politics*. Masaryk originally coined the term in his struggle with the civic indifference which he regarded as a result both of the many generations of autocratic Habsburg rule and of the more recent disenchantment with politics after the the Austro-Hungarian settlement of 1867. At that time, Czech loyalty to Austria in the Prussian-Austrian war failed to bring the Czech crown similar concessions as to the Crown of Hungary. Understandably, Hungary was a distinct entity whose political elite was ethnically monolithic. Thus, in spite of its mute ethnic minorities, Hungary could be separated off without protest, given its own parliament and linked to the German part of the dual monarchy solely by a personal union. The Czechs stressed that the Czech lands, too, were such a distinct entity, with its own parliament and traditions. However, here more than a third of the population were ethnically German, culturally continuous with the German majority in the Austrian part of the monarchy. Its political elite was bitterly divided. The German minority had for three hundred years been part of the dominant majority in a German Austria. Quite understandably, their spokesmen were not willing to agree to the status of a minority in a separate Czech Kingdom, even one linked to Austria by the person of the sovereign. In a unitary German Austria – the designation was Cisleithania, the lands on this side of the river Leitha – Bohemian and Austrian Germans safely constituted a dominant majority. In Czech lands alone, even though linked to Austria by a personal union, ethnic Germans would inevitably have become a minority. The Czech dream, a triple monarchy – in effect a federal Austria – was utterly unacceptable to the German nationalists and so to Vienna. Emperor Franz Joseph I, though bearing the title, would not even have himself crowned King of Bohemia.

Czech deputies in the Austrian parliament, the *Reichsrat*, responded with a boycott until the Czech lands should be given a status comparable to that of Hungary – which, for reasons cited, meant never. Masaryk favoured an active stance, pointing out that, even if the Czechs have little chance of taking part in activities political in the narrow sense, sulking is not citizenship – and neither is mute submission. The Czechs could still significantly affect their lot by other civic activities, cultural, educational, municipal. That, too, affects the *polis* and so represents a “political” activity, though it is non-political in the usual narrow sense of exercising power and bearing responsibility for the state. Basically, Masaryk was saying, though we cannot affect matters

of *state*, we can build up our *nation* as a cultural entity in a shared state. So there we have it, a century before Havel – the unpolitical politics.

The significance of the term is broader. Democracy for Masaryk was never simply a way of legitimating a government by casting ballots. Certainly, even that is better than leaving the choice of the ruler up to the outcome of a civil war or up to blind heredity. But the significance of democracy for Masaryk is that it allows people to mature into free and equal citizens who take part in and accept responsibility for matters politic. European monarchies, the Habsburg monarchy included, had a strong tradition of pacifying the populace by letting it cast ballots while retaining all power, in effect living their political lives for them. Austrian emperors, much like many later presidents, always assumed that the role of the subjects ended with the election of a government. After that, their only role was to work, waltz and pay taxes. In the period between Munich and the German annexation in March, 1939, of which more anon, that is what the right-wing parties advocated as *authoritative* or *directed* democracy. President Václav Klaus to this day regards civic activities as the biggest threat to democracy, as in his famous statement that *NGOism is worse than Communism*, producing merriment abroad and consternation at home.

That is what Masaryk counters with his conception of democracy as offering all citizens the opportunity to grow to the fullness of their humanity by exercising their freedom and accepting their responsibility for public affairs. For Masaryk, a democratic state which failed to assure for its people the prerequisites of full humanity would cease to be democratic – and those prerequisites include not only public health, public education, public transportation, public safety, public responsibility for the aging, but also public participation in the body politic. An enlightened despot, elected by a majority but ruling over an inert populace – that is not democracy, just an elective theocracy. Active citizenship is not something with which democracy could dispense. It is not an addition or an aspect of democracy. It is its very meaning. Even a century later, it is difficult to speak of Masaryk's conception of democracy without waxing eloquent.

And yet there is a problem here, not just in practice but in Masaryk's philosophy. Jan Patočka sees it in the tension between Masaryk's Kantian moralism and his positivist or "scientific" conception of the world and of philosophy alike. That tension is real enough. For the first, the basic dichotomy is that of Good and evil (or absence of Good). For the second, it is the dichotomy of Truth and illusion. Masaryk repeatedly invokes "science", empirical, de-

scriptive *observations* – in effect descriptions of *what is* – as a justification of moral judgements – that is, of prescriptions of what *ought to be*. To many observers, that appears as a fundamental contradiction.

Yet it is not necessarily so. In Masaryk's thought it far more often represents an attempt to conjoin two disparate yet indispensable aspects of experienced reality, the hardness of the real and its value and meaning. Masaryk bases his attempt on a conviction that a moral ordering – relations like *better than* – is intrinsic to reality in its hardness, there to be *seen* much as with the eye of reason we *see* relations like *bigger than*. In fact, that ability is what *reason* means for him. The good is something *sui generis* which we simply *see*. Thinkers as widely different as G. E. Moore and Max Scheler would agree with him. We may disagree with him, but can hardly dismiss his position as contradictory. As long as we need to make judgements of value in a factual world, any of our philosophies will need either to cope with that dichotomy or tell lies about half of our experience.

We can detect an echo of the dichotomy of morality and science in a problem that surfaces in Masaryk's conception of democracy, as in his *The Ideals of Humanity*.⁹³ Masaryk operates with a normative conception of democracy which we could label *humanistic*. It defines democracy in terms of the ideals of the Enlightenment, of freedom, responsibility and basic human needs, latterly called "rights". Democracy provides him with a perspective for evaluating human social existence in terms of the ideal of freedom and of what – for want of a less metaphoric term – we can identify with Richard Rorty as *human dignity*. For Masaryk, deprivation and humiliation deprive humans of their humanity. The ability to assure humans freedom and self respect is at the same time the task and the measure of what we could call Masaryk's normative conception of a *humanistic democracy*. The point is not simply that "majority rules", but that *no one is overruled* in his basic human rights or needs. A social system which deprives some of its members of their humanity, though it have majority support, is not democratic in Masaryk's humanistic sense.

Yet in Masaryk's writings, even in the same *The Ideals of Humanity*, we encounter a second conception of democracy as well, one we could call *populistic*, identifying democracy with *the will of the people*. Here democracy is conceived rather as it was in the French revolution, as the rule, however harsh, of "the people" over "the aristocrats" and over all privileged elites. It

⁹³ T. G. Masaryk, *The Ideals of Humanity* (translated by W. Preston Warren, London, Allen and Unwin 1938). Compare Masaryk's fourth and ninth chapter, pp. 20–34 and 86–98.

is profoundly egalitarian, in effect deriving both *liberté* and *fraternité* from the fundamental claim of *égalité* though it has little space for dissent from the will of the majority. In terms of actual experience, that is also a legitimate use of the word, especially in old Austria, where a narrow privileged stratum of the imperial family with its a plethora of arch-dukes and their titled retinue put a notable strain on state budget and so on the great majority of voters.⁹⁴ So Masaryk repeatedly speaks of Czech national rebirth as *democratic* in the sense that it was truly the work of the common people, of the recently enfranchised peasants, of people with calloused hands, not of some historic or self-appointed elite. That egalitarian, even populist streak is very strong in Czech national consciousness to this day – and, like it or not, it is also a legitimate aspect of a movement which claims as its own the slogan of freedom, equality and brotherhood.

Masaryk never saw or resolved that distinction clearly. While committed to democracy in a humanistic sense of respect and good will to the *humanity* of each person, he hoped that the Bolshevik revolution, about which he had no illusions, would yet overcome its difficulties because it was “democratic” in the second, *populist* sense of having the support of bulk of the people. Had it truly been so, he might have been right. Even more improbably, toward the end of his life on one or two occasions he expressed a hope that the “democratic” – read, *populist* – base of the Nazi revolution in Germany would overcome its nationalist arrogance with its crimes against *humanistic* democracy. By then, to be sure, he was a very old man.

Masaryk has been dead these seventy years, yet that ambiguity of democracy remains. Democracy is viable only if it can combine those two components, a normative humanism and a descriptive populism. It has to be a way of life *of human rights* but also *of the people*. After our experience with Communist populism in Czechoslovakia, we tend to identify democracy entirely with *humanistic* democracy and, somewhat surprisingly, manage not to see that our democracy is becoming increasingly the democracy of an elite, as alienated from its popular base as the aristocratic “democracy” of the Renaissance in Ragúsa or Venice. In the Czech Republic the percentage of voters

⁹⁴ Masaryk’s *humanistic* conception of humanity is eminently respectable today, sanctified by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. His *egalitarian* conception is rather suspect, as perhaps a communist plot. Yet compare its passionate defence by eminently respectable Hannah Arendt in *On Revolution* (London, Penguin (1963) 1990), esp. pp. 47ff where Arendt presents equality as the driving force and the great achievement of a revolution.

who do not vote out of sheer disgust or vote for a protest party like the Communists should serve as a warning. If democracy loses its popular base, if it become the democracy of and for an elite – or conversely, if it becomes an outright populism, it ceases to be viable. As Jan Patočka clearly saw, practical philosophy needs resolve the seemingly theoretical problem of the relationship of the normative and the descriptive, of eidetic and factual. For that seemingly theoretical problem has a way of becoming very much a practical problem as well.

Is the tension between his scientific positivism and his Enlightenment optimism also what marks – and perhaps mars – Masaryk’s view of evil? Perhaps the most troubling criticism of Masaryk is the charge that in his historic optimism there simply is no way of accounting for radical evil, for evil which is not just a misunderstanding or a lesser good, but which is genuinely a will to destroy, a *will to negation*. Masaryk’s alleged inability, at least in the early thirties, to become fully aware of the deadly threat of Nazism is said to have stemmed from that limitation. Masaryk, the charge runs, simply has no understanding of positive evil.

As an observation and not as a charge, that may seem quite accurate. Whether we ascribe it to his Christian heritage or to his Enlightenment education, on what we might call the metatheoretical (or “metaphysical”) level Masaryk never questions the postulate of the unity of the *kosmos* or of its positive value. In principle, it is *good to be* and bad to perish. Or, spoken with the scholastics, *Esse qua esse bonum est*, to be is good simply as such. Because the *kosmos* is one, there cannot be two gods, one to create what is good, the other what is evil. There is but one God, and since being is good, we must assume that it is a good God. Whatever is, is to that extent also good. There can be no positive evil.

Then whence radical evil? In principle, evil can only be something secondary, derivative, something that comes about in the course of the being of this world. It must be something not present at the root (*radix*, hence radical), but something that comes about in the *growth* of the world, something that happens to reality in the course of history, albeit mythical history. Seen from the perspective of a benign unitary *kosmos*, the idea of *radical evil*, evil which is neither a reversion nor a perversion, but pure, primordial evil, existing of itself as a pure will to negation, would be for Masaryk nonsensical. Primordially, being is good – and so, as Augustine taught, evil can only be a corruption, a misunderstanding or a less developed stage of the good.

Since Augustine’s time, this analysis faced the heartfelt but philosophically naïve criticism that there is in fact so much real evil in the world, out

and out evil with no redeeming social value, just sheer will to kill, that the Augustinian view is simply untenable. After Auschwitz and Katyn, Srebrenica and Guantanamo, that would be hard to deny. But Masaryk's position does not deny it. Empirically, there is clearly utter evil in the world, no misunderstanding, no retarded growth, just full out and out evil. The world can indeed become *very evil*, as we sing in Bernard of Cluny's hymn *Hora novissima*,⁹⁵ but the point is that it needs so to *become*. It is not so "by nature". Ironically, evil, too, is an achievement of history.

That, to be sure, does not make it any less evil. What it does, though, is to assure us that, metaphorically, *evil can be cured*. Because it is something that happens in history, it can also be made to un-happen, at least in particular instances. In that sense, Masaryk's historical optimism is not a naïve belief that progress will cure all, but rather an act of faith – and of hope. It is the faith that particular instances of evil are not an ineradicable feature of the universe. That does not make evil any less evil at any particular moment or the need to resist it any less a moral imperative. It does, though, mean that the appropriate question to ask about evil is, in principle, *what causes it and how can it be cured and prevented?* To ask how its perpetrator can be destroyed may *in extremis* be necessary, but it is never enough.

I do not believe Masaryk has a defective conception of evil. We might call it a hopeful conception, but it certainly is not one which denies the empirical reality of radical evil. What it does deny is its claim to eidetic primacy. But, as Husserl warns, from eidetic judgements ("evil is privation of good") we cannot derive any empirical conclusions whatsoever (as "this existing evil is really not so bad"). Masaryk's conception expresses the conviction that we need to struggle against evil – and that such struggle is not a priori futile. It is also yet another reason for considering him Christian.

Such, then, in the barest outline was the philosophical self-understanding which Masaryk sought to offer his people as the Czechs entered onto the global stage when *the guns of August* 1914 began to speak. It saw the *kosmos* as basically benign and rationally ordered. It saw history as the story of the unfolding of human potential, moving from subjection to humanistic democracy. Finally, it saw Czech aspirations as an integral part of that grand movement. At its core was the blend of fact, metaphor and myth in the ideal

⁹⁵ You will find it in the much beloved old hymnal of the Anglican Church in Great Britain, *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, though you would look for it in vain in more recent hymnbooks of our optimistic age. I have last heard it sung sixty years ago.

of freedom and humanity, said to define our nation. Our ancestors were said to have defended that ideal already in the Reformation and again in our national awakening. Our task now, as Masaryk presented it, was to earn our independence to fulfil our striving and to serve as a beacon of humanistic democracy in central Europe. If our nation lives up to this ideal, it can expect the support both of history and of other democratic countries.

It was a philosophy of the age of Reason and Progress, reflecting the assumptions and serving the needs of the nineteenth century. It is far from evident to what extent and in what proportion the nation then accepted the vision of a philosopher whose party programme had more pages than his party had members. Yet as much by accident of history as by design, that humanistic vision seemed to flow in the same direction as the mighty stream of popular nationalism unleashed by war. Then suddenly, there was no more time to inquire and reflect. It was time to act. Borne by the winds of war, the hitherto genteel, rather academic humanistic vision was facing the test of practice, guiding our nation through the First World War and on into the twentieth century.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Crucible of Praxis

Independence!

The formal declaration came on October 28th, 1918. Ten days earlier, our last Emperor, the youthful Karl I who ascended the throne two years earlier upon the death of Franz Joseph I, had proclaimed federalization of his Empire. Local representative bodies were to shoulder the responsibility of power in individual lands. In the Czech lands, it was the Czech National Committee, made up of leading personalities of Czech politics and culture. Twenty years earlier, it would have been a bold, dramatic gesture that might have saved the Empire and preserved it to founder in due time on the unresolved conflict of petty nationalisms, as its successor, Czechoslovakia, would twenty years later. After four years of war-hardened passions, it was too little, too late. In Washington, T. G. Masaryk, acting as the chairman of the provisional Czechoslovak government, responded by issuing a Czechoslovak Declaration of Independence, modelled after the American, with the full support of Woodrow Wilson. *Finis Austriae*.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ See J. B. Kozák, *T. G. Masaryk a vznik Washingtonské deklarace v říjnu 1918 (Masaryk and the Origin of Washington Declaration in October 1918)*; Praha, Melantrich 1968). Masaryk reports on his war-time activities in painstaking detail in *Světová revoluce za války a ve válce 1914–1918 (Spisy T. G. Masaryka, sv. 15)*; Praha, Masarykův ústav AV ČR a Ústav T. G. Masaryka 2005), English translation, *The Making a State* (translated by H. Wickham Steed; London, Allen and Unwin 1927), interspersing his account with observations elaborating his philosophy of history and of the place of the Czech nation in it, what Patočka will later call his *national philosophy*. As for the *finis Austriae*, see Masaryk, op. cit., section 79, pp. 249–253. Perhaps the most startling recognition is that Austrian statesmen until the final days of the war could not admit that the very existence of the Austrian Empire was at stake. A world without Austria was just unimaginable – and Masaryk’s great achievement may have been that he could imagine it and brace for the shock.

Or not quite so simply. Austria's Germans themselves deposed the Emperor and sought to proclaim a unification of German Austria with the rest of Germany, including the border regions of the Czech lands. When the Czech National Committee deposed the Emperor, it had no intention of supporting the growth of yet another German Empire. It declared the Czech lands in their historic borders sovereign and independent, almost exactly three hundred years after the Battle of White Mountain. Another two days later, a gathering of leading Slovak personalities declared Slovakia a part of a common state which, on the model of old Austro-Hungary, they called Czecho-Slovakia. In America, prominent Ruthene emigrants had negotiated with Masaryk and signed another declaration proposing to join the Ruthene part of former Greater Hungary to the new Czecho-Slovak state as well. After six hundred years, the last vestige of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation disappeared from history's stage.

The domino effect continued. Germans living in the newly independent Czech lands invoked the same "natural right" of national self-determination to constitute the predominantly German border regions as the province of *Deutschböhmen* (or German Bohemia) and a part of the newly proclaimed *Deutschösterreich*, German Austria.⁹⁷ It was a gesture futile for the same reason as the 1890 attempt at a linguistic division of the Czech lands. The two populations of Bohemia, King George's *two peoples*, lived largely intermingled throughout the Czech lands. The unity and integrity of the Czech lands was sealed by some seven centuries of history. And, in any case, the victorious allies were not about to let defeated Germany profit from the break-up of Austria. Within the month, Czech units of the former imperial and royal

⁹⁷ Here history may have hinged on a misunderstanding. Woodrow Wilson would naturally have understood the word *nation* in its English political sense of an administrative territorial unit with its government and inhabitants. In that sense *national self-determination* would have been the right of individual components of multinational empires (ie. of the Kingdom of Bohemia, in which Czechs made up a majority), not of individual ethnic populations. This is how Masaryk understood it as well. Bohemia's Germans chose to interpret the *nation* in Wilson's declaration in a cultural sense, as people of a shared culture. On that interpretation, not Kingdom of Bohemia but its ethnic components, Czechs, Moravians, Germans or Jews could claim self-determination. Since the various populations intermingled for centuries, such ethnic self-determination would have led to a chaos, as it in fact did in Yugoslavia in the 1990's. Perhaps the only lesson is that invoking national passions in a pluralistic society effectively precludes reasoned solutions. Only ... did Mr Wilson in far away America realise he was doing that?

army with allied support established Czech authority throughout the Czech lands. The dominoes tottered, then steadied, at least for the next seventy years.

Meanwhile in Prague the ecstatic crowds celebrating their liberation gave little thought to such concerns. The four years of war, marked by staggering casualties and severe privation, intensified the perception of Habsburg Austria as enemy and the source of all woes, national and personal, for the last three hundred years. In a way easy to comprehend and hard to fathom, the slogan *Independence!* acquired an immense power as the embodiment of both national liberation and personal fulfilment. The celebrating crowds lived that fulfilment. They neither knew nor much cared what to imagine under that slogan except that after generations as second class citizens in a German dominated state we shall be *masters in our own house*.

It was so spontaneous, and so understandable. Still half a century later, after another war, concentration camp and exile, my mother positively glowed at the remembrance. It was, she said repeatedly, the happiest moment of her life, and she was far from alone. Still, given the multi-ethnic composition of the new state, that facile phrase was rather problematic. The proportion of ethnic groups in the new Czechoslovakia – or, according to the Slovaks, Czecho-Slovakia – was depressingly similar to the ethnic make up of Austro-Hungary. Some six million ethnic Czechs, politically most aware and active, made up approximately half its population. Ethnic Germans, some three and a half million of them, un-reconciled with the new state, made up the second component. The third component were the two and a half million Slovaks, positive but expecting to be equal partners with the Czechs, as their hyphen in the name of the new state indicated. In the Slovak lowlands, though, the population was predominantly Magyar, for a thousand years dominant and ill prepared for the role of a minority in a Slovak state. Ruthenia was an ethnic mix of Ruthenes, Ukrainians, Magyars and Jews with little sense of cohesion. Forging a sense of a national identity for a state so diverse, geographically awkward, without a common history, language or purpose, posed a major challenge. The vague idea of the celebrating crowds, that *we*, meaning ethnic Czechs, would now be *masters in our own house*, was not overly helpful for learning to live with diversity. But then, reality testing was not a virtue encouraged by living for centuries with the unacceptable.

Nor had Czech politicians in pre-war years, though enamoured of nationalist rhetoric, given much thought to a possible independent state. The first Czech political party, the National Party among whose prominent members

were the great historian František Palacký⁹⁸ and his son-in-law, František Ladislav Rieger,⁹⁹ emerged out of the revolutionary turmoil of 1848. It invoked the so called *historic* rights of the Kingdom of Bohemia and of its traditional aristocracy in its quest for autonomy within the Habsburg empire. A split in its ranks, to this day a national habit, produced a second, more forward looking formation, the National Free Thought Party, which came to be known as *Mladočeši*,¹⁰⁰ the Young Czechs, striving for ethnic equality within the Empire as a putatively *natural* right. After the failure of the compromise of 1891 – the so-called *punktace*, proposing to divide the land into a German and a bilingual part¹⁰¹ – its demand subtly shifted to Czech he-

⁹⁸ František Palacký (1798–1876), a leading historian and a spokesman of the nation, rediscovered for the Czechs their Hussite past and forged the dominant schema of Czech history for the next hundred years. It was he who penned the famous sentence, “Were there no Austria, we should have to invent it” in rejecting the invitation of German nationalists for the Czechs to elect representatives to an all-German parliament in Frankfurt in 1848. The Czech nation, he argued, could survive far better in a multinational empire than in a German national state. While Palacký was a man of pronounced conservative views, his conception of Czech history, conveyed to broad popular strata by the hugely popular novelist Alois Jirásek (1851–1930), served as the framework of Masaryk’s humanistic and democratic reading of the *meaning of Czech history*. After 1948, Jirásek had the ill fortune of having his works co-opted by the Communists for propaganda purposes and so largely discredited, unjustly and unfortunately.

⁹⁹ František Ladislav Rieger (1818–1903) was a Czech politician of the first generation, before Czech politics became internally differentiated. He took his party to represent ethnic Czech interests in Austria, rather than particular interests against others within the Czech community. Unwittingly, it came to represent the interests of the then best established segment of Czech society, its privileged aristocracy and landed gentry, developing into a typical conservative party.

¹⁰⁰ The Young Czechs, Karel Kramář the most prominent among them, split off from the conservative National Party with a liberal “national” programme. Rather than the aristocracy, they came increasingly to favour the newly rich capitalists of Bohemia’s flourishing economy, thereby winning influence and gradually losing popular support until, after a series of further splits, they ended up as an anachronism of the extreme right, with Karel “Petrovič” Kramář favoring Czechoslovak intervention in Russian civil war in support of the Czarist regime. Independence does not seem to have improved Czech capacity for reality testing.

¹⁰¹ The failed linguistic compromise had one unexpected lasting effect. The core of the proposal was to divide Czech lands along ethnic lines into a predominantly German part, where German would be the language of public administration, and

gemony in all the Czech lands, though still within the Austrian empire. The political newcomers, Social Democrats, made a social and democratic transformation of Austrian society their programme while hoping to preserve a Greater Austrian federation transformed by a social revolution. Finally, of the three “realists”, T. G. Masaryk, Josef Kaizl and Karel Kramář, only Kramář, an admirer of all things Czarist and Russian – he married a wealthy Russian aristocrat – imagined a future without Austria, though hardly independent. The Czech lands, converted to Russian Orthodoxy, were to be a monarchy ruled rather improbably by some member of the tumbling Czarist dynasty. It was hardly a realistic option. Through all the tumultuous debates about the idea of a Czech *nation* – or, in the terminology of the time, “the meaning of Czech history” – no one had taken the trouble of thinking through, rigorously and consistently, *the idea of a Czech state*.

In the long nineteenth century, which lasted until the outbreak of the First World War, it did not seem to matter. Austria was such a fixture of European history and politics alike that it seemed simply unthinkable that there should be no Austria. It might be reformed, marginal areas might be detached or added, but in spite of its virtual collapse in 1848 and again in 1867 the idea of central Europe without Austria remained unthinkable.¹⁰²

predominantly Czech part, where both languages could be used in official transactions such as buying a postage stamp. The proposal failed, since the two populations were really far too intermingled for such separation. Yet the proposed line on the map remained. When Czechoslovakia was established, Czechoslovak Germans used that line to establish their proposed *Deutschböhmen* and *Deutschösterreich*. Then in the 1930's, the Nazis borrowed the name of a mountain range, ethnically heavily German, at the northern end of the Czech-Moravian Highlands, the Sudeten Mountains, to name the entire area demarcated as predominantly German *Sudetenland* and demand it be annexed to Hitler's Reich. The Munich conference granted them their wish while the following war undid it again. Finally, after the war the returning Czechs expelled the German population in what now appears as an ethnic cleansing *ante verbum*, asserting the ethnic unity of the Czech lands. *Finis “Sudetenland”* – though to this day there are people who use the term as if it designated a geographic reality rather than a political fiction.

¹⁰² The classic study is, of course, Oscar Jászi's *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press 1929, with numerous reprintings and reeditions). For the fancier of history, however, there is an equally voluminous novel by Karl von Boehm (pseud.), *Die Kaisersaga: Utopia Austriaca (Imperial Sage: Utopia Austriaca*; Augsburg, Adam Kraft Verlag 1960), in which a fictional pretender, Francis István, ascends the throne upon the death of Crown Prince Ru-

The Czech constitutional battles of the nineteenth century were fought with pens on paper in the safety of the House of Habsburg.

Then on October 28th, 1918, there was no more Austria. If the Czechs were not to become an insignificant ethnic enclave in a German cultural area stretching from Holland and the Baltic to the Balkans, they had to build their own state, not on paper, under ideal academic conditions, but in practice, with the ethnic mix in fact bequeathed to them by history and the victorious allies.

The new state could not, alas, be constituted as a federation, and not simply because the French general staff pressed for a strong centralized ally in case of German resurgence. Things had not changed since Karl I's belated attempt at federalization. If federalization were tried in Czechoslovakia, the result would have been the same as in Austro-Hungary. In all the linguistically mixed areas along the borders ethnic Germans would have claimed self-determination and annexation of their particular district to their German kin across the border, as they in fact did in 1918. The heavily Magyar regions would have done the same with Greater Hungary, the small Polish region with the reconstituted Poland. The result would have been a non-viable federation of Czechs with ambivalent Slovaks, approximating the pathetic rump of Czecho-Slovakia that lingered on for six months after the Munich Agreement (of which more anon). For better or for worse, the new state was viable only as a centralized state of all its citizens, regardless of ethnic identity.¹⁰³ Yet the driving force behind the creation of that state was the pent-up nationalism of Czechs who, after three hundred years in the German shadow, wanted to be *masters in their own house*. Yet once more, squaring the circle must have seemed easy by comparison.

dolf and saves the Empire by liberal policies and an alliance of the Crown with the people to break the stranglehold of the late feudal aristocracy. For lovers of kitsch, there is even a battle scene where the Emperor, having made peace with God in local church, leads a cavalry charge. The author was evidently intimately familiar with the final years of the Empire, down to the uniforms of individual regiments, and presents a true feast for lovers of antiquities without offending historians unduly. Not serious, perhaps, but a glorious read.

¹⁰³ Emanuel Rádl, a man of clear perception and great moral courage, saw this was Masaryk's prewar vision for Austria which, given his war-time alliance with Czech nationalism, Masaryk could not apply to his own country though Rádl saw it was its only chance for survival. Compare Rádl's last book, *Válka Čechů s Němci* (*The Czechs' War with the Germans*; Praha, Melantrich (1928) 1993).

That was the underlying problem of the *first republic* which seems so idyllic in retrospect. How do you forge a *state idea* or a sense of *national identity* for a country so ethnically and historically diverse, so devoid of a sense of common allegiance or common purpose?

The Czechs found themselves on the threshold of independence with no clear conception of the new state. Even during the war, Masaryk and his comrades in exile were the only ones who, from the second war year on, aimed their efforts explicitly at national independence. That was not due to any greater hostility to Austria on Masaryk's part. Of all the pre-war Czech politicians, Masaryk most clearly thought himself both a Czech and an Austrian, fully sharing Palacký's conviction that Austria needs to be reformed but preserved. He was equally at home in German culture and in Vienna, where he lived for many years, first as a student, later as a member of the parliament, the *Reichsrat*. Unlike his more provincial colleagues, Masaryk knew Austria.

Perhaps just because he knew and appreciated it, Masaryk saw clearly that in the global conflict it had initiated so lightly the old multi-national Austria of waltzes and *Schlamperei* could survive neither victory nor defeat. Victory would mean rigid hegemony of the military with its pan-German orientation. Defeat would mean – as in fact it did – that the Hungarian half of the Empire would declare independence; the Polish and Italian regions would join their neighbouring ethnic kin while Austrian Germans would overthrow the monarchy and proclaim *Anschluss*, annexation to Greater Germany. There would be no more Austria, only a Greater Germany with a Czech ethnic minority in the Czech lands. If the Czechs were not to share the fate of other Slav minorities like the Wendic Sorbs, they needed not only a nation, but also a state. Ironically, though still at the last session of Austrian parliament Masaryk spoke of the need to reform Austria, when the war broke out in earnest, he focussed all Czech diplomatic and military efforts abroad on Czechoslovak independence. By the time the Czech National Committee in Prague finally felt ready to declare independence, the world was ready to honour it.

Ironically, the Czechs, surprised by their triumph, were far from sure what to make of it. They had basically three conceptions of Czech statehood at their disposal. One was Masaryk's humanistic conception, the second the popular nationalistic conception which ordinary Czechs imbibed from Alois Jirásek's novels, the third the moral conception of Masaryk's most consistent disciple, Emanuel Rádl.

The *philosophical rationale* with which Masaryk endowed his new-found state reflected his historic optimism as well as his commitment to and confi-

dence in the power of good will. It was based on the assumption that, for all the horrors of the world war, the birth of Czechoslovakia was not a random violent act but a part of the drift of history, an intrinsic part of the moral progress of a humankind guided by Providence to live out the humanistic ideal. For Masaryk, that drift reflected the gradual growth of humanity from rude beginnings to the *ideal of humanity*, a sunny world of freedom and justice for all. The new-found pride in the Czech nation as heir of a glorious Hussite past and of reformation humanism, however historically tenuous, committed its modern day heirs to the Enlightenment ideals of the great democratic revolution.

For Masaryk the Czech “revolution” was very much a national one, a matter of national self-affirmation. However, it was justified not by ethnic distinctiveness or folkloric peculiarity, but rather by being a profoundly democratic and humanistic one. It was, he believed, democratic because it was the self-affirmation of common people, farmers, labourers, shopkeepers, writers, against the Germanised privileged strata. It was humanistic, because it was heir to the humanistic ideals of the reformation and of the Czech rebirth out of the ideals of the Enlightenment. The reborn Czech state could be a state of all its peoples because the ideals to which it pledged allegiance were universally human.

Seen through such a democratic and humanistic prism, the birth of a Czech state dedicated to those ideals appeared in harmony with the drift – or perhaps the *moral progress* – of history. Masaryk’s lectures and, between the lines, even his public statements show that he was keenly aware of the difficult national and social problems the new Czech state would face. Still, largely on the strength of his faith in progress and his historic optimism, he held out the hope that if the Czechs would only live up to their democratic and humanistic ideal, they could rise like eagles – or, given the popular symbols of the time, like falcons – on the updrafts of history.

In the retrospect of a century of wars both hot and cold it seems a strangely optimistic nineteenth century perception as Stefan Zweig celebrated it. Perhaps a much later book, Sebastian Haffner’s *A German’s Story*,¹⁰⁴ most clearly captures the sea change. In Germany and Austria the horrors of the

¹⁰⁴ Stefan Zweig (1881–1942), the great Austrian recorder of the discrete charm of another age, surely needs no introduction or, if he does, can provide his own. See Stefan Zweig, *Die Welt von Gestern* (*The World of Yesteryear*; Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp 1947). Czech translation by Eva Červinková: *Svět včerejška* (Praha, Torst 1994). – Sebastian Haffner (1907–1991) represents what was best in German letters

front line shattered that optimism. The succeeding inflation and global depression wiped out what little was left of it and made it seem as a naïve, unreal illusion, wholly unbelievable from the start. In Germany, history appeared to have vindicated Nietzsche. Writers like Ernst Jünger and Herman Hesse or philosophers like Martin Heidegger celebrated what once would have been called nihilism as history's ultimate verdict. To them, the crumbling of meaning appeared as a liberation from illusion. History no longer has any meaning. Czechs coming to Germany often seemed naïve in their idealism, as dreamers from another world. Conversely, Germans coming to Czechoslovakia seemed to be decadent cynics, bearing out Masaryk's diagnosis of the destructive and self-destructive impact of subjectivism.

For in Czechoslovakia some of the gentility of the nineteenth century did seem to survive amid that central Europe wide *Götterdämmerung*, codified in a literary form by Karel Čapek and presided over by the tall, noble figure of the old philosopher and now President Masaryk. It seemed like an island of peace and light, of freedom and democracy, of a triumphant humanism. It was as if Masaryk with his deep appreciation of America somehow conveyed to the Czechs something of the American will to believe and their confidence that believing will make it so. Like the Americans, the Czechs of the first republic seemed to live in an enchanted world of their own which to external observers seemed both admirable and illusory. Yet for all its failings, when compared with other successor states, Masaryk's Czechoslovakia truly seemed to represent an achievement of a different order. And, perhaps, it did not just seem to be that way. Perhaps it really was that. The young idealists who had dedicated their lives to it – two of them were my parents – were so committed to believing it as to make it real.

Such, in a nutshell, was Masaryk's philosophical reading of the meaning of Czech national identity in the new Czechoslovak state. It was a national self-affirmation freed, as his followers hoped, of narrow nationalism by the universal ideal to which it was pledged, the democratic ideal of humanity, freedom, human dignity and democracy. The task of the new state was to live up to that ideal which could make it the home not just for its founding *Czechoslovak nation* but for all of its diverse citizens. That, at least, was

in one of the worst times of German history. *Geschichte eines Deutschen* (A German's Story; München, DVA 2000) written in 1939 and published posthumously, mirrors the German traumata between the wars and, perhaps unintentionally, gives a cogent answer to the question how decent people can do monstrous things.

how Masaryk's disciples and followers understood Masaryk – and understood themselves. The ideal of humanity and Czechoslovak democracy as its embodiment was something to live for – and, for a great many of them, became something to die for in the prisons and on the battlefields of the Second World War.

It would be difficult to overstate the powerful intellectual and emotional significance of “Masaryk's Czechoslovakia” for the generation of idealists to whose lives Masaryk's reading of Czech national identity had given meaning and value. Not since Hussite times did Czech national identity seem so clearly defined. Again like the Hussites, those who shared that ideal often found it difficult to understand that there could be Czechs and Slovaks who did not live that Czechoslovak dream with them.

Yet such there were. The men and women who lived the birth of Czechoslovakia in ordinary daily lives had a simplified version of Czech national philosophy, derived perhaps more from Alois Jirásek's historical novels than from Masaryk's philosophical writings.

In that version, the mediaeval kings and saints of Czech history and legend alike formed a tapestry at the back of the stage on which the nation's history was acted out. The real scenario in that popular version of that history opened with the glorious Hussite era in which the Czech nation was said to have assumed its historic role and true identity. Here the reformer Jan Hus and God's warrior Jan Žižka were the popular iconic figures. That nation defied all in the defence of God's Truth against the backwardness of dark Middle Ages represented by the Church of Rome and its German adherents (see Masaryk's *theocracy*). For two hundred years, though outnumbered, the Czech nation fought valiantly to the end (see the legend of The Last Moravians at White Mountain). Even in tragic defeat, it remained faithful to its Truth, with Jan Amos Komenský as the new iconic figure (see the legend of the Teacher of Nations and Jirásek on secret Czech Brethren).

On that popular reading of history, what followed the Catholic conquest of the Czech lands was just *Darkness*, as Jirásek called one of his novels – the darkness that fell on the land, illuminated only by Jesuits burning Bibles. In spite of a scattering of covert faithful, the nation came to the verge of losing its soul and its language. Its vaunted baroque culture was the work of foreign carpetbaggers, an offshoot of Italian and Spanish culture, not a native growth. The nation was saved at the last moment by a handful of devoted patriots who revived the Czech language and rediscovered glorious Czech history (see Dobrovský, Jungmann, Palacký). Guided by leaders

like Karel Havlíček and Tomáš Masaryk, the reborn nation overthrew the German/Catholic yoke and won its freedom, its own Czech national state. After three hundred years of subjugation, Masaryk's Czechoslovak legions reversed the verdict of White Mountain. At last we were said to be *masters in our own house*, Czechs in a Czech national state.¹⁰⁵

In the long run, that legend proved as disruptive as it was bigoted. Yet it told a story which made sense of the confused time for the men and women who survived in the trenches of the First World War, in fields and factories and in the most ordinary walks of life. The celebrating crowds in Prague streets on October 28th believed it implicitly. It was a glorious tale with a triumphant end, and the crowd just loved it. Besides, there was just enough truth to it to make it believable. Only the crucial *ideal of humanity* somehow dropped out, replaced largely by a cult of the nation. This version of national ideology left little room for the Slovak, German, Magyar, Ruthene or Polish part of the population. The profoundly religious dimension of Czech history was replaced by a sectarian squabble, and even that with a nationalistic tinge. Thoughtful Catholics who could have come to an understanding with Masaryk's democracy and humanism¹⁰⁶ felt understandably uncomfortable in the identification of national revival with a narrowly sectarian vindication. Still, the new myth mobilized popular support for Masaryk's national philosophy, albeit at the cost of masking the conflict between his noble humanism and popular Czech nationalism. Perhaps it was a part of Masaryk's historic optimism that he could believe that the former would redeem the latter.

In any case, Czechoslovakia set out with two not altogether compatible perceptions of its own identity. One was the idealist vision of humanistic democracy. The other was the vision of national pride incorporating a rather distorted version of our Hussite heritage. In the flush of victory which the Czechs saw as a vindication of three centuries of injustice, it somehow did not seem to matter. Alas, it came to matter damnably twenty years later, when push came to shove.

¹⁰⁵ This, incidentally, tends to be the meaning of Masaryk for the dwindling band of aging loyalists gathered in various associations bearing Masaryk's name – and great part of the reason why Masaryk so interpreted has little appeal for the middle and the younger generation which know no other interpretation.

¹⁰⁶ So Karel Skalický, a Catholic priest and theologian, writing about the *meanings* of Czech history in: Karel Skalický, *Za naději a smysl (In Quest of Hope and Meaning)*; Praha, Sofia 1995), pp. 143–179.

One of the few far-sighted thinkers who realised that that internal contradiction did matter dreadfully was a gentle moralist and philosopher, Masaryk's most dogged yet critical disciple, Emanuel Rádl.¹⁰⁷ Rádl was a biologist by training, with initial interest in evolutionary theories. As a student, he was strongly influenced by the views of the German vitalist thinkers, Hans Driesch. His massive *History of Evolutionary Theories*, translated into German, then into English by no less a man than the genetic biologist J. B. S. Haldane, established his reputation in the field.

In the philosophical debate of the time between a mechanistic and a vitalist model of reality Rádl fully accepted Hans Driesch's views and argued for a conception of reality which is teleologically ordered. Life, on such a conception, is not mechanically driven by antecedent efficient causal conditions, but rather guided by a goal to which it is ordered. It is a conception which Rádl shared with thinkers like Aristotle and Leibniz. Each living being is a purpose striving for realisation; the whole system of all life is one grand system, embodying and realising an order encoded in its very being.

Rádl, however, went beyond Driesch in tracing out the consequences of human freedom within the system. While other beings live the order of the *kosmos* as natural, acting it out necessarily, humans encounter it as a call, not a command, that is, as a *moral* order. Humans in their freedom need to acknowledge the order of the *kosmos* and need to choose – reflect, decide and

¹⁰⁷ Emanuel Rádl (1873–1942), biologist and university professor in biology, won an international reputation when his *Dějiny vývojových teorií* (*History of Evolutionary Theories*) was translated into German and then English, and still rates a footnote in Ernst Mayer's *The Growth of Biological Thought* (Cambridge, Harvard 1982). Under the influence of the German vitalist Hans Driesch he became increasingly interested in philosophy. After 1918, he became the leading philosophical thinker of the new republic (and a professor of philosophy at the Natural Science Faculty of the University). He saw philosophy as a *programme for transforming the world*, guided by a moral insight. His many books include a rather idiosyncratic *Dějiny filosofie* (*History of Philosophy*) and a study of the nationality question, *Válka Čechů s Němci* (*The Czechs' War with the Germans*). Generally, he undertook the task of thinking through the consequences of Masaryk's philosophy as Masaryk did not. This led him into a head-on conflict with both Czech and German nationalists. In 1935, he suffered a nervous breakdown and spent the rest of his life in the seclusion of mental illness. During a brief spell of lucidity shortly before his death he wrote a strange but much cited volume, *Útěcha z filosofie* (*Consolation from Philosophy*) in which he expressed his faith in the moral law – and his approval of burning at stake those who cast doubt on moral consensus of common sense. He died in 1942, leaving an ambiguous heritage.

will – to be guided by it. Because humans are free, their doings are not “natural” – instinctual – but *moral*, here meaning *having a moral value*, either positive or negative. Nature is a-moral, humans are moral or immoral (though the latter is also a moral valuation).

It is at this point that Masaryk’s influence enters into Rádl’s thought. Ironically, it is not Masaryk’s positivism, but rather his Enlightenment rationalism that spoke to Rádl. For once we recognise human behaviour as *moral* (which here means *free*), we need a moral order to guide our decisions. What is the order of the *kosmos*, the grand scheme which guides other beings as a natural order and confronts us as a moral challenge?

For Rádl at this stage critical reason is what enables us to discern that moral order – and reason means not calculating ability but rather the ability to discern the *meaning* of what is. Consistently with that, Rádl entered into the methodological debate between Masaryk and Josef Pekař on Masaryk’s side. Pekař was a positivist in the tradition of Luipold von Ranke. History to him means *telling it like it was, wie es eigentlich gewesen*. Pekař, currently once more much in fashion, rejected Masaryk’s reading of Czech history in terms of the humanitarian ideal as fond fancy. *The fact*, he claimed in true positivist fashion, is that Czech history is a story of ethnic strife of Czechs with Germans. Pekař evaluated all events of Czech history by a sole criterion – whether they aided or hindered the Czechs or the Germans in that strife. Thus in his *Bílá Hora*¹⁰⁸ he judges the Hussite reformation as positive, since it reinforced the Czech element, Lutheran reformation as negative, since it was German and germanising. For all the devastation it brought, Pekař considered the Catholic triumph at White Mountain as positive, because it established in the Czech lands a hegemony of transnational Roman Catholicism rather than of German Lutheranism.

Rádl objected not so much to Pekař’s conclusion, though he disagreed with that, too, as to his claim that that conclusion represented a *fact* rather than one possible interpretation. Anticipating Popper, he claimed that a historian does not start with “facts”, but with meanings – with hypotheses which he subsequently tests in terms of their ability to interpret the “facts” which, of themselves, are meaningless. Masaryk’s quest for the meaning of Czech identity was in that sense scientifically legitimate and philosophi-

¹⁰⁸ Josef Pekař, *Bílá Hora (The Battle of White Mountain)*; Praha, Vesmír 1922), pp. 157ff. For contrast, see Ernest Denis, *Čechy po Bílé Hoře (Bohemia after the Battle of White Mountain)*; Praha, Šolc a Šimáček 1903) whom Pekař quotes, and Josef Petráň, *Staroměstská exekuce (The Execution of Prague)*; Praha, Brána (1971) 1995).

cally valid as part of the quest for the moral order. It was, possibly, the most powerful argument on Masaryk's side of the debate.¹⁰⁹

To this, Rádl added an activist view of philosophy. Philosophy is for him not idle contemplation but rather a proposal to transform the world. To know the good means for Rádl automatically an obligation to do the good. The good, though, is not a matter of personal preference, but, in Rádl's view, is quite objective, not a "fact" which can be established by empirical research, but a given which can be ascertained by reason, in the best Enlightenment style – though his conception of reason was qualitative, not reducible to mathematization. Hence the state cannot be simply an expression of a certain group's *national identity*. It needs to represent a moral commitment and so belong equally to all its citizens, regardless of nationality. Altogether, this was Masaryk at his pre-war finest, only now applied to Czechoslovakia rather than to Austro-Hungary.

Though Rádl, together with the young theologian, J. L. Hromádka, proved the most perceptive and perhaps the most influential among Masaryk's disciples, Masaryk never took to him as he took, say, to Karel Čapek. Perhaps he found Rádl's rather pedantic moralism less than congenial, or perhaps it was Rádl's tendency to appeal to tradition that was foreign to him. Or, just perhaps, it was Rádl's consistent defence of Masaryk's own democratic humanism against the popular nationalism which had played a crucial role in winning broad support of Masaryk's ideas. Perhaps Rádl's penetrating insight disturbed Masaryk's reassuring historical optimism. In any case, in spite of his devotion to Masaryk, Rádl never became one of his circle of intimates like Čapek or Peroutka – and perhaps more is the pity. Great men need critical supporters in direct proportion to their greatness, though they tend to seek them out in inverse proportion.

Be that as it may. Rádl was the one philosophical thinker who thought through Masaryk's philosophy rigorously and critically. Fully in the spirit of Masaryk, he argued that the birth of the republic is not a natural event – as Pekař could have held – but rather a moral one, that is, a free act. As such, it has to be guided by the moral law and that, at this stage, meant for Rádl reason in a rather Kantian sense. The foundation of the state needs be rational, as the ideal of humanity, not merely factual, as the momentary dominance of the Czech ethnic component of the new state.

¹⁰⁹ Emanuel Rádl, *O smysl našich dějin: Předpoklady k diskusi o této otázce* (Concerning the Meaning of our History: Presuppositions of a Discussion About It; Praha, Čin 1925), note esp. pp. 23–34 and 81–95.

In his *The Czeschs' War with the Germans*, mentioned earlier, Rádl had an uncomfortable way of pointing out that the Germans were no intruders in the Czech lands but for centuries approximately a third of its population. Ethnically, that republic was a Czecho-German one more than a Czecho-Slovak one. Public debate on the issue was marked by massive wishful thinking and vicious invective. For the most part, Czech politicians – ironically rather like their contemporary Israeli counterparts dealing with Palestinians – comforted themselves that the Czech Germans would grow used to living as a minority. Czechoslovakia was in fact scrupulous about assuring them all the individual rights of a minority population. Rádl saw through such thinking with a merciless clarity. He saw that the Czechs, often without any ill will, were making enemies of a large part of their population. Superior Czech strength, based on French support, was hopelessly vulnerable. Ever more hostile Germans would seize the first chance to bring down Czechoslovakia. While most Czechs were still celebrating their independence, Rádl was beating to quarters.

Needless to say, it did not make him any more popular than calling for Israeli/Palestinian compromise in Palestine would win popularity today. Rádl came under increasing attack by the popular press. In 1934 he still organised a World Congress of Philosophy in Prague and made arrangements for Husserl's lectures the following year, then suffered a total nervous break-down. A painfully sensitive man, he could not face the horrors of the coming war. Already during the First World War he had withdrawn to a remote village and refused to read newspapers, hiding from the horror. Now, with another war coming, he retreated into mental illness.

The one book Rádl wrote during that period, his *Consolations from Philosophy*, shows the direction which his thought was taking. Once he had made the Kantian distinction between the natural and the moral, the sole barrier between (free) humans and chaos lay in human ability to recognise and to honour the moral order which in the human world of freedom no longer had the force of a natural law. Human living together in peace and good will, so precious for Rádl, became entirely dependent on the ability of Reason to erect such a moral barrier to replace the natural one.

The violent outburst of irrationality in Germany – Rádl had just written a concise book about the Nazi take-over, *About the German Revolution*¹¹⁰ – drove Rádl to seek security in the comfort of custom and the security of the familiar. If reason failed us, only tradition – *what humans have always and every-*

¹¹⁰ Emanuel Rádl, *O německé revoluci* (Praha, Laichter 1933).

where believed – can provide a secure foundation for human social existence. Writing in moments of lucidity in the final year of his mental illness, Rádl, once the radical democrat and rationalist, paints the Middle Ages as *the age of faith*, condemns all change since then, starting with the Renaissance, as a revolt against the moral law and approves the burning of heretics who cast doubt on tradition.

It is a strange book, immensely sensitive and moving in its agonizing love for life and peace, frightening in its uncritical praise of all things traditional. Writing as a visionary setting out a programme, Rádl had been a democrat and a humanist. In seeking consolation in a disconsolate age, his voice echoed the stance of the Inquisitors. Perhaps there is a reason why Masaryk never took to him even at the time when they spoke with one voice. Out of respect for Rádl and for the love he bore Masaryk's young idealists in the Academic YMCA, it may be better to remember him as he was before his illness struck.

Such, then, was the state of philosophical reflection of national identity in the new Czechoslovak republic. There was the quasi-official ideology made up of Masaryk's democratic humanism, fused with a popular nationalism, heavily decorated with a pseudo-Hussite symbolism. Then there was Rádl's critique, criticising the official ideology from Masaryk's fundamental moral perspective, with no practical concessions to popular nationalism – and so with little hope of popular support outside the narrow circle around Rádl and his theological counterpart, J. L. Hromádka.¹¹¹ Beyond that, there was little attempt to take the new state seriously in a philosophic sense.

¹¹¹ J. L. Hromádka (1889–1969) was, like his friend Emanuel Rádl, one of Masaryk's very few devoted yet critical pupils. In what may be the best interpretation of Masaryk during his lifetime, he pointed out the discrepancy between Christianity and Masaryk's *religion of Jesus, not Christ*. He raised a generation of young protestant intellectuals, no less devoted to Masaryk. During the war he taught at Princeton. In spite of warnings, he decided to return to Czechoslovakia after the war to serve his people and his church there. After his long time in America, he had no illusions about capitalism and expected that, for better or for worse, Communism was in our country to stay – and that his duty as a theologian was to remain in dialogue with the new rulers, confident that in time they would grow less tyrannical, more just. After the terror of the 1950's the liberalization in the 1960's, culminating in the Czechoslovak Spring of 1968, seemed to bear out his reading. Soviet occupation that year crushed him utterly; he died within the year, a fellow traveller for some, a prophet betrayed to others.

For the most part, the generation of young idealists who identified with “Masaryk’s republic” did not seem even aware of the challenge of ethnic diversity, of social inequality or of the conflict between Enlightenment ideals and nationalist passions. To them, the Czech nation had simply won its freedom and established its own state in its own land. They set about the task of building their new state with an incredible verve, living with a sense of individual fulfilment as well as of a fulfilment of national hopes, three hundred years deferred. It is difficult to find words lofty and poetic enough to capture the exulted mood among Masaryk devotees of those years. That rapture carried Masaryk to the peak of a personality cult of major proportions and enshrined the faith of the young Czechoslovaks in Masaryk’s conception of Czech identity as one of the unshakeable truths of their history. Not only darkness, but bright light, too, may be blinding.

Amid the exhilaration of Masaryk’s triumph, Masaryk’s supporters – with a few sober exceptions as Emanuel Rádl and possibly Masaryk himself – tended to overlook two crucial realities. One of these was that Masaryk’s triumph was achieved at the cost of an alliance with Czech nationalism, natural in war but problematic in peace. The very idea of Czechoslovakia and its genuine greatness was that it was conceived as a *moral* state, whose base was not ethnic, but ethical. Czechoslovakia was possible only as a state based on a common allegiance of all its citizens, whatever their nationality, to Masaryk’s ideals of universal humanity and principles of freedom and justice. To be viable, Czechoslovakia would need to create an atmosphere in which being a committed citizen of Czechoslovakia and an ethnic German or Magyar would constitute neither a contradiction nor a tension. Only such a common commitment could bond together a population as diverse and a territory as dispersed as that of the new state. It would have to have been a microscopic model of an ideal European Union a century before its time. The Czechs, it seems, have a weakness for anachronisms.

That particular anachronism was to prove too great. For the most part, the Czechs welcomed Masaryk at the war’s end not as a humanist philosopher but as a leader who won them independence in their own Czech state. They saw their German fellow citizens as former oppressors, not even a minority, and Slovakia and Ruthenia as colonies where Czechs carried an anachronistic White Man’s Burden. After the hopes, sufferings and sacrifices, they wanted the new state to be as purely Czech as possible. Prague’s Postal Museum bears mute witness: the prewar Post Office signs are all bilingual, the Czech “*C. a k. poštovní úřad*” at left, the German “*K. und k. Post Amt*” at right, in yellow letters on black background. The post-war ones are

in Czech national colours, unilingual in Czech only, even though the composition of the population had not changed. It was so understandable – and so infinitely tragic.

In spite of that, the new republic did largely succeed in becoming the island of freedom and democracy of its aspirations. It provided refuge to a flood of escapees from revolutionary Russia as well as from its repressive neighbours. Its own German minority seemed to become reconciled to the new state, political parties speaking for the German minority joining the parliament. Later, refugees from Hitler came streaming in and some of the best known figures of German intellectual life, including Thomas Mann, became Czechoslovak citizens.

For its ethnically Czech citizens, in spite of daily grumbling, the republic continued to be a dream come true and an object of intense love and loyalty. Even today, seventy years later, far and away the best loved television serial, *Constables' Tales (Četnické humoresky)*, conjures up an idealised image of the Czech world between the wars as a golden age. Thirty nine instalments and several screenings later, the viewers ask for more, though for the most part their personal memories reach at most to the Soviet occupation. The flaws – and there were many – fade and only the dream remains, mingling with memories.

In that sense and for the Czechs, Masaryk's conception of Czech national identity was a resounding success. It gave the Czech national community a sense of its own identity, centred not on nationalist passions but on a philosophical ideal of humanity and on a political commitment to democracy, on freedom and justice. It provided them guidance in creating a state and in making the transition into the twentieth century. It sustained its people in the crisis of another world war – the Czechoslovak government and Czechoslovak Army in Great Britain during the Second World War were virtually skansens of the first republic. It flared up again, recognisably, as late as 1968 in the popular response to the fleeting liberalization of the Czechoslovak Spring. If the purpose of a national philosophy is to provide a people with a sense of its own identity and a vision of its role in the world, Masaryk's Czech philosophic reflection of Czech national identity succeeded for three generations.

Yet in spite of that, in 1945, in the miraculously reborn Czechoslovakia, Masaryk seemed venerable but irrelevant except as a fetish of the more rigid among the old line nationalists – and an object of research for historical scholars of democratic humanism, and not only in Communist-driven public pronouncements. Far more basically, public mood had changed. The war

deformed sensibilities, its passions excused excesses. The brutal expulsion of the three million Germans, however understandable in light of the role the German minority played at the time of Munich, made mockery of any ideals of the Enlightenment. It was an outburst of pent-up rage, but it was also an admission of a failure to solve the problem of building a pluralistic society. The Germans of the Czech lands in 1938 and the Czechs in 1945 affirmed in word and deed their inability to live together in a shared land.¹¹² Masaryk's historic optimism and democratic humanism were no longer capable of molding and guiding Czech society. Not without reason did Jan Patočka, the other great national philosopher of the twentieth century and himself a student of Masaryk's work, sum up the verdict when he wrote of Masaryk's attempt to forge a conception of Czech national identity – in his words, a Czech *national philosophy* – as a *failure*.

To understand that sea-change we need undertake another excursion into history and to the heartbreak of the Munich "Agreement" of 1938, the dictate which Czechoslovakia was not even invited to sign, only to accept and bow to its verdict.

The background is straightforward enough. The actors involved had little chance to act other than as they did. After the break-up of Austro-Hungary, President Masaryk's hand-picked foreign minister, Eduard Beneš, committed Czechoslovak international safety to a system of alliances. There was no other way. Though the ethnically Czech among Czechoslovakia's citizens were passionately committed to defending their new-won homeland by armed force, if need be, that homeland, as carved out at peace conferences, was militarily indefensible. By accident of history, it grew into a long and narrow stretch of land, surrounded in three quarters by German and Magyar regions. For the most part, its borders were open. Even in the west, where the ring of border mountains could be fortified, there was little space for manoeuvre. The Czechs were determined to defend their new state even with

¹¹² The critical turn came actually in 1935, after the rise of Hitler. Up to that time, the German-Czech conflict remained a contest over relative advantage in an unquestioned common land. After Hitler, Czech Germans gave up seeking accommodation with the Czech. Only a purely German border region annexed to Germany would satisfy their demands. When they survived the war, the Czechs chose, unfortunately, to play by the same rules: nothing but a purely Czech border region indissolubly a part of the Czech lands would satisfy them. In a zero-sum game, all players ultimately lose.

bare hands, but most Slovaks were rather less so and Germans and Magyars not at all. In case of another war, the most Czechoslovakia could do was to contribute to the efforts of its allies in the West. Czechoslovakia's security came inevitably to be pegged to its mutual defence treaty with France, with British and Soviet support contingent on France moving first.

Czechoslovak defence strategy was based on that reality. It assumed that in case of war Czechoslovak army would fight only a delaying action in Bohemia while the bulk of its forces withdrew into the Slovak mountains to be ready for the French offensive. As soon as the French *régiments d'attaque* stormed across the Rhine, Czechoslovak army would break out of its mountain fastnesses and attack the Germans from the rear. It was not the most realistic of plans, but under the circumstances it was the best the situation offered.

As long as the Versailles system held, French patronage seemed sufficient guarantee. There would be no more war. Conventional wisdom held that the French would never permit a resurgence of a militarised Germany and that the British would wish to sustain the one democracy east of the Rhine. With the rise of Hitler, the situation began to change. France set about building its Maginot line and reorganizing its *régiments d'attaque* as fortress artillery. So much for storming across the Rhine. Meanwhile conservative opinion in England, mesmerised by the alleged Bolshevik threat, came increasingly to fancy Hitler's uncompromisingly anti-Communist rhetoric. When His Majesty returned enchanted from his visit to Hitler, Germany could well seem a more reliable bulwark against Bolshevism than the socially liberal Czechoslovakia.

The Czechoslovak strategic plan of mobile defense was quietly shelved as the Czechoslovak army, encouraged by its French advisers, undertook an ambitious construction project designed to ring the Czech lands with a miniature Maginot line of field fortifications. For a relatively poor country in the depth of depression, it was labour of intense devotion to the Republic. The Czechs were intensely proud of their infantry pill boxes. Three generations later, they still are. Even a word of hesitation about their excellence will provoke a torrent of indignant protest. It was indeed a noble achievement of fortress engineering, capable of stopping any attacker charging against its strong points without tanks or air support. Unfortunately, the Germans were building tanks and dive bombers.

The new Czechoslovak military doctrine mirrored the Maginot Line mentality. It was based on the unspoken assumption that defense means blocking the mountain passes and fighting a positional war along the bor-

der, keeping the enemy safely outside. The men of the border units who would have manned the fortifications were determined to give neither inch nor quarter, ready to die at their posts. The reality, however, was that the Germans were preparing for a mobile war and were exploring weak spots in the line of forts. The weak spots were not hard to find. Between its strong points – maintained today as museums of national defence, as the artillery fort Hanička near Náchod – the Czech mini-Maginot line was but a single string of small infantry bunkers. Most of those were located in solidly German areas whose fanaticised population, well armed from the Reich, gloried in the idea of striking a blow against the hated Czechoslovakia. In many places, the system was not to be finished until 1940. Along the border with neutral Austria, with no natural obstacles to an attack, it could have offered little resistance. It would have been a matter of days.

They would surely have been days of tragic heroism. The morale of the Czechoslovak army – at least among the Czech half of its officers and men – is reported from all sources as incredibly high. This army wanted to fight and would have fought with desperate tenacity, like Masaryk's legions a war earlier. It was well equipped with small arms and artillery, though sadly deficient in communications equipment, mobility and air cover. In addition, the massive investment in border fortifications absorbed all resources that should have gone into motorising and building high speed rail and highway communications with the relatively secure rear in Slovakia. Had the army followed its first strategic plan, its best personnel would have died with vain valour in the border fortifications while the remnant tried to retreat, in great part horse drawn and lacking air cover, along secondary roads to Slovakia.

When in March of 1939 Hitler annexed Austria and uncovered Czechoslovakia's southern flank, it was clear that the game was up. Armed resistance without allied support could achieve at most a splendid moral gesture not unlike the Moravians backed up against the game preserve wall at the battle of White Mountain. Such was the situation when France and Britain cancelled their treaty obligations and joined Hitler in demanding that Czechoslovakia surrender its fortified border areas to *give us peace in our time*. In exchange, it would be allowed to survive as a pathetic remnant of a state, indefensible, economically not viable, and wholly at Hitler's mercy. Left alone to face Hitler's rage, President Beneš announced his decision to accept those terms. The Army, armed and mobilised along the border, could have refused, citing its oath, had its commanders been willing to accept the responsibility. Instead, it obeyed, blaming Beneš. To this day, the men who

had the power to resist vociferously vilify Beneš for not ordering them to do so. But how could a single man's indecision force the entire Army, ready and eager for battle, to surrender without a shot? It was perhaps the most desperate, demoralising hour in all the centuries of our history.¹¹³

For seventy years, we have been second-guessing President Beneš's decision to surrender. Would Masaryk have made that splendid moral gesture, squandering our lives but saving our honour? When his son, Jan Masaryk, was asked that in his London exile, he is supposed to have replied without hesitation that his father would have said only, "Time to saddle up!" Really? It would have been an incredibly bloody, futile gesture. After the war, the Allies, studying captured German documents, came to the conclusion that Czechoslovakia could have held out four days to a week. Yet it would have been such a grand affirmation, romantics argue, that we as a nation would have regained the manhood we lost at the Battle of White Mountain. As it was, Jan Patočka¹¹⁴ and Pavel Tigrid¹¹⁵ argue that the surrender for the second time broke our moral backbone, barely recovering from the Battle of White Mountain. Sociologists in fact trace our moral decline from Munich on. So, they conclude, we should have fought and *covered ourselves with the glory of twentieth century Don Quijotes*.

¹¹³ Jan Tesař, *Mnichovský komplex (The Munich Complex)*; Praha, Prostor 2000), pp. 11–83 provides a comprehensive review of Czechoslovak defense possibilities. In addition, he advances the hypothesis that the Czech general staff never really expected to fight. The author's factual research deserves attention even though we may not share his conspiratorial explanation of those facts. Still, the claim that Munich broke our moral backbone raises the question whether there was not something not quite in order with our backbones that one old man's failure to issue an order was enough to make more than a million well armed men surrender without firing a shot.

¹¹⁴ Jan Patočka argues this explicitly in his letters published as *Co jsou Češi? (What are the Czechs?)* in stark contrast with his 1968 series of articles, *O smysl dneška (The Meaning of Today)*. See Chapter 7 below.

¹¹⁵ Pavel Tigrid (1917–2003), originally Pavel Schönfeld, a Czech journalist, spent the war in exile, working for the Czech section of BBC. After the war he returned to Czechoslovakia only to be driven into exile two years later by the Communist coup. In Paris, he founded and edited an exile journal, *Svědectví (Testimony)*, oriented specifically at home audiences. For many clandestine readers at home, Tigrid embodied the hope of a free Czechoslovakia. After the liberation, he served as advisor to Václav Havel for two years, later became minister of culture in the government headed by Havel's opponent, Václav Klaus.

It is a powerful argument. However, the Poles fought, charging with naked sabres against tanks, but it did not seem to affect their moral profile in later years. There might have been rather more serious considerations as well. Some scholars point out that, as now we know, the British Foreign Office never considered Czechoslovakia a desirable formation on the map of Europe. Its founders may have been idealistic, but an entity patched up from a mix of such incompatible nationalities would be inherently unstable in a region made precarious by the demise of Austria. If under a German attack Czechoslovakia collapsed internally, British Foreign Office might well have taken it as a confirmation of their predictions. The British might have been willing to guarantee the Czechs cultural autonomy, as they in fact promised at Munich, but not a multiethnic state. In fact, the most challenging task facing Czechoslovak exile diplomacy was convincing the British that Czechoslovakia – and not only the truncated “Czecho-” after Munich – ought to be restored at all. While recognising Beneš as the exile president of the Czech nation, they did not agree to a restoration of the pre-war Czechoslovak state until 1942, after Czech paratroopers assassinated the number three man in the Nazi hierarchy, Reinhard Heydrich, in what the Nazis considered wholly subdued Prague. The restoration of Czechoslovakia could be justified largely because the reason for its downfall was perceived to have been external, Britain’s unwillingness to honour its obligation. It would have been damnably hard had Czechoslovakia disintegrated for internal reasons, as a result of a revolt of its own (non-Czech) citizens.

For, the wisdom of hindsight has it, had the Czechs decided to fight in 1938, Czechoslovakia would have almost certainly visibly disintegrated. The Slovaks would have declared independence, the Magyars would have opted for annexation by Hungary while the three million Germans almost to a man would have taken up arms against their Czech compatriots.¹¹⁶ To the British, that would have been proof positive that Czechoslovakia had been a mistake, not fit to be renewed even after Hitler’s defeat. Had Czechoslovakia fought and disintegrated, then, according to this argument, its val-

¹¹⁶ This is grossly unfair to the incredibly brave Czechoslovaks of German nationality who, in spite of the pressure of their fanaticised fellow Germans, remained loyal to Czechoslovakia. Some thirty thousand of them joined the social democratic *Republikanische Wehr*, swore allegiance to Czechoslovakia and Masaryk and defended the republic in arms alongside the regular Czech units, paying a terrible price for it after Munich when the right-wing Czecho-Slovak government would do nothing to protect them. Individual Czechoslovak Germans such as Walter

iant gesture would have sealed its fate regardless of the outcome of the war. Perhaps Beneš was not an indecisive coward but a far-seeing statesman.

This argument, to be sure, runs so utterly contrary to our most cherished myths that it is totally unacceptable and likely to provoke a violent response. It is just unthinkable. How could we justify surrendering just because we did not get an order to defend ourselves, had we not Beneš to blame? Besides, there is no indication that President Beneš thought along those lines in making his decision. Yet, though we are all ready to reject it out of hand, the possibility of such reasoning still raises questions. Would it really have been better had we fought? It is an ongoing debate and a wound that shows no sign of healing. Only a person willing to live vicariously through that Czech agony with its utterly unacceptable and inevitable options can hope to understand the course of our philosophic reflection about our identity.

Unacceptable and inevitable – that is the problem. Our history has repeatedly driven us into impossible situations from which there was no honourable way out short of personal heroism hardly to be expected from ordinary mortals. Yet we have to cope with them. Critical self-awareness which bonds ethnic kin into a nation – Masaryk's *meaning of our history*, Patočka's *national philosophy* – is not a product of idle free fancy. It is an attempt to cope with a particular historical situation, groping for basic human dignity and a sense of personal validity within broader or narrower bounds set by the intractable givens its time. Sometime those bounds are broad indeed. At other times, they grind all hope and effort to dust between the unthinkable and the inevitable.

Czech national identity, as Masaryk formulated it in spirit and deed,¹¹⁷ presupposed a peaceful world within a fundamentally benign cosmos. The main thrust of human presence – or spoken with Masaryk, the *meaning of*

Brüghel served Czechoslovakia throughout the war – Brüghel worked for the Czechoslovak government in exile and returned after the war, only to find there was no room for him in the new ethnically cleansed Czechoslovakia. Altogether, there may have been as many as three hundred thousand of them. However, there were three and a half million Czechoslovak citizens of German nationality and their Sudeten German Party, a knock-off of the NSDAP, was the strongest party in the Czechoslovak parliament. It was a time of heartbreak.

¹¹⁷ I am borrowing the phrase *spirit and deed* from the title of Emil Ludwig's once popular *Geist und Tat*, published in translation as *Duch a čin (Spirit and Deed; Praha, Čin 1935)*. Ludwig, a perceptive journalist, was a Czechoslovak of German

human history – centers on the growth of humans to the full stature of their humanity. That humanity is rather Kantian: life in freedom and responsibility, in respect and good will to others. Reality, Masaryk firmly believed, is so structured that it encourages such growth and rewards such behaviour. *Do well, and it will be well with thee*. Ultimately, virtue will be rewarded and vice punished, as it happens in fairy tales and, in principle at least, in well ordered societies.

For Masaryk, shared commitment to that *ideal of humanity* with its concomitants, democracy and social justice – basically respect and love for one's neighbour – is what has made a Czech nation out of the ethnically Czech population of the Czech lands. In anticipation, Czechs first turned to it in their struggle for freedom of faith within the Church in the Reformation. In the name of that ideal they entered upon modern national identity in their nineteenth century rebirth. In the name of the same ideal they triumphed in the creation of the free Czechoslovak state. However imperfectly, that state embodied the *ideal of humanity* in its commitment, as a token of a future humankind committed to human dignity and mutual respect, to freedom and social justice.

Masaryk's ideal and task of being Czech served the Czech nation well in its rebirth and its re-emergence upon world stage. It provided global understanding and reliable guidance as long as the basically peaceful and benign nineteenth century order lasted, in central Europe artificially prolonged by the Versailles treaty. Masaryk's conception of being human and being Czech presupposed an order of things which in all situations offered the possibility of a rational understanding and a reasonable choice. Humans may not always choose reasonably, in the best long range common interest. They often responded selfishly to short-range stimuli. But the possibility was there. It was an order which did not confront humans with impossible situations.

In Europe, that order collapsed definitively with the great economic crisis of the 1930's. It had already developed dangerous cracks in the First World War and was restored only by prodigious effort, artificially. That artifice proved insufficient in face of the economic crisis. Humans found themselves in impossible situations, trapped between the unacceptable and the

nationality, in the spirit of Masaryk. His is a series of interviews with Masaryk, sober, realistic, perceptive and altogether in my estimation the best source for understanding Masaryk as a person, badly distorted by the syrupy superficiality of Karel Čapek's *President Masaryk Tells His Story*. Note esp. section "Between Nation and Humanity", pp. 99–109.

inevitable. Some clung to the ideal of a rational humanity, and died. Many more turned to irrationality, and killed. That was the situation which Czechs committed to Masaryk's *ideal of the Czech nation* confronted at the end of the summer of 1938. There were no longer reasonable options. There was only the unacceptable and the inevitable.

The ideal of humanity – the vision of freedom and dignity in a democratic society – lost none of its ideal validity. Only the philosophical framework in which Masaryk sought to ground it lacked the resources for dealing with the wholly different reality of the twentieth century which for us began at Munich on September 29, 1938. Perhaps that is why Jan Patočka, in spite of his great respect and appreciation of Masaryk, speaks, as we noted at the start, of Masaryk's *attempt at a Czech national philosophy and its failure*.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Jan Patočka, "Pokus o českou národní filosofii a jeho nezdar" (An Attempt at a Czech National Philosophy and Its Failure; in: Jan Patočka, *Češi I (Czechs I)*, op. cit., pp. 341–365.

CHAPTER SIX

The Unacceptable and the Inevitable

President Beneš's decision to accept the Munich dictate may have made the post-war restoration of Czechoslovakia possible, but, by general consensus, it broke the moral spine of the nation. Perhaps so, but it definitely sounded the death knell for the historic optimism on which Masaryk based his noble attempt at a Czech national self-understanding. To be sure, a great many Czechs clung to that optimism and to the memory of the glory days of the first republic, largely because the alternative was despair. It was, though, an embattled faith, no longer spontaneous or obvious. We were defying defeat, and forced ourselves to believe, *faut de mieux*. Still, especially for the younger generations, the nineteenth century vision of peace and progress was no longer believable – and the humane values of Masaryk's democracy unimaginable. Munich left its imprint on our collective consciousness for years to come.

It would be difficult to describe the total trauma or the hate and despair it bred. Once the war would start, spirits would rise. Understandably. We would no longer feel defeated, only embattled. A great many individual Czechs were determined to fight, quite literally, in exile or in the resistance. Still, many were simply crushed, as if surrendering without firing a shot had sapped their self-confidence and self-respect alike. The moral morass of the "second republic", designed to be indefensible and nonviable, testified to the moral devastation which the surrender wrought both on individual Czechs and the Czech community as a whole. It is not at all clear whether we managed to restore the moral warp and woof of our society to this day. The second republic left deep scars.

The second republic: officially, it was called Czecho-Slovakia. Its borders were grotesque, drawn so that all Czechoslovak fortifications would be in the Reich and all major internal rail and highway links interrupted. The Czechs pretended that they were still running the country, but Slovakia and Ruthenia blatantly ignored the central government in Prague. That government, whose writ ran only in the remnants of Bohemia and Moravia, operated un-

derstandably under ruthless pressure from *the Reich* – Nazi Germany – and within hopelessly narrow limits, in spite of the efforts of its government to preserve some vestiges of autonomy. That political anomaly lasted less than half a year, from the signing of the Munich agreement on September 30th, 1938, to the German occupation of Bohemia and Moravia on March 15th of the following year. In Slovakia, a clerical regime with strong fascist leanings seized full control. In Ruthenia, a Ruthene nationalist sought rather improbably to create a passable facsimile of national fervor. What was left of the Czech lands, Bohemia and Moravia, was left to cope with the hopeless task of daily survival, with a philosophic question underlying it all – *now what is the meaning of our national identity – and what, if anything, is still the point of it?*

What, indeed? Modern Czech identity, shaped by Masaryk, had been distinctly *Czechoslovak* and pegged unambiguously to the enlightenment ideals of freedom, social justice and tolerance, to democracy in the full broad sense Masaryk gave that word. It was not, though, Masaryk's arbitrary invention. Given its demographic origins in the nineteenth century, the Czech national community tended to be rather plebeian, socially progressive and equally impatient with all aristocracy and with the traditions which claimed to justify it. It tended to be social and profoundly democratic, committed to politics as a discussion in quest of a consensus. Vast majority of all Czechs identified with that vision and it was that vision which long had functioned as a *national philosophy* in the sense of a pre-reflective national consensus.

Yet that consensus was now stifled at the root, much as the post-reformation consensus had been stifled after the Habsburg conquest in the early seventeenth century. While the publicly active sector of the old republic did try to cling to the legacy of the Masaryk years within the new limits, it found Nazi tolerance for such legacy suffocatingly narrow. The presence of Nazi Germany made itself felt in all public expression and decision making. That Nazi presence in turn encouraged Czech antisemitism as well as a vehement vocal rejection of democratic traditions in favour of what was then called an *authoritarian state*. Seeking an ideology more compatible with it than Masaryk's humanistic democracy might well have appeared to many as the wiser course. Encouraged by the mood of the hour, the idea of a directed democracy found legitimacy and favour on the right. The neighbouring Nazi Germany seemed triumphant for the foreseeable future.

At the end of November, 1938, a respected jurist, dr Emil Hácha, Catholic and conservative, yet no less committed to Masaryk's democracy, finally agreed to serve as president of the truncated state, as a person acceptable to the Czechs and not overly offensive to Hitler. He accepted under heavy

pressure, unwillingly, as a personal sacrifice. Yet his inauguration proved a festive occasion, with a parade of units of the once mighty Czechoslovak army and a vast crowd, clinging to the remnants of their Republic and at least symbolically expressing their loyalty.¹¹⁹ Somewhat improbably, the “second republic” seemed to be a going concern.

A dramatic simplification of Czech political scene followed, with the right gathered in a National Solidarity, the democratic left forming an opposition Labour party and the Communist Party banned. Philosophically, aside from the tottering *directed democracy*, understood vaguely as authoritarian rule of more or less elected representatives over a mute and docile populace, the only political ideologies acceptable to the new rulers were those based on *fascism*, wide-spread throughout Europe, or on German *national socialism* or Nazism, rather a German speciality, though not without imitators.

At the time, those two labels stood for distinctly different ideas and realities. Today, three generations later, they have become hopelessly tangled – ironically due largely to the needs of the Allied war effort. The then Allies – the British Empire, France and assorted small victims of Hitler’s expansion – needed an ideological device for their cause. In 1940, with some allowance, *the democracies* could do. However, after Hitler attacked the Soviet Union and *the democracies* found themselves allied with Stalin, a more flexible term was needed. That is when the term *antifascism* came into service as

¹¹⁹ There was only one difference: at Hácha’s inauguration, the traditional twenty-one gun artillery salute was omitted. – Dr Emil Hácha (1872–1945), president of the Supreme Administrative Court, was elected president of post-Munich Czecho-Slovakia on November 30, 1938. He strove to minimize the damage of Munich as he could, under constant German pressure. In March, Hitler called him to Berlin and after a night-long interrogation with threats of aerial annihilation of Prague and physical duress forced him to sign a letter inviting the Germans to occupy what was left of Czecho-Slovakia. Hácha wanted to resign in protest, but leading figures of Czech politics, including Beneš from his exile, urged him to stay on to prevent worse. That *worse* came three years later when the Germans executed Hácha’s prime minister, gen. Eliáš. Hácha again wanted to resign, was urged yet once more to stay on for the good of the nation. He broke down and stayed, no longer able to intervene in German arbitrary will. Then he was no longer a tragic figure, only a pathetic one. At the war’s end he was arrested and charged with collaboration. Beneš, who could have cleared him, refused to intervene: recognising Hácha to have been president, even for the three months of Czecho-Slovakia, would have put Beneš’s own mandate in question. Hácha, severely ill, died in prison not many days thereafter and was swept from public view as an inconvenient reminder of the aftermath of Munich.

a harbinger of many *anti*-movements to come, lumping together indiscriminately two equally distasteful but distinct phenomena, fascism and Nazism, against both of which the Allies did battle.

Fascism as Mussolini formulated it in Italy and Franco in Spain, was a fundamentally conservative – or in the idiom of the time, a *reactionary* – movement, reacting against the political development since the democratic revolution. It rejected the democratic revolution first and foremost for the freedom and equality it proclaimed. To the fascists, that appeared as sheer *hubris* – and critical reason, its basis, as the original sin. Not reason, but tradition expresses and so teaches us the ageless moral order. That order is said to be hidden from the intrusive eyes of critical reason. It is said to open itself to one who is willing to honour ageless tradition and humbly listen to the voice of the deep. Unlike the conservatives, though, the fascists assigned a central role – and a certain mystique of ancient Rome revived – to the State, using the Roman instruments of law enforcement, a bundle of rods and a headsman's axe, as its symbol.

In countries like Spain or Austria, where the Church served as the chief bulwark of a traditional social order, the Fascists understandably leaned to clericalism. In Spain and Portugal alike, the Church and the fascist movement, the Falange, functioned as the twin pillars of the State. In more secular states, though, the Fascists got along without the Church quite nicely. Everywhere, whether using that name or not, the fascists revered elites in general, defending their prerogatives, though a significant part of the traditional aristocracy disdained them as social upstarts. Still, the fascists felt at home with the fashionable Gothic revival of pseudo-mediaeval order and values while deploring the Enlightenment and its reforms. In war-time France, the home-grown fascists banned the motto *Liberté, égalité, fraternité!*, substituting a docile one of their own – *Travail, famille, patrie* – work, family and fatherland. The change spoke volumes.

Interestingly enough, fascism in its original form was not anti-Semitic. Snobbish, yes, but its snobbery retained a more traditional form. In fact, a great many German Jews escaping from Nazi Germany found refuge in Fascist Italy. Official anti-Semitism made its appearance in Italy only when the Germans marched in to prop up their tottering fascist ally in 1943 and brought in distinctly Nazi ideas. Prior to that, while Italian fascists made a point ostentatiously of *keeping the Jews in their place*, they did not make a programme of persecuting them.

Nazism, the other permissible philosophical option, was a horse of a different colour. It was radically revolutionary and virulently anti-Communist

and anti-Semitic, committed to destroying the old order, not to preserving it. At times it actually seemed that anti-Semitism represented the only firm plank in the programme of the Hitler movement. As for the rest of the programme, the Nazis picked it up and discarded it as convenient. During the economic crisis, they indulged in radical socialist rhetoric to attract the unemployed. A year after taking power, Hitler suppressed that rhetoric (together with its spokesmen, murdered in the course of the Night of Long Knives) and stressed a nationalist note to attract the professional middle classes. What remained was a cult of wilful power, of sheer force, with anti-Semitism (and other *anti*-movements, as the anti-Bolshevism which made Hitler so appealing to the then British King Edward VIII) as symbolic demonstration of strength after the years of defeat and powerlessness.

Nazism was certainly different from fascism, though hardly an alternative. It was truly a revolutionary movement, as revolutionary as fascism was conservative. The Nazis, recruited largely from groups acutely unhappy with the present state of the society, like middle class victims of the inflation and working class victims of the Depression, were not interested in preserving any old glory or revering some ageless *Order of Being* or *Moral Order of the Cosmos*. For all his fervent willingness to adopt the symbols of the Nazi movement, Heidegger with his basically fascist views lasted less than a year before resigning as Rector and withdrawing from overt politics.¹²⁰ In their quarrel over South Tirol, Hitler and Mussolini actually mobilised their armies against each other. Hitler was an anti-Fascist – and in Austria the fascist Chancellor, Kurt Schuschnigg, rounded up Nazis in concentration camps and was in turn imprisoned by them after 1938.

The Nazis had no wish to conserve or restore. Refurbishing the glory that was Rome, building a state embodying the manly Roman virtues, all that was a Fascist impulse. The Nazis were out to destroy the state and the society which, in their own eyes at least, had failed them. They were determined to create their own alternative revolutionary institutions, displacing the old much as the *Volksgerichte*, people's courts, replaced the Prussian tradition of justice and the Waffen-SS took the pride of place from the Army. Instead of a cult of tradition, the Nazis cultivated the *volkisch* virtues of the peasants

¹²⁰ Of the making of many books detailing Heidegger's involvement with the Nazis there seems to be no end. They vary in interpretation from vitriolic to apologetic, but they largely agree on the facts, here taken from one of them, Hugo Ott, *Martin Heidegger, A Political Life* (translated by Allan Blunden, New York, Harper Collins 1993).

– Heidegger affected a peasant cloak – and the muscular rhetoric of young men. The movement bristled with slogans glorifying *strength through joy* and covered walls with posters of sun-bronzed blond Germans, sound in body and disciplined in mind (if any).

As for the source of inspiration, while fascism looked to age-old customs as *the Moral Order* (a.k.a. *family values*) grown visible, Nazism looked to the spontaneity of sheer Will to Power and to mystic intuitions which can invalidate reason and custom alike. The People's Courts, *Volksgerichte*, were to judge not by law or precedent but by the *sound feeling of the German people*. Hitler had little use for Freudian psychoanalysis, sickly and inward looking as it seemed to him, but at times himself acted as a Freudian *Es* on a bad day. His habit of countermanding his generals' orders was notorious – and, from the Allied standpoint, rather fortunate. Yet ten years earlier the Nazis did succeed in infecting a large part of the German population with a blinding passion for Hitler and the New Germany. The combination of fear and *ressentiment* can be a powerful motivator and Hitler was a master at exploiting German fear of *red hordes from the East* and the German sense of injury from a lost war and a lost security.

Both fascism and Nazism represented powerful, pervasive movements, though hardly a very practical model for any *coalition of the willing* in the rump state of Czecho-Slovakia. In spite of the desperate situation, they had little appeal. Given the nationalism of the Nazis, a Czech variant of Nazism seemed patently absurd. Nazism was fundamentally a German racism. It classified races genetically as the culture generating Germanic master race, to be nurtured, the culture destroying Semitic race, to be destroyed, and the lesser breed between them, more or less fit for the role of servants of the master race. The Czechs, low on that scale, could hardly be expected to follow it with heart and will and were not deemed worthy of having someone lead them to it. Only today, after the defeat of German imperial claims and with the fading of memories, does a Czech Nazism, riding an anti-communist backlash, have some appeal on the racist fringe of Czech society. Its search for Germanic roots of the Czech community is actually slightly less absurd than the popular quest for putative Keltic origins. In the absence of visible Jews, it replaces the traditional Nazi anti-Semitism with “anti-cigánism” – hatred of the Roma – and with general xenophobia. At the height of German imperial ambitions, however, Czech Nazism was neither a viable nor a very visible option.¹²¹

¹²¹ Except, perhaps, to Col. Emanuel Moravec who attempted to build a miniature Nazi movement of his own, complete with a mythology of St Wenceslas, por-

Czech fascism was something else altogether. Beneath the republican surface of Czech society there was always a layer of popular conservatism, born of resentment at the pace of change brought about by the republic, especially among the strata marginalised by the change – and, given our history, *conservative* tended to coincide with clerical and authoritarian. The discontented responded readily to the fascist undertones of both the nationalist and the religious right, disaffected equally by Masaryk's ideas of freedom and justice and by the popular infatuation with Hussite symbols. Though the bulk of Catholic faithful shared a commitment to the republic, some of the Church hierarchy often sounded more ambivalent. Some Catholic intellectuals – as Jaroslav Durych¹²² – deeply conservative, with a strong sense of a moral order and respect for authority, rose to prominence during the second republic. In the bitterness of defeat fed by accumulated *ressentiment*, they viciously attacked Masaryk and the men of the First Republic like Karel Čapek. Still, even they did not stoop to collaboration. Like its Italian counterpart, Czech fascism was more marked by a contempt for the plebeian Nazi hordes than by any Nazi sympathies.

The bulk of the Czech democratic right was too disoriented by the betrayal of its extreme fringe, Nazi and Fascist alike, to produce a viable alternative conception of Czech national identity. In part, there simply was no time. The triumph of the Right after Munich was too short lived. Then,

trayed as a willing vassal of the German emperors, a youth movement and a black-shirted shock troop. The Germans, however, wanted the Czech lands as a pool of docile labour, not as politically active, whatever the ideology. Col. Moravec did get into the government after the execution of gen. Eliáš, but found few supporters and at war's end committed suicide. In recent years, there has been a spate of books about the *second republic*, incl. a rather useful study richly supported by primary sources, Jan Gebhart and Jan Kuklík, *Druhá republika 1938–1939* (*Second Republic 1938–1939*; Praha, Paseka 2004) or more popularly written, Jan Rataj, *O autoritativní národní stát* (*In Quest of an Authoritative National State*; Praha, Karolinum 1997), rich in illustrations, though alas, all in Czech. The only overview I know in a world language is rather modest volume by Theodore Prochazka, *The Second Republic* (New York 1981).

¹²² Jaroslav Durych (1886–1962), poet and novelist, was one of the Catholic authors who had the courage to respond to the Munich tragedy by inquiring into Czech failures which contributed to it, not sparing even Masaryk. He was the author of *Boží duha* (*God's Rainbow*), a novel inquiring into injustices perpetrated by Czechs on Germans, which wholly captivated Jan Patočka who translated it into German (*Gottes Regenbogen*, Stuttgart, DVA 1999).

too, the intellectual resources simply were not there. Czech conservatism had too long been tied to the Austrian establishment. The Czech community had its share of conservatives, but for the most part lacked conservative thinkers. As a result, the nich was, for the right, less a time of purposeful reaction than a time of bewilderment, of aimlessness and of moral morass. It would be unrealistic to expect an intellectual surge, a sense of identity or a *national philosophy* from such a time.

For the Czechs it was fortunate that the war broke out less than a year after Munich. Thanks to it, they did not have to wallow in their slough of despond for long. At a stroke, the task became clear – to fight a safely external enemy, “the Germans” (conveniently forgetting the thirty thousand Czechoslovaks of German nationality who volunteered to take up arms in the *Republikanische Wehr* in defence of the republic). Or perhaps to fight “the Nazis”, or later “the fascists”, now in the blurred sense of the word which covered anyone we happened to fight at a given moment. The Czechs, willy-nilly, acquired a make-shift national (anti)philosophy. Our new identity, such as it was, was defined by an external enemy. We – meaning *all proper Czechs* – were now (anti)fascists. Like all *anti*-ideologies, it was a rather scrappy creed, prone to violence and readily open to abuse. That became evident in the rage and cruelty, unthinkable in Masaryk’s day, to which a significant segment of Czech population gave vent at war’s end while driving out vaguely defined *Germans and traitors*.¹²³

Masaryk’s humanism with its sepia tones of the nineteenth century perished in the age of wars, but there was no new conception of the meaning of human life in general or of the place of the Czech nation within it to take its place. The second republic did not have the time to provide one; war-time

¹²³ Because a parliament had yet to be elected, President Beneš upon his return ruled by presidential decrees. One of those called for an expulsion of *Germans, Magyars, collaborators and traitors*. As legislation, it was not much, but events were faster. After the war, for a range of motives all masked by genuine spontaneous rage, self-appointed vigilantes drove anyone who might fit one of those four categories out of their dwellings and across the border. The initiative, coming seemingly from war-time resistance, was accepted by president Beneš as a way of resolving the minority problem and approved by the Allies, otherwise engaged. In half a year, over three million humans were forcibly displaced. In a war, par for the course, but this was peacetime. Only fifty years after the fact have we begun timidly to speak of it. It will be another fifty ere we can absorb it. The memory is yet another reason to be grateful for the European Union and not very favourably disposed toward the Irish, Kelts though they may be.

resistance was too busy fighting a war. It, too, had to make do with the makeshift ideology of *hating the Germans* (or perhaps “*the fascists*”, as convenient). *Inter arma*, it seems, *silent* not only *Musae*, but *sophia* as well.

Nor did a complex of shared perceptions and values emerge during the three postwar years before the Communist coup. Among the Czechs who survived the war, there was a strong desire to forget that Munich and the war ever happened. Perhaps the instantly repressed memory of the great expulsion added a reason for forgetting. We remembered too well who we had been in Masaryk’s day to want to look closely at what we had become in our new found passion for ethnic cleansing. In any case, by far the most of us wanted just to forget and return to what now seemed like the idyllic times *before all that*. There was even an attempt to legislate the war years out of existence with the rather problematic doctrine of legal continuity of Czechoslovakia before and after the war. According to that, legally, there never was any *Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren*, dr Emil Hácha, though duly elected after President Beneš’s resignation and once cheered by an anxious crowd, was now *de iure* never the president of Czechoslovakia. No Czechoslovakia ever existed and, I suppose, *de iure* at least none of us were seven long years older.

It was all just silly, of course. We were all so much older, the world had changed so much. The Beneš government with the passionate support of much of the Czech population sought to solve its minority problem with an ethnic cleansing, uprooting the more than three million ethnic Germans and transferring them to Germany – and to seek to dissolve the memory in turn. Today, at peace in a united Europe, the idea of a country expelling one third of its productive population seems wholly unconceivable and its legitimacy rather dubious. Back then, though, it was still war in human minds and hearts, with passions running high. The Czechs, rightly or wrongly, blamed the tragedy of their beloved republic and the seven year ordeal squarely on their German fellow citizens. Some have argued that the transfer itself may have been necessary for both sides. Both Czechs and (Czech) Germans had failed so utterly at finding a way of sharing their common homeland. Given the passions of the war, going on living side by side might well have been impossible. Still, it could hardly be reconciled with the tolerant humanism that had once been Czechoslovakia. Nor did the fanatic tone of public discourse, intensifying as the Communists mounted their drive for power, represent a continuation of our pre-war discussions. It was again war-time passions speaking, perhaps fuelled and fanned intentionally much as the *anti-Communist* passions are being fanned in some quarters today, twenty

years after the fact. Almost all of us invoked Masaryk as our programme, but it was not Masaryk's Enlightened ideals we had in mind as much as the nationalism which stuck to him during the First World War.

In the wake of the war with all its horrors, the cultural situation of our national community – what the Germans call, in a problematic but powerful metaphor, the *geistige Lage*, the state of our souls – was not conducive to the rise of a critical new self-understanding. We were still chafed raw and disoriented. The political right was thoroughly discredited by its apparent kinship with fascism. The charge, to be sure, was rather unfair. The bulk of conservative opinion in prewar Czechoslovakia was emphatically not fascist or fascist leaning. Ours was a genuinely democratic right. Except for its traditional anti-Semitism, it tended to share Masaryk's democratic presuppositions, even if not his rhetoric. Only an extremist margin carried right wing rhetoric to its fascist extreme. Yet the association was there. Our only distinctly right-wing state up until 1992 had been the second republic. In post war years, right wing rhetoric sounded familiar – the Order of Being, the virtues of tradition and obedience thereto, the deep rooted elitism. After the nightmare of Nazism and fascism, hardly anyone would have dared proclaim right-wing views openly. Even the People's Party, traditionally Catholic and closely associated with the Church, legitimated itself by its social conscience. No one protested against the banning of our clearly right-wing Agrarian party.

Fair or not, in the post war years our political right was simply too paralysed by association to provide the badly needed counterweight to the Communist advance. The left was not so much paralysed as disoriented. The Czech (non-Communist) left had always been democratic, actually synonymous with democracy in the Czech lands. It was social democratic, committed to democracy with a social conscience. The sense of our national identity as Masaryk helped shape it was democratic and social. With the right discredited in the popular view by its apparent kinship with Nazism and fascism, this should have been the golden age of Masaryk's social democracy.

It proved to be the opposite. Certainly, had it been the West that offered to come to our aid at Munich and that visibly defeated Hitler in the war, it could have been that. Unfortunately, in Czech eyes the West betrayed us in our hour of need. The Soviet Union, the Communists claimed, had been willing to come to our aid. (Discretely, they omitted to mention that the offer was made safely conditional on French aid and, since neither we nor the Germans had a common border with the Soviet Union, it was entirely theoretical.) In any case, it in fact had been the Soviet Union that bore the brunt

of the war and did the most desperate fighting, at Moscow, at Leningrad, at Stalingrad, at Kursk. The Red Army suffered and inflicted the vast bulk of casualties and in the end it was the Red Army that drove the Nazis out of most of our land.

After the war, while the West sought to re-conquer its former colonies – as the Dutch in the East Indies or the French in Indochina – the Soviet Union posed as a champion of national liberation in the third world. It may have all been done with mirrors and mostly was, but it was done convincingly. In addition, there was the fresh memory of the immense suffering during the depression and of the two world wars, both brought about and openly financed by capitalists. All of Europe, including prominently England, shared the conviction that capitalism had failed and needed to be replaced together with the ideologies of its era. It may have been a naïve, irrational conviction, but it ran deep in emotion. The Czech lands were not exempt from it.

And so it was. With the right discredited and the left disoriented by the vigorous entrance of the Communists onto the global political scene – not to mention the evident obsolescence of the assumptions of our pre-war national self-understanding, so evidently outdated – the scene seemed set for a triumphant entry of a new, Communist conception of Czech national identity.

Today, with the Soviet Union but a memory and communism in global disrepute, most commentators would vehemently deny there was ever a possibility of a Communist version of Czech national philosophy. Czechs have become downright compulsive about insisting that only a straggling band of knaves and fools ever supported the Communists, never mind the 39% that voted for them in our last reasonably free election. To hear tell, an innocent observer would come to the conclusion that the Communists were aliens, a strange conquering race that came out of nowhere, driven by sheer will to evil, devoid of human motivations, more like koranic *jinn*s than like humans. Therein we seem to have assimilated the American way of thinking in stark black-and-white together with everything else American. We insist that we are simply incapable of comprehending the Communists who staged the coup in 1948. Perhaps, in part at least, we fear lest we find in them a distorted image of our own selves.

For the Communists were no aliens from outer space. They, too, were the heirs of Europe's noblest moment, the Enlightenment revolt of critical reason against the oppression and misery sanctioned by sanctified custom. The Communists, too, were heirs to the ideals of liberty, equality, brother-

hood and of the democratic revolution. They had been our comrades in the social democratic struggle to *make workers human* – to include the labouring class in the democratic polity. For them, too, empathy with the suffering of the downtrodden was a powerful motive. There undoubtedly were also knaves and fools among the 39% of Czechs who voted Communist in 1946, but there surely were at least as many idealists who emerged from the Great Depression and the horrors of Nazi oppression with a firm determination, *Never again!*

Yes, the Communists were also different. Their creed included not only social justice for all, but also a conception of social interaction as *class war* and a dictatorship of the (vanguard of) the proletariat in place of liberty and justice for all. Then personally many of them were more radicalized and brutalized by the war. They claimed that the social democracy we envisioned, a world of freedom, peace and justice, is not possible as long as those who wield economic power are not subject to the constraints of *the people* – and there were reasons to believe them. They claimed, too, that the stranglehold of the great economic cartels cannot be broken by democratic means. Perhaps that, too, was true; it was certainly persuasive. Still, it should have been a warning.

Yet we had all been witnesses and victims of two horrible world wars and a horrendous depression between them. We knew that it was German industrialists like Fritz Thyssen who brought Hitler to power – and that for instance Henry Ford, himself was a virulent anti-Semite and an admirer of Hitler, though we were yet to find out that he continued to profit from manufacturing vehicles for the German as well as for the American army. Capitalism as we had known it before the war did fail horribly. For that matter, so did the pre-war democracies. They could not cope with the economic crisis, they could not even stop Mussolini from occupying Ethiopia – or Hitler from occupying Czechoslovakia. Now all Europe, including that pillar of democracy, Great Britain, was nationalising its heavy industries and looking for a different social model. In addition, the experience of the war had eroded our restraints against the use of violence as a tool of social policy. The post war population transfers showed as much. It should not be surprising that to a great many people the Communist revolutionary project seemed no more than an extension of the striving for a democracy with a social conscience which had marked Czech national aspirations since the time of our national revival. If we look at the post-war situation with an unjaundiced eye, it seems rather more surprising that the Communists should have failed so disastrously in capitalising on it.

For fail they did. They won the one election before their armed coup and the mood of the hour was largely on their side. In part it was clearly a reaction to what the Czechs regarded as the betrayal at Munich: to many voters, a vote for the Communists was a gesture of condemnation of the role of the democracies in yielding to Hitler as well as a wave of gratitude to the Soviet Union for our liberation. In part, it was sheer calculation. Communist party membership could effectively mask a dubious war-time record while providing access to the assets left behind by German expellees. In part, though, it was also the conviction that the Communists would take up the project of freedom and social justice that had guided us for generations and do it more effectively than the discredited old parties with their endless squabbles. In any case and for whatever reasons, the Communists could have expected to play a leading role for years to come, even without an armed coup, and might have well realised much of their plans without arousing so adamant an opposition.

They failed to take up that project, failed disastrously and, most of all, failed necessarily. Part of the reason was internal. The Communists were committed to a doctrine of class war and automatically resorted to harshly repressive measures where an attitude of trust and good will would have won them what they tried in vain to seize by force. Czech democracy was based on Masaryk's conception of politics as a patient quest for consensus. The ostentatiously "revolutionary" posturing, much though it fitted the mood of the moment, was fundamentally alien to Czech political culture and turned a potentially tolerant public into a mute opposition.

Another reason was external. The Communist party came to power with Soviet support, dependent on the Soviet Union and its All-Union Communist Party (of Bolsheviks), to give it its full title. Czechoslovakia, for all its disenchantment with Western policy at Munich, was a strongly western-oriented country. We write in Latin script, not in the Cyrillic *beechnuts*.¹²⁴ Our culture had been integrally western for a thousand years. We looked to the West for our models. In spite of our traditional russophilia, to be forced suddenly to treat Russia, by our standards hopelessly crude and primitively backward, as our model, while being cut off from what we thought *civilization*, made our new masters profoundly unbelievable. Perhaps more damagingly still, giving Soviet advisors final word in all our affairs meant that

¹²⁴ No, that is not an ethnic slur. The Russian word for a letter, *буква*, literally means a beechnut, evoking rather bucolic associations in anyone who, in spite of the forty Communist years, can still enjoy Russian literature, as Masaryk once did.

the Communist party could not make decisions appropriate to the Czech situation. Stalin may have condemned Karl Kautsky as renegade, but he still proved him right. It was Kautsky who had said that *wherever socialism is not possible democratically, it is not possible at all*.

Perhaps the clearest test of Communist strategy was the way the Party chose to deal with the memory of Masaryk. Prof. Nejedlý,¹²⁵ a Communist historian, was all for co-opting his memory as the Party successfully co-opted Alois Jirásek. The dead cannot protest. Yet the Party chose to condemn Masaryk instead – and in that one decision definitively lost credibility with many of its wavering sympathisers. While with some moderation the Party could have ruled with popular consent, it chose instead to rule by might – and lost it all. The individual failings which the Party came gradually to admit, “self-criticise” and order corrected were just pebbles in what was to become a land-slide. Rape, alas, may be faster than love, but it wins little affection.

In retrospect, the forty years of Communist rule seem to many like lost years, simply destructive, reminiscent of the rape of our cultural identity after the Battle of White Mountain. Yet they were not monolithic. They began with twenty years of forced transformation which, however Soviet controlled, was significantly Czech in its dynamics, carried out for the most part by Czechs in the name of Czech ideas. Even though in the staged trials and forced labour camps the Communist were acting rather like the Nazis, in many other ways a significant segment of Czech opinion suspected that, though they may condemn them, many of the new Communist measures did what long had wanted doing. Former farmers justly recall forced collectivization as a time of suffering and heartbreak. It was all of that. Still, it could not have been so vicious and pettily cruel were it not fuelled by generations of humiliation and resentment of the rural poor. Craftsmen and shopkeepers remember “nationalization” similarly, and justly so. Yet it, too, could not have been so horribly vindictive had it not the support of many

¹²⁵ Zdeněk Nejedlý (1878–1962) provides an example of the dilemma confronting Communist intellectuals. He was quite a good historian: his detailed biography of Masaryk, unfortunately ending with Masaryk’s appointment to Prague in 1882, is thorough, detailed and generally reliable. He was convinced that Communist ideals would have a chance only if they were grafted onto local traditions. However, this would transform Communism from its Soviet to a Czech model. During the war, in exile in Moscow, he realised that the Soviets insisted on obedience to the letter and gave up his efforts. As minister of education after the war he no longer sought more than to obey Moscow orders. In spite of his solid early work, he is not remembered kindly today.

common labourers who remembered the humiliation which a stratified society unwittingly meted out as their lot. Reasons cannot excuse the injustices, but they do make them comprehensible.

None of that excuses or mitigates the cruelty and the horror. The early Communist years were years both of revolutionary fervour and of revolutionary terror carried out with the viciousness of petty hate. The Communists knew they did not have a majority support and rather distrusted the support they did have. Not surprisingly, they overcompensated, imitating their Russian comrades who had been doing it for years. This was the period when uncritical, fanatic true believers, many of them young, committed the worst excesses in the unquestioning conviction that they were building the brave new world. Only too often they were just forcing worn-out workers to act out their ideological fantasy, destroying dreams and people alike. In the villages, the collectivization they celebrated in song and dance was a tragedy that cost lost and broken lives.

Ten years later, the revolutionary fervour spent, a weary reality showed through the sparklers of illusion. Gradually, the forced labour camps emptied out, the sharp edges of fanaticism smoothed by wear. *Immortal Stalin* died and from the Soviet Union there seeped news of his crimes and of the whole monstrous deception that for long passed for socialist reality. Songs, simple songs that did not call to vigilance or extol heroic effort, reappeared among the young, singing of girls laughing at dusk in the garden. Life, ordinary, decent human life started to find its way back. The façade of slogans remained, but more and more people no longer pretended to take them seriously.

The “Czech” cycle of Communist rule climaxed in the Czechoslovak Spring of 1968. Revolutionary fervour spent itself, the task now seemed to be one of “giving Communism a human face”, humanizing what fanaticism had distorted. History seemed to be acting out the scenario which the great reformed theologian, Josef Lukl Hromádka,¹²⁶ once one of the bright young men around Masaryk, had anticipated. There was no hope of bringing down the Communist regime, nor would it necessarily have been desirable. The

¹²⁶ J. L. Hromádka, whom we mentioned earlier (note 110 above), remains to a great extent a non-person in Czech Brethren circles in spite of his great contribution to theology and philosophy alike. Against the background of the current backlash against the old regime, violent in part also because in the course of forty two years nearly everyone both suffered and was forced to some compromises, Hromádka appears as having been *soft on Communism*. I do not believe that was

hope was that the force of the Czech dream and the heritage of Masaryk would create a new, democratic and socially just society within the framework of a socialist economy, giving Communism *a human face*.

I believe that is the one point at which we might legitimately speak of a possibility of a new, socialist *Czech national philosophy*. At least Jan Patočka definitely thought so. In the late sixties, he published a series of articles devoted to an enquiry into our national identity which he here labelled *national philosophy*. In that volume, to which we shall return in detail in our next chapter, Patočka applied the acumen and erudition of a major thinker to a quest for the meaning of what the Czechs were then living, the hope of the Czechoslovak Spring and then the crushing Soviet occupation. He traced the philosophical structure of the national revival in the previous century. He singled out the interplay of the Enlightenment with romanticism in our heritage and identified the component of the Enlightenment as central to Czech identity. *The return to the original meaning of socialism as human liberation*, he wrote, *proved ever more a return to the inmost presupposition of our national programme*. Affirming our allegiance to the great ideal of our time is a step forward, holding onto that ideal means to save and reaffirm our cultural existence. Striving for a democratic socialism within the Soviet sphere is, he concluded, the challenging, difficult task of the coming era.¹²⁷

That conclusion of his sketch of Czech history prepares a framework for the kind of national self-understanding which Patočka would later call *national philosophy*. We should not, however, suspect Patočka of preparing a niche for himself. The man whom he thought the likely bearer of that *na-*

his motivation. Rather, he identified deeply with Masaryk's confidence that History itself leads us to nobler humanity. He had a strong Old Testament sense of Communism as God's judgement on all the injustices of the capitalist order and was prepared to accept it as such, making it his task to give it a *human face* long before it became fashionable. It seems quite possible that had Masaryk lived that long, he would have assumed a like stance. The question is only whether in the process Hromádka did not go too far to be accommodating, crossing the line between dialogue and collaboration. Soviet intervention, however, made it clear that Communism had failed and that any attempt to give it a human face was vain. At that point, had Masaryk lived and Hromádka not died, it seems rather likely they, like Jan Patočka, would have turned to outright opposition, *saying NO to the Devil*. In any case, reading the prophets Ezekiel and Jeremiash is helpful in understanding Hromádka.

¹²⁷ Jan Patočka, *O smysl dneška (The Meaning of Today)*, in: Jan Patočka, *Češi I (Czechs I)*, op. cit., p. 338.

tional philosophy was not he but his brilliant student and younger colleague, Karel Kosík,¹²⁸ probably the best known Czech philosopher in the first half of the Communist era and, in his way, a paradigmatic example of the possibilities and constraints of creative thought under the Communist regime.

Kosík was one of the new generation of philosophers who reached their philosophical maturity after the Communists had come to power. He studied philosophy at the University of Leningrad, knew Hegel and Marx thoroughly and, on the whole, took a Marxist philosophical matrix for granted. However, he was also a Czech and after completing his education came to teach in Prague. Thanks to teachers like Jan Patočka, he encountered both Husserl's phenomenology, Sartre's existentialism and Heidegger's ontology. He appears to have taken it for granted that, for better or for worse, Marxism and what the Soviets called "socialism" were here to stay for the foreseeable future. Consistently with that, he concluded somewhat like J. L. Hromádka that a Czech philosopher's task was to make Communism as liveable as possible. Such was in fact the posture of an entire philosophic community in the Czech lands at the time. Among others, they included, beside Kosík, major dissenting thinkers such as Milan Machovec or Vítězslav Gardavský.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Karel Kosík (1926–2005), once Jan Patočka's prize pupil and friend, was the best known Czechoslovak philosopher of the 1960's. He belonged to the generation for whom Communism was simply a fated given and their task to make life human under and in spite of it. Much the same might be said of him as of Hromádka (note 69 above). Had Hromádka lived, their fortunes after the Soviet occupation might have been analogous. The Communist regime banned Kosík from the university, but the Velvet Revolution did not quite rehabilitate him. Having opposed and been persecuted by the Communists was not enough to make him acceptable. Only right-wing views were now *salonfähig*. Kosík continued to write brilliant essays for the social democratic leaning daily, *Právo*, notable one castigating the *Lumpenbourgeoisie* of the new order. Though they have appeared in cumulative volumes in Czech, they, unlike his *Dialektika konkrétního* (*Dialectics of the Concrete*), have never been translated into a world language. See bibliography.

¹²⁹ Major Vítězslav Gardavský (1923–1978), brought up a Catholic yet had to live in the harshest years of Communism. Presenting his thought as a Marxist-Christian dialogue he introduced Christian ideas into the stifled intellectual atmosphere of the time, esp. with a series of articles (later book), *Bůh není zcela mrtev* (*God is not Altogether Dead*). After the Soviet occupation he was expelled from his post as teacher of philosophy at the Military Academy, was doggedly persecuted until literally hounded to death, book still in hand. His rich literary work is another victim of the backlash against anything connected with Communism after the Velvet Revolution of 1989.

For Kosík, the task of humanising Communism started with a critical reading of Hegel and especially of Marx, stressing the motifs of his early writings. On Kosík's reading, shared by critical Marxists in the West, Marx in his later years became dogmatic, substituting theoretical abstractions for lived reality, and with that irrelevant. It was in the young Marx that Kosík found a different emphasis on reality in its tangible immediacy – or, in his terminology, in its concreteness. It is, for instance, alienation as a lived, personal experience, not as a theoretical abstraction, and the struggle at overcoming it that constitutes lived reality, our *Lebenswelt* or, borrowing a term from phenomenology, *Sein als Bewußtsein*. In the dogmatic Marxism-Leninism of the time, that would be a deviation into “idealism”. Read through a phenomenological prism, it appeared as the most valuable Marxist insight.

For Kosík, the operative component in the praxis which constitutes reality in its lived concreteness is work, whether as labour or as toil. Yes, it is the familiar Marxist thesis about alienated labour, but in Kosík's hands it comes alive as lived experience. It is fascinating to watch how very much like Masaryk Kosík sounds when he speaks of the experience of work. Alienated labour is not simply work whose product is appropriated by another. It is toil in which a person finds no fulfilment, into which the worker cannot enter with whole being and find satisfaction therein. It is the toil of the unfree. Its opposite is the labour people undertake willingly, with heart and will, the labour of the free. One can almost hear Masaryk speaking of his father's attitude to work.

For Kosík's conception of toil, of alienated labour, is not something deduced from dogma. It is something a concrete subject – what Husserl called *Ich-Mensch* – encounters in the concreteness of lived reality. That is why Kosík's best known book bears the title *Dialektika konkrétního* (*Dialectics of the Concrete*). Dialectics in Kosík's vocabulary is the meaning structure which Husserl called *Wesen*, only conceived dynamically. The *concrete* is lived experience in its experiential immediacy, constituted as an intelligible whole by praxis (basically, by labour). *Dialectics* is the meaning-structure of that process. What Kosík seems to call for is what Husserl had termed *deskriptive Wesenslehre der reinen Erlebnisse*, dynamically conceived, as Husserl conceived of it when in *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften* he came to speak of *fungierende Subjektivität*.

There are vast differences, to be sure. Kosík really is a critical Marxist and a Marxist critic. Yet it is uncanny how some of the central themes of Czech philosophising – its practical orientation, its normative moral emphasis, its

stress on reason and clear seeing – emerge repeatedly, though in very different forms, in the work of original Czech thinkers, here as very different as Masaryk, Husserl and Kosík.

Kosík's *Dialectics of the Concrete* was quickly translated into all major languages and a number of local ones besides. For a time, Kosík became the best known Czech thinker. His work met all the requirements of a *national philosophy*, in promise at least. It provided a global framework in its dramatic revision of Marxism. It made that Marxism viable while at the same time providing the crucial link between the *global* and, in Kosík's fortunate term, *the concrete*. When he wrote much later of *Masaryk's Idea of Czechoslovak Statehood in Light of History's Criticism*¹³⁰ he proved that his struggle with "the concrete" was not merely theoretical.

Had the *Czech phase* of Communism in Czechoslovakia been allowed to follow its course from its initial revolution with its reign of terror to the synthesis of a socialist democracy – as in 1968 even Jan Patočka imagined it might – Kosík might well have become the philosopher of Czech identity of his time, in effect assuming the role which Patočka took on when Soviet occupation and Communist normalization displaced the hopes of a socialist democracy. That normalization represented the Communists' the second attempt to short-circuit love by rape and with it their second great failure. Though to many aging witnesses of those events it seems in forty year retrospect that had the Soviet tanks not intervened, tanks from the other side might have done so on a like pretext. The Czech vision of a radically democratic socialism was too audacious for either side of the Cold War. Or perhaps it was just too unrealistic. Or perhaps those two are the same.

Should we judge Karel Kosík's fleeting attempt at a philosophical understanding of Czech identity a failure, as Jan Patočka judged Masaryk's? I do not believe so. Or if so, then only in the same sense. Much as Masaryk forged a national self-understanding for the humanist age of historical optimism, so Karel Kosík forged a self-understanding for the age of dominant Marxism and so transformed it into an age of a quest for a human face for the inhuman pseudo-reality. That pseudo-reality was an abstraction which sought to displace the "concrete", multilayered, conflicted unity of reality-as-experience with a unidimensional theoretical construct. Kosík's philosophy was a success for all who had to face life with the assumption that Marxism was

¹³⁰ Karel Kosík, "Třetí Mnichov?" (Third Munich?), a paper at a conference in Hodonín in 1992, published as *Masarykova idea československé státnosti ve světle kritiky dějin* (Praha, Ústav T. G. Masaryka 1992), pp. 130–141.

here to stay. Under those circumstances, a “Communism with a human face” was the best option available, even if it was never available in more than a token and a promise.

Soviet occupation on August 21st, 1968, put an end to any such hope. There was no more possibility, however tenuous, that further development would give Communism a human face and redeem the horrendous sacrifices of its early years. There would be no further development. The Soviets embalmed their “real socialism” for all eternity, changeless as their embalmed Lenin in his mausoleum on *Krasnaya ploschad*.¹³¹ Nothing remained but to accept the unacceptable, resign oneself to living the lie and hope that someday, in some future time, the Soviet empire would collapse – with no guarantees as to what might replace it. The age of endless ideology ended in a boundless sham. Henceforth, the way to social justice in freedom could no longer lead through Communism.

To preserve human dignity under conditions both unacceptable and inevitable may well have been the most basic thrust of Czech intellectual life in the period between the end of the First Republic in 1938 and the end of the Communist regime in 1989.

Philosophically speaking, for all its many upheavals, that really is one coherent era in Czech history, with common basic traits. The age that preceded it, between the national revival and the end of the first republic, was coherent as an age of hope. It was an age in which each generation lived with the sense that in some crucial sense it is better off than its predecessor and with the hope that, whatever happens, that upward trend will continue. There was the rebirth of Czech language and culture which meant most of all a rebirth of Czech self-respect. There was the final abolition of serfdom in 1848 and the end of absolutism in 1860. There was the coming age of steam and electricity, and, in 1918, the birth of Czechoslovakia. Yes, there was also a world war about which no one suspected of being only *the first*. That, though, could be integrated in the age of progress and hope as the last great battle against the forces of the past. Since humans tend to assume that whatever happens to be the case will always be so, it was not hard to believe that the endless escalator of history would bear us ever upward, much as

¹³¹ The older meaning of the Russian word *krasnyi* (fem. *krasnaya*) is *beautiful*, its more common meaning today is *red*. As with so much in post-Soviet Russia, it seems safer to leave the name of Kremlin's *Beautiful* (or *Red*) *Square* in the original.

we believe today. To most people it apparently never occurred that history might not be an escalator as much as a paternoster.¹³²

1938 and the death of the First Republic brought a radical discontinuity, introducing an age of hopelessness. Again, for all its sorrow, that age is a coherent whole, in spite of its turns and upheavals. That whole included Munich and the Nazi occupation, the Communist coup and the Soviet occupation and then twenty years of suspended animation. Yes, there were outbursts of joy, as the liberation at the end of the Second World War, Šlitř and Suchý¹³³ in the 1960's or the Czechoslovak Spring of 1968. Those outbursts of joy made the age bearable, but did not change its overall character as an age of disillusion, cynicism and despair. Jan Patočka captured the mood masterfully in his sixth *Heretical Essay*, "Wars of the XXth century and the XXth century as war". If anyone still read Masaryk, it was as nostalgia. The thinkers who spoke to the bitter, broken age after the occupation were writers like Franz Kafka, Albert Camus, Ernst Jünger, Martin Heidegger or Friedrich Nietzsche. The Czech lands had long been a skansen of the nineteenth century in the twentieth. With Munich and what followed, they entered upon the grim reality of the twentieth and, thanks to the Soviet occupation, lingered enough to become skansen of that reality in turn. Masaryk had once given us a national philosophy for the age of hope. That now seemed so distant as to be irrelevant. The pressing task was to forge a national philosophy for an age of disillusion and despair.

¹³² A *paternoster* is another central European curiosity. It is a twin shaft elevator made up of a continuous series of open cabins mounted on a circular cable which move in a continuous procession up one shaft and down the other, at a speed low enough to allow reasonably agile passengers to mount and dismount at will. It can move nearly as many people as an escalator while requiring a fraction of the space. Its endlessly moving open cabins are the delight of small boys and the despair of insurance companies. They also make a rather neat metaphor of the cyclical futility of history.

¹³³ Starting with (Jiří) Voskovec and (Jan) Werich, the famous V + W in the 1930's and 1940's, each era in our modern history had its cabaret chansonniers who breathed into it a particular spirit. (Jiří) Šlitř (1924–1969) and (Jiří) Suchý (*1924) with their whimsical texts and light melodies helped create a mood of youthful optimism in the 1960's. They were followed, after the Soviet occupation, by Jan Vodňanský a Petr Skoumal and others. With the onset of grimly single-minded capitalism, in the 1990's, whimsy ceased to play a major role in Czech mood, replaced by *the entertainment industry*.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Other Philosopher: Jan Patočka

Jan Patočka, the man whose lot it was to be the philosopher of a time without hope, made his contribution to Czech philosophy as a universally human rather than a distinctly Czech thinker. In his turbulent life-time, he offered three perspectives on the meaning of our national identity, each responding to a rather different time. One perspective was explicitly socialist. In it he came closest to formulating an explicitly *national philosophy* in his own sense of the word, in essays gathered in a slender volume entitled *The Meaning of Today*.¹³⁴ The second perspective is diametrically opposed to the first, drawing on authors like Heidegger, Hannah Arendt and Ernst Jünger. It is a part of his most consistent and explicit enquiry into philosophy of history, presented in erudite and passionate detail in his *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History* and in his sketch of Czech history, *What are the Czechs?* Both date from the years of the death of hope following the Soviet occupation. His third perspective is Kantian, in the spirit of the Enlightenment and of Masaryk. It is consistent with his early writings, before the Communist coup. Explicitly it is something of a political testament, an outcry more than a thesis, presented in a rapid fire sequence of short documents explaining the spark of hope that was *Charta 77*.¹³⁵ Together, they represent a rich en-

¹³⁴ *O smysl dneška*, meaning literally if not elegantly “In quest of the meaning of the present time”, reprinted in: Jan Patočka, *Češi I (Czechs I)*, op. cit., pp. 2312–338. See also ch. 6 above.

¹³⁵ These were *samizdat* essays circulate privately at the time, since reprinted in Patočka’s *Collected Works* which are finally being published in the care of dr Ivan Chvatík: Jan Patočka, *Sebrané spisy* (Praha, OIKOYMENH 1996 and ongoing). In world languages, Patočka’s works are most readily accessible in German in the six volume edition of selected texts, Klaus Nellen (ed.), *Jan Patočka: Ausgewählte Schriften* (Wien, Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen 1987–1999). In Eng-

dowment for anyone who takes the question of the meaning of our cultural identity seriously.

Of these three attempts at a critical understanding of Czech national identity, the second, strongly influenced by Heidegger's writings, is by far the most extensive. Most of Patočka's followers consider it the definitive *mens auctoris*. The third, Kantian, tends to be overlooked in the margin of the occasion which evoked it, the protest of Charta 77, a heroic act of resistance which led to Patočka's death after an eleven hour police interrogation. As for the first, socialist one, most of Patočka's followers find it rather embarrassing and tend to write it off as an unfortunate aberration written under the intoxicating influence of the Czechoslovak Spring of 1968. They may well be right – and yet the document, even if unintended, may in the long run prove the most valuable. However, given the current backlash in the Czech lands against all things socialist, it seems unthinkable that a national hero should ever have held democratic socialist views, much less assumed Euro-Communist positions as Patočka seems to do in the last of the *The Meaning of Today* essays. It is the shaken and defiant Patočka of the times without hope, echoing Ernst Jünger, that has become the icon. Still, even though it is the national philosophy of his Heideggerean period which stands out in clearest contrast to Masaryk and has proved most influential, it is well to remember that there is a great deal more to Patočka's philosophy than his thought during the sab-bath of years between the Soviet occupation and the protest of Charta 77.¹³⁶

lish, three books appeared in Erazim Kohák's translation, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History, Introduction to Phenomenology and Body, Language Community Language World* (all Chicago, Open Court Press 1996) as well as a dozen shorter articles in Erazim Kohák, *Jan Patočka* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press 1989). In French, the prolific and excellent translator Erica Abrams published a number of texts from the 70's not available in English.

¹³⁶ Jan Patočka (1907–1977) studied philosophy in Prague, Paris and Freiburg, completing his studies shortly before WW II. His first interest was Husserl's phenomenology. While Czech universities were closed during the war, he taught at a gymnasium. After the war, he concentrated on the history of ancient philosophy. After the Communist coup, banned from teaching, he worked first in the Masaryk archive and, after that was suppressed, at the Comenius Institute, earning respect as a major Comenius scholar. When he could return to teaching during the political thaw of the 1960's, he focused on philosophy and history of science. During the Czechoslovak Spring of 1968, he wrote a series of essays about Czech national identity which can be considered his first *attempt at a national philosophy*. After being banned from teaching again in the wake of the Soviet occupation, he became

Approaching Jan Patočka's philosophic thought is rather a challenge in part because, like Masaryk, he has become a cultic figure, enshrined in the *light inaccessible* of historic greatness. His dramatic entry onto public stage, Cyrano-like at the head of Charta 77,¹³⁷ and his dramatic death with police assistance made him larger than life. The honour was well earned yet proved treacherous. To this day, Patočka, through all his life a reticent scholar and a scholarly philosopher, remains something of a national symbol instead. His writings, once banned, are appearing in most admirable collected editions, yet his ideas remain largely hid from critical discussion behind a veil of hagiographic awe. It would take an audacious author to speak of him critically.

Nor that only. Jan Patočka may also seem inaccessible because, unlike Masaryk, he was truly a professional philosopher.¹³⁸ Masaryk was a man of the *polis*, a politician with a philosophical education more than a philosopher, coping with problems shared by his people and by his time, seeking to address all sorts and conditions of humans. Jan Patočka, by contrast, spoke primarily to his fellow academicians. Not seeking conflict, he addressed

the foremost interpreter of Martin Heidegger's philosophy for the Czech philosophic community. During that time he produced his *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History* and his *What are the Czechs*, representing his second and rather different attempt at a national philosophy. Patočka's students and followers generally consider this phase of his thought definitive. His final attempt came when he stood up to the Communist regime as one of the spokesmen of the civil rights initiative, Charta 77, when he wrote a cluster of brief documents in a rather Kantian tone. Picked up by the police, he died after interrogation on March 13, 1977.

¹³⁷ Charta 77 was, formally, an open letter to the Communist President of Czechoslovakia and other prominent figures calling on the government to respect its own laws and pointing out that it does not. The occasion was the 1976 Helsinki convention on civil rights which the Communist government co-signed and incorporated into its legislation. The government reacted with fear and fury, jailing several of the initiators – who included people of dissenting views ranging from reform Communist to ultra right – and launching a widespread campaign to discredit the whole action. They succeeded in intimidating the vast majority, yet the handful of signers remained, at great personal cost, as the nation's conscience and a constant reminder that the Communist “normality” is anything but normal. When the Communist regime collapsed, the *Chartists* – *Charta 77* signers – assumed responsibility for public affairs in so-called “Velvet Revolution”.

¹³⁸ For a philosophical biography of Jan Patočka, see Erazim Kohák, *Jan Patočka* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press 1989), still useful, although the Patočka Archive has since compiled a far better bibliography, made possible inter al. by the opening of borders hermetically sealed to me at the time of writing that book.

problems arising from classic philosophic texts. Intellectually, he was part of the community of scholars the world over, on their own high level of academic erudition. Though at times he, too, spoke to the *polis*, for the most part his writings sounded profound but esoteric, easy to imitate but hard to comprehend. They seemed far removed from the concerns of an average reader and damnably hard to sum up in a clear and concise creed for popular consumption.

Yet it would be hard to understand the practical aspects – in Kant’s sense – of Patočka’s contribution to our self-understanding and the great impact he had on his students and followers without inquiring into his philosophy, however esoteric. Patočka’s pronouncements on matters political grow integrally from his philosophical convictions. It was Patočka, as we have noted, who first spoke of the endeavour which we have described as quest for our national identity as a *national philosophy*. Understanding the meaning of our national identity is for Patočka as for Masaryk a distinctly philosophic task.

It was not, however, Patočka’s philosophical priority. His primary concern was philosophic in the purest sense of the word, a quest for understanding. As a student, in pre-war Prague, he read widely, as his many book reviews from his student years attest. While studying in Paris, he heard Edmund Husserl give the lectures which later became the *Cartesian Meditations*, and made a point of visiting him later in Germany. Masaryk’s doctoral dissertation, dealing with *Suicide and the Meaning of Civilization*, already had sociological and political implications. By contrast, Patočka devoted his dissertation to a technical philosophical problem, Husserl’s conception of the *natural world*, not in the sense of the world of nature but rather of the world as we encounter it “naturally”, prior to critical reflection, in lived experience.

Patočka’s interpretation of Husserl, based on an implicit assumption that truth is to be sought in lived experience prior to reflection – and so prior to reflective critical reason – rather than in the rational structure of experiencing is not without its consequences for Patočka’s *national philosophy*. Still, the central problem in Patočka’s philosophy is not the meaning of Czech identity and its place in history, but rather the universally philosophical problem of the epistemological grounding of cognition and the metaphysical foundations of the one, the true and the good. Patočka really was an academic rather than a practical philosopher.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ Interestingly enough, Masaryk, though he studied philosophy and taught it all his life, denies being a philosopher, claiming he never built up a philosophical system. Thus he prefaced the one systematic presentation of his views, in Karel

Patočka, his students and his editors in their turn would come to speak of that concern as *care for the soul*, borrowing a metaphor from Socrates. Today that romantic image may sound unfortunate, yet it is still understandable, given the predilection of much of Czech dissident philosophy for the poetic locutions of more romantic of Hegel's heirs. Nor is the term *soul* as here used at all vacuous. It refers to a concern for a person's cultural endowment in the widest sense of that word and for the cultural endowment of the national community as well. When Masaryk strove to nurture his people and his nation to the full stature of their humanity – or when, on the eve of the war, Patočka spoke of the *myšlenka vzdělanosti*,¹⁴⁰ only very approximately translated as the *idea of culture* – they were speaking of what later would come to be called *the care of the soul*. Patočka's philosophical concern was on the one hand with metaphysical foundations, on the other hand with the cultivation of humans to their full humanity.

An explicitly social dimension enters Patočka's thought much later, in the 1960's. The delay is not accidental. In the early years of Communist rule, the Party claimed a monopoly on ideology. Questions were not welcome. In the latter 1960's, though, a political thaw in Czechoslovakia made it possible to raise the question of the meaning of national identity, if any. At the same time, the utter banalisation of the ruling Communist ideology made it imperative. Yet much as at the time of the national awakening, the people who would think of national identity had to face the reality that the ideology forcibly imposed on them, though itself it faded into banality, reduced the *faith of our fathers* to obsolescence, beloved perhaps, yet irrelevant. Once

Čapek's *President Masaryk Tells His Story*, Part III.1. He was a practical philosopher, not a system builder. Yet the philosophical perspective of his life and work remained constant through all his life.

¹⁴⁰ These are two terms which defy translation but demand understanding. *Soul* is a word Patočka tends to use in the sense of the German *Geist* rather than *Seele*, as a metaphor for the collective – or better, *shared* – cultural awareness of a community, its *culture* in the anthropological sense augmented by the cultural sense in ordinary usage. *Vzdělanost*, at times translated as *cultivation*, is closely linked to it. Its roots reach to the ancient Roman conception of the *homo humanus*, a person cultivated in the Roman sense, as contrasted with the barbarian or the barbarian's kin, the plebeians. Czech national "awakening" was fundamentally a task of *cultivating* the erstwhile peasants as citizens, not only in matters of knowledge but also of the skills of civilised cohabitation. Cultivation is a prime example of the *care for the soul*.

more, the Czechs had to start building their national identity on scorched earth – or, more optimistically, on an untilled green meadow.

Patočka rose to the challenge. In the series of articles we mentioned earlier, later gathered as *The Meaning of Today*,¹⁴¹ he tackled first the idea of what he took to calling *national philosophy*, the quest for the meaning of our national existence. He pointed out, first of all, that such a question could arise only if *history as such* could be said to have a meaning. Only if history can be told as a story which leads in a continuous sequence from some past state to some future one, can we ask about the place – or *meaning* – of some particular component within it. Hegel, Patočka argued, provided such a global framework in his conception of history as the story of the return of (potential) Spirit or Mind unto itself as actual. Stripped of idealist obfuscation, it is the humanistic conception of the growth of individuals and societies from a primitive beginning (though with great possibilities) to actuality, the maturity of combining freedom and responsibility.

Within this overall framework of history – in one of its varied versions – we can pose the question of the place and task of a particular national community. When the Soviets took it as their historic task first to build “socialism” in one country and then carry it all over the globe *on Red Army bayonets*, they were answering the question of their identity and staking a place for themselves in History. So were the Americans when they took as their historic task first to build “democratic capitalism” in their own country and then carry it all over the globe with their tanks and cluster bombs. Less dramatically, so did the Irish monks who made it their task to preserve the riches of Christian learning which they themselves barely understood as the glory that had been Rome crumbled around them before a tide of paganism.

The attempt at a *national philosophy*, Patočka argued, poses a double challenge. One is to sketch an overall conception of history as meaningful, the other is to explain the place of a particular community and of its fortunes within it. In successive articles, Patočka then traced for his bewildered compatriots the development of Czech *national philosophy* – or *identity* – in the

¹⁴¹ That title, too, defies translation but could be paraphrased as *In quest of the meaning of what we are living at present*. Given the background of the collapse of all Communist faith, the outburst of socialist democratic hope and the hammer blow of Soviet occupation, it was a central question which in Czech did not even sound awkward. Jan Patočka, *O smysl dneška (The Meaning of Today)*, in: Jan Patočka, *Češi I (Czechs I)*, op. cit., pp. 231–338.

context of modern European history. Already during the war, in the pamphlet *Two Senses of Reason and Nature in German Enlightenment*,¹⁴² he had analysed the conflict of rationalism and romanticism in the Enlightenment. Now he pointed to a similar duality in the myth of our rebirth. As prototypes he invoked a man of the Enlightenment, Bernard Bolzano,¹⁴³ and as a romantic counterpart, Josef Jungmann.¹⁴⁴ Rather like Masaryk, only with far greater philosophical erudition and sophistication, Patočka then traced our dual heritage through the nineteenth century and explained our emerging national identity as a product of the ongoing struggle between these two poles of our thought.

The series culminated in an article in which Patočka abandoned his habitual role of a judicious observer, seeking to understand, not judge, and presented his personal conclusion, albeit heavily cloaked in abstractions. The ideals of Enlightenment rationalism with the universal horizon of freedom and human rights seemed always closer to his personal conviction than the inward looking romantic sense of hearth and home. In concluding, though without mentioning Masaryk by name, he identified what Masaryk called ideals of humanity, of freedom and social justice, as the inmost meaning of Czech identity. In spite of the trauma of Soviet occupation and the toil

¹⁴² Published as *Dvojitý rozum a příroda v německém osvícenství*. This is one of the essays available in English in: Erazim Kohák, *Jan Patočka*, op. cit., pp. 157–174.

¹⁴³ Bernard Bolzano (1781–1848), a gentle priest, a logician and a philosopher, rationalist in the tradition of Leibniz and also an early Bohemian patriot. Though a friend of Czech, he himself wrote in German and spoke of Czechs and Germans as the two stems (*kmeny*) of the Czech lands. Patočka cites him as an early pioneer of Czech national awakening, though that role is normally reserved for the learned abbé Josef Dobrovský (1753–1829), no less a rationalist, who, however, spoke both Czech and German and built up the foundation of modern Czech grammar and vocabulary. His views were largely shaped by the Enlightenment, just as Bolzano's.

¹⁴⁴ Josef Jungmann (1773–1847), another pioneer of modern Czech, though in a romantic orientation, marked by linguistic nationalism wholly foreign to Bolzano or Dobrovský. He looked to *the folk* for inspiration, sought to draw on folk linguistic usage. In addition to numerous translations of German literature into Czech bequeathed to us numerous ingenious neologisms. Fortunately for us, most of his less fortunate inventions dropped out with usage. The primary norm of modern Czech came to be the pure classic Czech of the Czech Brethren translation of the Bible in the sixteenth century, advocated by the rationalists as the starting point for modern Czech, rather than a romantic concoction of folk dialects.

and trouble of the Communist years, the Czechs, he concluded, were true to their identity in opting for the socialist ideal. Their historic task is the one the reformers of Czechoslovak Spring sought to undertake, giving that socialism a human face. Though couched in the Heideggerean rhetoric of *the movement*, Patočka's conclusion is a ringing endorsement of Masaryk's ideal of Czech national identity, chastened in its optimism but steeled in its determination, and carried on into what was then known as Euro-Communism or, in the Czech parlance of the time, *socialism with a human face*.

Was Patočka simply carried away by the wave of hope and determination which, in 1968, swept with it virtually the entire nation in a rare unanimity? Patočka's followers today are firmly convinced of it. They write off Patočka's passionate endorsement of socialist democracy as a momentary aberration, at most a compulsory libation to the powers that were. Seen through the prism of his subsequent writings through the sabbath of years following the Soviet occupation, it can be nothing more. In the current mood after the fall of Communism, it *may* be nothing more. Q.E.D. Yet the *national philosophy* which Patočka presents at the conclusion of his first systematic attempt is quite consistent with his friendship with J. L. Hromádka and Karel Kosík as well as with views he expressed earlier. His excursion into democratic socialism may be just one of three views he assumed at various times, but it is not just an aberration. It is a genuine alternative, and one best suited to the Czech hopes and possibilities in the late 1960's.

There were other situations, and other views suited to them. We have already mentioned that brief, glorious episode of Charta 77 as Patočka's third attempt at a *national philosophy*. It reflects the moment of hope in the first two months of 1977, right after the *Charta* was made public and just before Patočka's death. At the time, the Soviet acceptance of the civil rights "basket" of the Helsinki Agreement,¹⁴⁵ however insincere, did seem to open

¹⁴⁵ In 1975 at the Security and Cooperation in Europe Conference held in Helsinki the Soviet Union in effect bought Western recognition of its post-war boundaries with its acceptance of the so called *third basket* of civil and human rights guarantees, evidently without the least intention of observing them. However, once the treaty was signed by the satellite regimes, those guarantees became a part of Czechoslovak law – and the writers of *Charta 77* called for no more than for the Communist government to honour the laws it itself promulgated. Deucedly awkward. No wonder the government raged. Václav Havel was sentenced to four and a half years. But the treaty was not to be undone. Henceforth the Communist regimes would be measured by an Enlightenment yardstick.

possibilities of more humane development. The regime raged and panicked. The papers, tightly controlled by the regime, filled with violent, vicious rhetoric reminiscent of the Nazi hate tactics of the 1930's. The Communist Party machinery did everything to contain the impact of the Charta. As usual, the ordinary humans in streets and workshops were easily intimidated into expressing proper condemnation. They wore blank faces and thought their own thoughts. Few had any illusions about the possibilities and limits of open dissent under an enraged authoritarian regime. Charta seemed beleaguered and isolated.

It was then that Jan Patočka wrote his noble texts in defence of the Charta.¹⁴⁶ There is no trace there of the mystical rhetoric of the romantics. Both the language and the ideals expressed are Kantian in the finest sense. Patočka writes of the moral duty to resist force, of the society as a whole being subject to the sovereignty of moral sentiment, of duties of each person before own conscience, including the duty to resist injustice. They are brief documents, yet they constitute a clear endorsement of the Enlightenment tradition represented in Czech political thought by Masaryk.

It is, admittedly, one brief outcry. Still, it makes the facile identification of Patočka's *national philosophy* with the distinctly right wing views of the period of the *Heretical Essays*. Yes, the writings of that period are representative of the way Patočka reacted to the Soviet occupation and to the German occupation before it. Yet he reacted rather differently to the hope of 1968 and again to the slender beam of hope he saw in the Helsinki Accords. There really was more to Patočka than the sixth *Heretical Essay*.

Still, it was the *Heretical Essays* which became emblematic of Patočka's thought. The years of normalization between the Soviet occupation of 1968 and the publication of *Charta 77* were Patočka's most productive. It was a period which produced not only a range of philosophical writings but also what is Patočka's most important contribution to the philosophy of history, the *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, Patočka's interpretation of the meaning of Czech history in *What are the Czechs?* as well as his *Two Studies about Masaryk* (*Dvě studie o Masarykovi*), the two studies about Masaryk in which Patočka explicitly and almost contemptuously rejects Masaryk as

¹⁴⁶ The Charta 77 writings were widely republished in Western press at the time. The Prague editors gathered them in *Češi I (Czechs I)* as Supplement I, pp. 423–448. They can be found variously in English, incl. in: Erazim Kohák, *Jan Patočka*, op. cit., pp. 340–348.

a philosopher – and honours his historic greatness as a statesman and the founder of a state. To many of his closest followers, the views of this period need be used to judge and accept or reject Patočka's all other writings. The late dr Jiří Němec, once prominent among Patočka's younger associates, advised me to burn and forget anything Patočka may have written that in any way deviates from the corpus of the years 1970–1976.¹⁴⁷ To treat the views of this period as one of several rather varied phases of Patočka's thought, ineradicable yet neither definitive nor exhaustive, would surely sound as sheer heresy. Let us, therefore, set aside such deviant thoughts and focus on the *national philosophy* which Patočka presented to his countrymen in the 1970's.

We have said earlier that Patočka's reflections on Czech national identity are neither random nor *ad hoc* but rather start from a lived problem and grow out of his overall philosophy. However, any philosophy which seeks to be not only descriptive of what humans actually do and are but to be also prescriptive of what they can and should do and be, must needs distinguish two models of being human. One of these needs represent the actual, as humans are, the other an ideal, setting a standard and providing the actual with an orientation, a sense of direction and a distinction between good and evil. We encountered that in Masaryk's humanism in his distinction between actual, everyday humanity, the *huddled masses yearning to be free*, and the ideal of that freedom – the *humanity*, now in the sense of humaneness, to which humans can and ought to grow.

Patočka draws such a distinction with his conception of *movement* in the sense of a mode or way of being in the world. Such a *movement* represents a fundamental possibility of being human. However, it is not a category. Therein Patočka heeds Heidegger's warnings against using static terms for dynamic phenomena and instead of categories speaks of *existentials*, regularities of the vital movements of existing. He speaks of three such movements, defining them differently in different places, but retaining the same basic insight.

The first, basic movement is one of acceptance in which a human receives a place on earth and in life. It is a movement of birth in which human possibility becomes actual – and it is the movement of acceptance in which the community of kin creates for the new human not just space but specifically *his or her place*, a home world.

¹⁴⁷ Personal communication at the Patočka Archive at the Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen in Vienna in May 1985, where it was my privilege to have dr Němec introduce me to his reading of Patočka.

The second movement is one in which humans secure their presence on earth. That is the movement of toil and of all effort that sustains life. There is, in Patočka's writings, a tendency to speak of this movement deprecatingly, almost contemptuously as of a merely animal dimension of being human, reminiscent of *average everydayness* in Heidegger's perspective. Life on the level of the second movement would represent the daily, pedestrian routine of surviving, the cycle of birth, toil, copulation, death, no less banal today for being obscenely affluent. Yet this movement is utterly basic, *such stuff as life is made on*, and a necessary condition of anything further. Without a secure grounding in the movement of toil, of simple daily life, the transcendence of the third movement would be vanity and a chasing after the wind.

Transcendence is for Patočka the third, culminating movement in human grasp for fulfilment. Here humans rise above their daily preoccupation with survival in a creative flight of freedom. If we called the movement of work the stuff of life, then the movement of transcendence is its great opportunity, the moment of imagination reaching for infinity. The possibility of living is here crowned with the ability of dreaming. Humans become fully, distinctively human only in their ability to live in transcendence and thereby give meaning and value to the movement of birth and to the movement of living alike. Not the tangible goodness of daily living, so cherished by humanists like Karel Čapek, but the Icarus-like reach for the exceptional, the great, never content with the petty or the banal, is the meaning of life. It is an aristocratic vision, with little appreciation for the plebeian mass. Considering the way the mass of Czechs accommodated to the occupation and the normalization, that is not exactly surprising.

Patočka's triple movement is reminiscent of Aristotle's three "souls" or modes of living, the vegetative, the animate and the intellectual, and surely not by accident. Patočka learned deeply from Aristotle. Still, there is a difference. Patočka truly seeks *existentials*, dynamic fundamental possibilities of the process and activity of being human.

The movement of acceptance, symbolised by the gesture of an aristocratic Roman father accepting an infant presented by a mother, is a necessary condition of all else. It is, however, not yet human in a full sense.

The same is true of the movement of self-preservation, of all the effort which sustains life. The ploughman and the reaper represent perhaps the oldest metaphor of this movement. Without that, nothing else is possible. Still, human fulfilment means more than toil. Yet though necessary – according to the ancient myth which Patočka is fond of quoting, imposed on humans by gods who themselves neither toil nor die – the movement of toil

still does not represent the fulfilment of our humanity. For Patočka, humans who spend their entire lives preoccupied with earning their daily bread are mute drudges, living less than fully human lives. They live on the level of all (other) animals for whom survival is the whole content of their lives. Only humans who overcome the preoccupation with survival transcend everydayness to the level of freedom. Only a life which does not happen to humans but which they choose freely and in full awareness, accepting the consequences of their decision, is fully human. It is life that holds all average everydayness with its petty concerns in utter contempt and turns to the horizons of grand possibilities. That is how the gods and the heroes of antiquity live, that is the life of Nietzsche's *superman* who strives for greatness and scorns death. It is also the point at which Patočka is most clearly heir to aristocratic antiquity, not to the Hebraic sense of life as God's tangible gift which Masaryk, democrat or perhaps plebeian to the core, experienced so strongly.

In a sense, this may be a crucial moment in any imaginary dialogue between Masaryk and Patočka. Here Patočka shares Masaryk's Kantian conviction that only in accepting freedom and responsibility do humans become fully human. Already Rádl pointed out this as a similarity between Masaryk and Nietzsche. There is a fundamental difference as well. In all of Masaryk's thought love of life plays a central role, love for the ordinary daily life of ordinary people. We need to stress the word *love*, truly love in the sense of the gospels which the Vulgate renders as *caritas* and modern theologians as *agape*. Masaryk cherishes the ordinary people of his childhood, he respects their daily labour – as, for that, he appreciates all labour. He respects humans for sustaining themselves and others in life, rather as Rádl in the preface to his *History of Philosophy* cherishes his mother and her tiny *shop on Main Street*.¹⁴⁸

In Masaryk's thought, Patočka's second movement, sustaining life, is fully human and worthy of respect. The value of the dramatic gestures usually associated with the third movement is instrumental, in the service of life. So Masaryk thought his grand gesture of founding a state instrumental in service of peaceful lives of his people. The point for him was not the grand

¹⁴⁸ Emanuel Rádl's *History of Philosophy* is a book I would not recommend for the study of philosophy but it is an excellent source for understanding Rádl, a positive moral philosopher. Note esp. his view of philosophy as a *blueprint for transforming the world* in first chapter and the homage to those who serve by patient labour in the Preface.

adventure of leading the Czechoslovak legion through revolutionary Russia but rather the return to the tangible goodness of daily life in a peaceful Czechoslovakia that it made possible. Perhaps Jaromír John captured it best in his nearly forgotten story Teta Lála in his *Barrack-room Evenings*.¹⁴⁹ The third movement of the grand ideal gives special meaning to the daily life of the second movement, but for Masaryk the pay-off is the peaceful life of love and labour.

In Patočka, the valuation seems reversed. In his *Heretical Essays* Patočka, though himself a diligent and steady worker, describes toil as the bitter lot of mortals avoided by gods who do not bear that curse. Heroes avoid it, too, by liberating themselves of pedestrian wishes of the petty average everyday and freely willing a great vision, heedless of consequences, much as artists sacrifice everything petty to the grand passion of their art. With that they choose a tragic fate, to be sure, because toil is the condition of the human lot. With Patočka we could say that the third movement presupposes the second and depends on it – while giving it meaning. The metaphor of flight suggests itself again: the movement of transcendence is inevitably like the reach of Ikaros for the sun, grand at the cost of self-sacrifice. Here we encounter that *tragic sense of life* of which Ortega y Gasset speaks and which the existentially inclined among twentieth century idealist thinkers take over, albeit not as the will of the gods but as a consequence of their valuation of toil as the lot of drudges.

Wasn't that, though, why Masaryk spoke so powerfully to humans of the peaceful nineteenth century (and of its extension in Czechoslovakia's first republic) and seemed to have little to say to the young of the century of wars, the century that *was* war? For the men and women of that century daily life became drudgery after a series of defeats. Disappointment after disappointment reduced hope to trite placebo. Amid the war that was the 20th century, in a time of deep, dark hopelessness, Patočka spoke to his people as a philosopher of the third movement, as a philosopher of exceptional people and exceptional deeds, a philosopher of the grand and tragic flight to the sun.

A philosophy captures imagination not by being “true” in some absolute sense but by being *true to its time*. Patočka's great contribution in that sabbath

¹⁴⁹ Jaromír John (1882–1952) tells the story of a former imperial and royal officer who opts for life in a small town with a farm girl “so there would be some meaning to my life”. *Večery na slavníku* (*Barrack-room Evenings*; Praha, Československý spisovatel 1954), pp. 306–324.

of years may well have been that his thought was *true to its time*. He spoke to his time by offering a reaffirmation of national identity in a time without hope. If a historical metaphor for this segment of his philosophical contribution were needed, Komenský's *Testament of the Dying Mother, the Union of Brethren*¹⁵⁰ would serve. Patočka's starting point reflects the bitter collapse of historical optimism. Though he had always written appreciatively – even if critically – of Masaryk, in the wake of the Soviet occupation Patočka circulated privately two essays in which he condemned Masaryk's *attempt at a national philosophy* as superficial, contradictory and ultimately a failure.¹⁵¹ In what often sounds like a hostile and contemptuous tone, he dismissed Masaryk's philosophy of religion as barely worth mentioning. In that period of moral disintegration, what now seemed like Masaryk's comforting truisms of another age, long revered, would no longer serve. The nation badly needed an unflinching, realistic way of coming to terms with what it could neither comprehend nor accept, yet could not deny.

Patočka's *national philosophy* would prove to be as different from Masaryk's as the personal fortunes of the two men had been. It should not surprise us that Patočka saw life rather differently than Masaryk and, later in life, found literary kindred souls not in Masaryk's Karel Čapek but in the German thought of the period of total upheaval between the wars, in writers like Martin Heidegger and Ernst Jünger. Therein lay the difference. Fate, Providence or simply just chance asked Masaryk and Patočka different questions. Of Masaryk it asked what hope he had to offer. Of Patočka it asked what he can offer when there is no hope. Perhaps that is why Masaryk *could* write a Czech national philosophy – and why Patočka *had to* write it.

¹⁵⁰ The *Kšaft umírající matky Jednoty bratrské* (*Testament of the Dying Mother, the Union of Brethren*), written in 1650, represented Komenský's acknowledgement that the Czech struggle for freedom of worship was lost and that the Catholic rule was here to stay for foreseeable future. It is a sober, rather didactic document, expressing resignation and yet confidence that in God's own time the Czech people would take up the bequest once more. It marks the end of the hope against odds that sustained Czech Protestants through the thirty years of war and at the same time a shift to a different, long range strategy. – In Masaryk's time, it was required reading in eighth form, today it is all but forgotten except for the concluding line in which Komenský expresses a hope that the governance of Czech affairs will one day return to Czech hands.

¹⁵¹ *Dvě studie o Masarykovi* (*Two Studies about Masaryk*), in: Jan Patočka, *Češi I* (*Czechs I*), op. cit., pp. 341–422.

Patočka worked out his conception of history in a series of six essays which he called *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*.¹⁵² That is what he described as the first component of national self-understanding – a conception of history as intelligible, as meaningful. As for the other component, the particular community's role in history, we find the only systematic presentation of his conception of it in *What are the Czechs?* It is a series of letters written in German to the widow of a German friend, retelling and interpreting the story of a millennium of Czech presence in central Europe.¹⁵³ In the six *Heretical Essays* Patočka confronts the collapse of the traditional conception of history and asks how history can be meaningful when there is no hope – no God or Destiny – to give it direction. While it is the metaphysics of hope – *progress* – that provides the framework of Masaryk's philosophical work, the framework of Patočka's struggle with Nothingness is an *anti-metaphysics of the death of hope*. That is the basic given. His reflections on history cannot but be heretical.

Among Patočka's students, there have been numerous conjectures as to the significance of the term *heretical* in the title of Patočka's essays. Heresy usually means a deviation from commonly accepted belief. Here it could be Patočka's deviation from Husserl's views or, given the normalization regime then in power, a deviation from its Marxist orthodoxy. However, a less strained reading may be closer to the truth: Patočka may have meant it as a recognition that in starting with the loss of all certainty he was rejecting what Czech thought had treated as almost beyond doubt.

Czech thinkers since the national rebirth tended to consider history as a principle built into the very structure of reality independently of human doings. Presumably God or Evolution tell a story which links moments of time into history. Thus we could speak of history even where there is no human to tell the story, as in the case of so-called *natural history*, without an apparent contradiction in terms. History simply *is*, for us to read off from our acts and passions.

That coherent order, most Czech thinkers tended to assume, has not only a physical but also a moral dimension. The events we live constitute not just time, a random or a causal sequence of events. Rather, they constitute a cumulative linear change in which the later is *eo ipso* also the better, more advanced, more developed and in every way an improvement on what had

¹⁵² *Kacířské eseje o filosofii dějin* (*Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*), op. cit., perhaps Patočka's most original work, present a view of history as born of and culminating in a dramatic shaking of the foundations.

¹⁵³ *Co jsou Češi?* (*What are the Czechs?*), op. cit., pp. 255–324.

been before it. What is more, that principle is assumed to be independent of human wishes so that, as prof. J. B. Kozák had told us, nothing humans can do can permanently reverse history, that is, the march of time to perfection.

It is this faith, inherited from a theistic conception of the *kosmos* as a creation, which Patočka *heretically* denies. History for Patočka is not built into the order of the cosmos. The *kosmos* does not conform to its rules. Of itself, there is only temporality, a sequence of moments, perhaps random, perhaps linked by efficient causality, but neither drawn nor aiming anywhere. Historicity is born within time, and, specifically, is born of philosophy. Humans awaken to *life in history* when their life in time – in the natural routine of birth, copulation and death – ceases to appear self evident, a matter of course. History is the vision which opens before us when *what is possible* challenges the apparent necessity of *what is actual*. With that, humans discover both the freedom to choose and the responsibility for their choice which freedom entails. My life ceases to be *just one thing after another* and becomes my history when I realise I can choose – and do so. Thus humans awaken to their historicity. As Patočka reads it, encountering time as History is not a given, but a cultural achievement, a bequest of Greek antiquity to Europe.

Here, with all due respect, a pause seems called for. History is clearly an achievement, but is it really a bequest of the Greeks? Time, as we encounter it in Greek philosophy and myth alike, is not the linear time of history. It is notoriously the cyclical time of myth and legend, ever returning like the wind onto its circuits. It is an eternal recurrence of the same in which nothing ultimately changes and nothing uniquely significant happens. *Just one thing after another*. That is a conception which persists unchanged for centuries after the birth of philosophy.

Time as a journey from hither to yon, from a beginning to an end, time in which unrepeatable significant events take place, seems rather more a Hebrew invention. Here time is born out of events which stand out as one-way markers along its way. It can be the encounter with God and the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai. Or it can be the ministry, death and resurrection of the Christ. These all are events that peg down time's cycle and call humans in a straight (or dialectical) line to a promised land or whatever. The Heideggerean encounter with Death – with finitude – need not be the sole factor which breaks the sense of necessity of the everyday and opens the horizon of possibility. It can equally well be the wonder of love and redemption. It would seem that humans need not either kill or die to launch upon the third movement of which Patočka spoke. They can also break out of everydayness in joy and thanksgiving.

Unquestionably, the Greek tradition, intrinsically tragic, does not recognise that as an option. Our point though is that the tragic sense of life is a characteristic specifically of Greek antiquity, *not of historicity as such*, as Patočka tends to present it. To the Israelites, subsequently to the Judeans and ultimately to their Jewish and Christian heirs it appeared otherwise. To them, *life is tragic contingently, not necessarily*. Or, in a Biblical metaphor, the fall is not built into the creation. The fall – evil – is something that happens in time, perhaps inevitably but not necessarily, and so can un-happen as well, in a saving event. That, in a non-doctrinal sense, is Masaryk's conviction which Patočka does not find convincing, perhaps because he lived a different reality. Fine. The point, though, is that an alternative reading *is possible*. So, to be sure, is a tragic reading of being human. But it is only possible, not necessary. History need not be the consequence of the encounter with finitude. It can also begin when joy breaks into the routine of the everyday.

That, though, is far more Masaryk's path than Patočka's, and not only because Patočka's experience was so radically different. To be sure, it was that. Masaryk's life seemed borne by progress to a final triumph. Patočka's life was a series of crushing blows ending in something rather resembling a crucifixion. Patočka's task was different as well. While Masaryk had but to acknowledge a hope that seemed obvious, Patočka had to offer strength in a time without hope. Masaryk's national philosophy needed to be a working programme. Patočka's had to offer a consolation at a time when all programmes seemed vain. Practice aside, on the philosophical level it was far the more challenging task, coping with hopelessness.

That hopelessness, though, is also a historical phenomenon, not a transcendental reality. Though Patočka's analysis is far more sophisticated, it is not altogether different from Rádl's. Both authors trace the decadence of Western civilization to a revolt against an order said to be at once natural and moral. That, admittedly, is not Patočka's terminology, but it is an insight he shares. In terms of his Varna lecture, "The Dangers of Technicization in Science according to E. Husserl and the Essence of Technology as Danger according to M. Heidegger",¹⁵⁴ Patočka accepts Heidegger's reading of the question. The critical point comes when human technology acquires a momentum of its own. Then it no longer opens us to a danger of its misuse

¹⁵⁴ Patočka prepared the paper for the International Congress of Philosophy in Varna in 1973. However, since the paper was as long as its title while the organisers allowed ten minutes per participant, Patočka had to yield the floor long before he got to the point of his extended presentation. For an English translation, "The

but rather is itself, in its very being, the danger. Humans no longer produce in order to consume, satisfied when they have produced enough. Now they consume in order to justify production. All human reality is mobilized in the task of releasing energy. That is the classic definition of progress which here has become self-justifying – and so unjustified.

Hence Patočka's profound thesis about the twentieth century as war. Of course: only war – in our ordinary usage, “defence needs” – is powerful enough motivation to persuade humans to surrender their freedom and to drive them to a total mobilization in the task of releasing ever greater quantity of energy.¹⁵⁵ Even interludes of peace are but preparation for greater war. Patočka resorts to the multi-dimensional metaphor of *power* which in Czech bears indistinguishably the connotations of energy and of force as well as of established authority. *Power* rules over individuals, mobilizing them to an exertion of effort as total as totally meaningless. Defiance of *power*, though seemingly futile, thus becomes the sole authentically human stance. Ideology of dissent thus becomes a national philosophy.

When Patočka speaks of twentieth century as war, he is speaking of it as of a century of total mobilization, ruled by the turbulent, chaotic forces of the Night. Those all overpowering chthonic forces mock the fragile enclaves of reason and light which humans laboriously construct and which *power* cynically and inevitably destroys. Civilization, peace, reason, light, all that is a fragile human artifice. Spontaneous reality is war. That is the nightmare world of Sartre's plays, here elevated to the status of ultimate reality. No, it is not an accident. For Patočka in the sixth *Heretical Essay*, that is the way reality is. All visions of order and light are at best what once we called the *thin veneer of civilization*. Beneath that there is the primeval chaos.

Or is there? That is actually not clear. Patočka, like Rádl, had once set out to seek a deeper *order* of a natural world behind the chaos of artifice. In shift-

Dangers of Technicization in Science according to E. Husserl and the Essence of Technology as Danger according to M. Heidegger”, in: Erazim Kohák, *Jan Patočka*, op. cit., pp. 327–339.

¹⁵⁵ Marginally, to avoid the temptation to write off Patočka prematurely as dated, note that while the age of world wars (or, if we would believe Prof. S. I. Hayakawa, of history) may have ended, the root metaphor of the global hegemony, shaping our perceptions and actions, remains that of *war*, whether the *war on drugs*, the *war on terror* or whatever – while *fear* remains its counterpart, in spite of Mr Roosevelt's injunction in his first inaugural, *the only thing we have to fear is fear itself* – nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror.

ing to a Heideggerean model, he did not give up that quest, only concluded that the *order* must be sought deeper than the Husserlian *natural world*, deeper than the layer of critical reason. It needs be sought *jenseits von Gut und Böse*, in what Goethe called the *Reich der Mütter*, *the realm of the Fates*, the primordial level of the ground of Being. There is an *order*, only that order is far deeper than philosophers of the Day even suspected.

There is, however, a second suggestion as well, prominent especially in the concluding *Heretical Essay* – a powerful evocation of what German writers between the wars, as different as the army chaplain theologian Paul Tillich and the army officer novelist Ernst Jünger, called *the front line experience*. The front line of the First World War had become a metaphor for total disintegration of all order, the total collapse of all meaning, a cataclysm so complete that in it even life itself loses all value and only a mad dance of Death remains. At the front – or in Vietnam a generation ago or in Iraq today – there is no longer victory and defeat, friend and foe. There is only the total, utterly irrational destruction, the orgy of death out of which, paradoxically, new life emerges. It is now a life stripped of all illusion, stripped of all hope, but therewith paradoxically freed of all burdens. When humans, caught in the *front line experience*, give up all hope of life, they acquire a new strength, a new life which can no longer be manipulated by either the hope of life or the fear of death. The shaken, those who have gone through the total shattering of all foundations, are now free.

Here Patočka draws heavily on Hannah Arendt for his insight and on Ernst Jünger for his imagery. The product is impressive, capable of addressing Patočka's contemporaries amid the mood of banal despair which followed the Soviet occupation. Philosophically it is rather reminiscent of the early Stoa. That, too, was a time of abandoned hope. An entire civilization, the whole world of Greek city states, was collapsing before Alexander's conquering armies. There was no hope of saving even fragments of the culture that had been Greece. A philosophy that presented a programme, like Plato's or Aristotle's, became as utterly futile as any effort seemed futile in face of the force of fate. That time, much like the time of Komenský and Rádl, needed consolation rather than a programme.

Götterdämmerung is always a time of consolatory philosophy, either of Epicurean philosophy of resignation and withdrawal from the world or, most successfully, of Stoic philosophy, turning inward to find a source of inner strength. The Stoic, indifferent to fickle fortune, bears his *centre of security* within. In his identity as what Marcus Aurelius called "a man and a Roman", he can stand firm amid the disintegration. So could Komenský's

pilgrim, finding his *centrum securitatis* amid the world's labyrinth in the paradise of the heart. So could Patočka's *shaken*, survivors of the death of hope at the front, whether literally or figuratively. They have confronted their own finitude, have given up all comforting illusions and now look calmly, firmly in the face of utter *nothingness*. Better than anyone else, it is they who represent the Stoic *manhood*, stripped, however, even of the external support of Reason. Here there is no support. There is just *nothing* – and, paradoxically, having accepted that, the *shaken* have nothing more to fear. Perhaps Kipling's poem, *If...*, resonating with lines like “*if you can meet with Triumph and Disaster and treat those two impostors just the same*”, comes closest to capturing the mood of the closing sections of Patočka's sixth *Heretical Essay*.

In an age which despaired of programmes, Patočka's dark vision of his time as ultimate, total *war* offered his contemporaries a philosophy of personal survival. It was not a social programme like one that Masaryk offered or for which Rádl called in the years of his vigour in his *History of Philosophy*. It was a call to personal defiance. Reality is here presented as *polemos* – Patočka translates the term as *war* – the perennial struggle against an indifferent kosmos which has no rules or built-in hope. All ideologies, all social realities have disappeared in the abyss of meaninglessness. What remains are the select few, the elite of those who triumphed, hardened by the front, rising above the triviality of everydayness. Among them they strike the only spark of hope which Patočka calls the *solidarity of the shaken*. Theirs is a higher level of humanity, able at last to break free of the vicious circle of hope, fear and death. *We few, we happy few, we band of brothers*, cried Shakespeare's Henry V upon St Crispin's Day. Or could it be the Nietzschean *Übermensch*, said to be the next developmental stage of our species? Either way, if we give up the crutch of hope in a time of despair, it is the only step possible – and capable of winning us freedom.

Patočka's rhetoric, projected in retrospect against the background of Charta 77 and Patočka's own dramatic death, can be immensely powerful and moving. However, in the cold light of empirical research, with the soul stirring rhetoric muted, his vision of an elite of *the shaken* comes to appear somewhat problematic. Patočka may have used *the front* as a metaphor for a different kind of a struggle, but his images are repeatedly taken from organized combat. The trouble with that is that in actual fact the survivors of the horrors of the front line, during the First World War or most recently among the casualties of shell shock in Iraq, did not emerge from the experience as war-hardened heroes. Far more regularly, they swelled the ranks of bewildered homeless, devastated by shell-shock, fearfully preserving a mini-

mal existence both sheltered and destroyed by alcohol and drugs. The *Frontkamaraden* of WWI found a marginal solidarity among paramilitary groups which served the darkest forces of their time. Altogether, the evidence does not suggest that total shock would have an ennobling effect on its victims.

Still, the imagery of humans hardened by the loss of illusion could speak powerfully to the excluded in the wake of the Soviet occupation. In Czechoslovakia in the years of Communist “normalization” in the 1970’s, all who refused to collaborate or to make the compromises needed for living on as usual, all who in whatever way *said NO to the devil, said NO*, as Svatopluk Karásek¹⁵⁶ sang, could, thanks to Patočka, think of themselves not as flotsam and jetsam – in Czech it was *vydědění a ztroskotanci* – but as defiant defenders of human dignity. They could find a certain camaraderie among people who had nothing in common except their shared defiance. For them, the defiance, heedless of cost, fulfilled a crucial part of the function of a national philosophy, offering self-respect to the humiliated and solidarity to the rejected. For whatever reason – and the reasons ranged from taste in music to philosophical conviction – they all *said no to the devil, said NO*. As a national programme, saying NO to the establishment may not be much, but as personal psychohygiene, purging humiliation and restoring personal integrity, it is heady stuff. And was not that what the Czechs most needed after the Soviet occupation?

There is good reason for believing that it was in truth so. In a very real sense, the dissidents of the 70’s, though sociologically speaking an isolated, ineffectual handful, saved the soul and self-respect of the nation. The philosophical framework which Patočka offered in his *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History* provided a powerful and crucially needed personal psychohygiene in a despairing time. As to a *national philosophy*, though, it provided at most a hint of one in *the solidarity of the shaken* and an opaque, poetic paragraph at the end of the sixth *Heretical Essay*, as concise and cryptic as the concluding

¹⁵⁶ Svatopluk Karásek (*1942) was an ordained minister in the Czech Brethren Protestant Church and a protest singer of the first post-occupation generation and a signer of *Charta 77*. Expectably, he lost government consent to serve as minister and was expelled from the county. He served a church in Switzerland, returning to Czechoslovakia after the fall of the Iron Curtain. Since then he has served as a minister and one term as a member of the lower house of the Parliament. His song from the harshest years of normalization, *Say NO! to the devil, say NO!* became as much a programme of defiance for the young of the seventies as Patočka’s writings for the intellectuals.

paragraph of *The Meaning of Today*. It was only in the second set of essays, *What are the Czechs?*, written as personal letters, that Patočka took on the task of inquiring into the meaning of Czech presence in central Europe, that is, into a *national philosophy* in the strict sense.

Patočka's erudite letters, not intended for publication, are somewhat startling. In print, what must have been the warm personal tone of a generous hearted man in a very personal communication is frozen for cold public perusal and so inevitably distorted. This is no longer the Patočka who found the meaning of our national existence encoded in the ideals of freedom and social justice. There are some elements carried over from the *Heretical Essays*, notably the emphasis on heroic deeds which stand out of temporality and give it the dimension of historicity. The emphasis on the crucial role of the exceptional individual – the *shaken* of the *Heretical Essays* – is elaborated in the concept of the *master people*, in Patočka's original German text the *Herrenvolk*. Patočka means by it a people whose assumptions and values are shaped by an aristocratic ruling elite, as in the case of nineteenth century Hungary or Poland (presumably excluding aristocrats like Vlad the Impaler or Elizabeth Bathory). By contrast, the Czechs appear to him as a typically plebeian community, deprived of aristocratic models – and for him that does not have the positive sense of direct democracy that it had for Masaryk or Hannah Arendt. The Czech lands had lost their native nobility to the Emperor's wrath after the Battle of White Mountain. The abolition of servitude, Patočka notes, brought peasants and labourers to the forefront, creating a community whose assumptions and values reflected the pettiness of having to build from below what an aristocracy putatively would have provided in a grand sweep, a shared code of values and conduct.

When Patočka sets about formulating a national philosophy, he now supplements the individualistic emphasis of his *Heretical Essays* with an emphasis on the community. That community is no longer simply the *community of the shaken*, but rather a tangible *polis*, a Holy Empire, *sacrum imperium*. Implicit throughout the opening section of *What are the Czechs?* is a conviction that the measure of greatness as well as of cultural potential of a given community is its ability to discern the vision of the *holy empire* beyond the *polemos* of individual interests. A cultured nation is one which is able to transform mere ethnic mass into a *body politic* – or in mundane terms, to build a state. That is the measure of the greatness whose opposite is the *petty history* devoted to the petty concerns of no less petty lives. A nation of warriors is capable of greatness, a nation of shopkeepers presumably is not. Greatness means state.

The conception of that state as *sacrum imperium*, the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, may be distinctive, the quest for community seems rather less so. In European history, we repeatedly encounter the alternating pattern of individuation and communalization. Both are intrinsic moments in European distinctiveness – the recognition of the autonomy of free individuals and the recognition of the integrity of the community. The question is only what manner of community it shall be – and of that European thought offers two very different models.

Globally as well as in Europe, humans have tended to regard their community as something coming down from above, *by the grace of God* – literally a *theo-cracy*. There is something sacred about a community so conceived. It appears as an expression of a cosmic order, both natural and divine. So the Roman Empire considered its law to be *ius universale*, the law of reason, as against the laws of particular tribes, the *ius gentium*, growing out of their local customs. Similarly the Church, perpetuating the imperial tradition after the Empire's demise, conceived of itself as superordinated to individual believers. The state to which it gave its blessing similarly called itself the *Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation*. Here was a *sacrum imperium* as a living reality until Emperor Franz II in 1806 exchanged his title of Holy Roman Emperor for the much more realistic title of Emperor of Austria, becoming in that capacity Franz I, to the bewilderment of generations of schoolboys. The images of Virgin Mary on the battle flags of the imperial royal Austro-Hungarian army in the First World War attest that the idea of the holy empire survived its actual demise.

Yet Europe bears within it a different tradition as well, often condemned as heretical, repressed and persecuted, often submerging and yet emerging again and again in various idioms of multiple sects and popular movement. That tradition sees community not as constituted by a lord, secular or religious, but as growing out of the commitment of individual believers or citizens, much as the Union of Brethren or the French Republic had grown, not by the grace of God but by the will of its people, of the *demos*. On that conception, it is the individual members who are sovereign, who discover and express the moral law and in effect establish the community as their tool for accomplishing common tasks. That conception provides the philosophical foundations of the democracy of Greek city states, such as it was. Closer to us, it is the conception enshrined in the Reformation which saw the individual believers, the “two or three gathered together in my name”, as the true Church of Christ. The ecclesiastical superstructure with all its power and glory it regarded as a tool which believers, touched by God's grace, establish

and use in God's service. More recently, we encounter that conception in the great democratic revolutions¹⁵⁷ with their conviction that all power is derived from and justified by the people. For people who read history from this perspective, it is not a sacred empire, but the democratic republic that is Europe's great achievement. In Masaryk's long discarded terminology, European Union is a triumph of *democracy over theocracy*.

In the version of his Czech national philosophy presented in *What are the Czechs?* Patočka opts for the *theocratic* rather than the *democratic* conception, seeing the striving for the *sacred empire* as the key in terms of which we can read Czech history. The benchmarks of his reading are the individuals whose great deeds aspired to creating a state. Patočka cites the rugged warrior Přemysl Ottokar II, who almost became a master of all central Europe, and the Emperor and King Charles IV who achieved that goal. He cites Masaryk as well, in spite of what he considers his philosophic failure, for the grand deed of challenging the mighty Habsburg empire and defeating it with his Czechoslovak Legion on the field of battle. He, too, created a state.

The moments of greatness were, according to this text at least, those in which the Czechs stood out as a *Herrenvolk*, a nation whose moral tone was set by men of aristocratic spirit, masters or *Herren*. The times of failure appear to Patočka in this phase of his thought as those in which, as in the Hussite revolt, the Czechs abandoned that striving for greatness and busied themselves with their petty doctrinal squabbles and their *petty history*, the history of everyday life. Such, in spite of certain inner greatness, was the Protestant reformation which, for Patočka, wasted the resources which Charles IV husbanded for a *drive to the east*, *Drang nach Osten*, the historic task of bringing culture to the vast expanses of Russia. To give up the historic task of being culture bearers to the East for their domestic doctrinal squabbles represents for him one of the failures of potential Czech greatness.

The really damning failure in the history of the Czechs, according to *What are the Czechs?*, came at Munich. Patočka sees the Munich agreement

¹⁵⁷ By the *great democratic revolutions* we mean throughout the culture-wide shift at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth century in regarding members of a given community as free *citizens* rather than as *subjects* of this or that lord. This shift, brought about largely by the Enlightenment, represents the fundamental change in what humans of the European cultural community regarded as evident. Individual revolutions as the French or the American, represent particular ways of acting out that change. We can thus criticise, say, the Jacobin phase of the French Revolution while still considering the great democratic transformation culturally positive.

entirely in terms of personal integrity of Czechs as individuals and as a community. He does not consider either the ethnic or the geographic position of Czechoslovakia, or its international position. In his retrospective view, individual integrity alone matters and personal failure alone explains. Had we fought, we would have lost, of course. However, we would have retained our pride, our unbent spine. Because we gave in without firing a shot, we lost our self-respect. We let pass our opportunity to reassert ourselves as a masterful people, a *Herrenvolk*, condemning ourselves to petty mediocrity for the foreseeable future. That is how Patočka saw it in 1975. Had he lived another twenty years, he might well have considered his bitter diagnosis vindicated.

Like those students of history who consider force the basic reality, Patočka lays the blame for the break-up of Czechoslovakia in 1938 entirely on President Beneš's decision not to fight. He makes no mention of the history of Czech-German relations in the Czech lands, of the economic depression or of Czech-Slovak tensions. Nor does he raise the obvious question: how could (alleged) one man's failure of nerve bring down the whole system? Why did not the Army refuse what was clearly an illegal order to surrender our land? If that Army was really well armed, well fortified and full of élan, eager to defend its country, why did it just collapse when one man stumbled? Did Beneš have such a hold on the country?

On Patočka's reading, history pivots on outstanding individuals, and in 1938 it pivoted for a moment entirely on the sloping shoulders of one hopelessly weary aging man. As Patočka sees him, Beneš was a weak and petty man, a perennial diplomat unable to stand up as a person of integrity. It was he – and of course the perfidious allies, France and England – who broke the nation's backbone and condemned it to a future of pettiness, to the *petty history*.

That, admittedly, is a highly controversial reading. Was the international situation really totally irrelevant? Did the unresolved ethnic tensions within Czechoslovakia really not matter? Did the personal integrity of the Poles, who fought, prove significantly stronger and more resistant in the post war years than that of the Czechs, who did not? What of the incredibly valiant Czechs who did fight, in our army abroad or in the resistance at home? They were not just a few. Questions abound, though in face of Patočka's grand and dramatic vision there is a certain air of pettiness about them. Still, it is difficult not to sense an undertone under the chorus of moral indignation. Perhaps it is so insistent in part because if President Beneš is guilty, then we are not. We just obeyed orders. It is not an unfamiliar claim among the retrospective assessments of the Second World War.

In any case, Patočka's reading of history proved surprisingly effective for the few dissenters who were acquainted with it. It offered to restore our lost integrity, at least virtually. If we read history from the perspective which Patočka presented, that of individual self-respect based on a heroic deed, his reading can become quite attractive – and vicariously restorative. Masaryk returns as a hero, not a slightly pedantic schoolteacher. The vision of heroic deeds of defiance seems to offer a redemption from the burden of past failure. There is room for young Palach,¹⁵⁸ the philosophy student who immolated himself in protest against the Soviet occupation. Patočka's own death in the aftermath of a police interrogation after he conceived and signed the protest document, *Charta 77*, becomes meaningful, not ironic, and bestows a mark of authenticity on his views. Whatever petty objections we might raise against it, Patočka spoke from the heart and to the heart of the noblest of his fellow countrymen at the time of greatest discouragement.

Still, a reader not caught up in the passions of the moment, especially a philosophic reader abroad who came unprepared and unwarned to Patočka's sixth *Heretical Essay* and to his excursus into national philosophy in *What are the Czechs?* might well come away with the impression that, embittered

¹⁵⁸ Jan Palach (1948–1969) was the first of a group of students who tried to shock their lethargic fellows Czechs with a dramatic act of self sacrifice, and the only one who broke through the massive wail of silence. He was a student of philosophy at the University at a time when our young people looked on in despairing disbelief as their elders obsequiously denied ideals of which they had sworn that “we shall never leave alive the path we have taken”. Palach doused himself with gasoline and set himself on fire on January 16th, 1969, in the heart of Prague. His act shocked the whole nation, his funeral became a manifestation. On the anniversary of the Communist coup, February 25th, a second living torched flared, Jan Zajíc. By now the regime was prepared and silenced the news. When in April Evžen Plocek burned himself in Jihlava, hardly anyone learned of it. The same is true of Josef Hlavatý, Miroslav Malina, Blanka Nacházellová. Their elders seemed to accept with relief the excuses about wasted young lives which the regime offered. The young who burned so brightly refused to be silenced. Patočka's passionate call to heroism shows that he understood them and could speak for them. – History offers a footnote: even before Palach's vain and heroic gesture Ryszard Siwiec, a veteran of war-time resistance in Poland, immolated himself in protest against Polish participation in the intervention of the armies of the Warsaw Pact in Czechoslovakia. Nearly forty years later he received a posthumous medal for it from Václav Havel – who, as Czech President, chose to cosign the *letter of eight* calling for a similar intervention in Iraq.

by the Soviet occupation, Patočka adopted the dramatic posturing and vindictive views of the extreme right in Germany between the wars and in the second republic at home. To me, such a reading appears deeply flawed and grossly unfair, showing both ignorance of Patočka's thought and a lack of understanding of his situation. Yet when the sixth *Heretical Essay*, "The Wars of the XXth Century and XXth Century as War", was first published in English as the only available text of a prominent dissident, a great many people did see Patočka as an extreme rightist heir of Heidegger's philosophy and politics. Fortunately, *What are the Czechs?* with its rhetoric of the *Herrenvolk* whose destiny is *Drang nach Osten*, misleading even though Patočka meant it in a wholly different sense, was unknown at the time. Still, in the eyes of western progressives, Czech dissent, hitherto uncritically lionized, became just a bit suspect.

Yet Patočka's work as a whole clearly speaks against such an interpretation of his national philosophy. Except for the essay written hard upon the Munich tragedy, *Czech culture in Europe*, and some texts written in the wake of the Soviet occupation, Patočka, while sharing Rádl's conservative views, remained firmly committed to democracy and to a Kantian conception of human rights. His last great act was his public defiance of the Communist regime as one of the authors, signers and spokespeople of Charta 77. The occasion was the Helsinki agreement, signed also by Czechoslovakia's Communist rulers and incorporated into Czechoslovak law. In that agreement, the signatories pledged themselves to observe the human rights of their subjects. A group of Czech dissenters, including Jan Patočka, his disciple Václav Havel and the former Czechoslovak foreign minister, Jiří Hájek, took the regime at its word. Their Charta was a proclamation calling on the regime to respect at least its own laws and pointing out that it does not do even that. The regime raged. There were house searches, arrests, persecutions in employment. Prof. Patočka, seventy years old, died under the harassment. Václav Havel and others were sentenced to four and a half years in prison. Their offense? They defended the very ideals which Masaryk considered the meaning of Czech national identity.

The point is that, however Heideggerean Patočka may have sounded in the bitter, hopeless years between the Soviet occupation and the Helsinki agreements, in the texts introducing Charta 77 to the public there is no trace of the dark rhetoric of the sixth *Heretical Essay* and of *What are the Czechs?* In his final act, transforming aimless time into history, Patočka returned to Kant's Enlightenment humanism, speaking the language of critical reason and human rights. The position of Charta 77 clearly takes up the thread

of Czech humanistic democracy which we know from Masaryk and from Patočka's own writings in 1968.

To some commentators it seems as if Jan Patočka suffered from a dual personality. On such a reading, there seems to be one Patočka of the Day, of reason and light, hope and promise – and of history rendered meaningful by a democratic hope. The other personality would be the Patočka of the Night who steps forward like Mr Hyde when Dr Jekyll's (or Masaryk's) hopes crumble under the chaotic onslaught of the Night. It is not an unreasonable reading and it did so appear to me when first I started to read then available Patočka texts. There is indeed a pronounced difference in the texts Patočka left behind, even if it is not as dramatic as Patočka's metaphoric Night and Day. Yet to all who knew Jan Patočka or at least pondered his work in detail such a reading must seem preposterous. The longer I live with his work, the more I agree with them.

To be sure, the difference in the tone of Patočka's writings in times of hope and in times of hopelessness is evident. Still, there are reasons for choosing a less torturous explanation. Let us say that there is only one Patočka, but that there are two kinds of philosophy responding to the needs of two kinds of historical period. One is philosophy as Emanuel Rádl describes it in the first chapter of his *History of Philosophy*, philosophy as a programme of social action, a project of active coping with a problematic situation. Those are the periods in which humans can act and affect their fortunes by their actions. They are also the periods when humans can deceive themselves that *I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul*, as William Ernest Henley wrote in his poem *Invictus*¹⁵⁹ before committing suicide. In those times a programmatic philosophy is in order – and Patočka's programmatic philosophy remains democratic, broadly in the tradition of Masaryk's Czechoslovakia.

Then there are the times when hope dies and there seems no point to anything, times like those which Patočka describes in his sixth *Heretical Essay*. Those are times like the weeks after Munich or the years after the Soviet occupation. In such times, since all action is futile, programmatic philosophy is utterly beside the point. Perhaps that is what Emanuel Rádl saw in the months before his death. Such times call for a consolatory philosophy

¹⁵⁹ The poem *Invictus* by the English poet William Ernest Henley (1849–1903) with such memorable lines as *my head is bloody but unbowed* is vintage Victoriana and can be found practically anywhere, including for inst. Louis Untermeyer, *Modern British Verse* (New York, Harcourt, Brace 1950), p. 53. Henley committed suicide in 1903.

which offers individual humans personal integration in a time of social disintegration. It can take the form of reconciliation, of the ultimate confession of a believer, *Thy will be done*. It can also take the form of an embittered defiance which, though futile and self-destructive as a programme, can become a source of paradoxical consolation. In the 1970's, when the regime broke characters with frightening ease, Patočka's philosophy of hope out of hopelessness helped stiffen his countrymen's resolve. As Masaryk had given his countrymen a national philosophy which met the needs of a time of hope and action, Patočka had given them a philosophy which courageously met the need of a time of despair. We shall retain our integrity, our self-respect, by giving up all comforting illusions, by giving up all hope, by refusing to consent to that which we cannot accept. *Say NO to the Devil, say NO!*

What more need be said? and, What more *can* be said?

CHAPTER EIGHT

Gray Naught and the Green Horizon

Say NO! to the Devil! In its magnificent defiance Charta 77 represented a moment of grandeur worthy of Goethe's Faust. Nothing more need be said – except perhaps *Verweile doch, du bist so schön!*¹⁶⁰ But of course the moment did not linger, even if for twelve more years it may have felt as if time were frozen. Yet the mills of the gods went on grinding and on November 17, 1989, the end came. On Václavské náměstí, an euphoric crowd jangled their keys. Václav Havel addressed them from the balcony of Melantrich, rich with modern Czech history. *Už je to tady!* Here it is, at last! In six exhilarating days the Soviet empire in Czechoslovakia crumbled. The Communists ran away from power like boys from a broken window. Suddenly, there was no more Devil and so much more needed to be said. *Saying NO! to the devil*, however noble, no longer seemed much of a programme.

In philosophic time, to be sure, the change was much more gradual. An imperceptive devolution began hard upon the paroxysm of proletarian passion when the Communists first seized power in 1948. Revolutionary fervour of early Communist years spent itself by the death of Stalin in 1953, leaving an indifferent, ideologically weary populace. Except for a sprinkling of fanatics, the following years were rather like the aftermath of the Battle of White Mountain. The victors successfully stamped out the old faith of their subjects but failed to instil a new one. By the 1960's, as the initial coercion became less insistent and persistent, the unwilling among the converts grew indifferent, withdrawing into private lives. The "Czechoslovak Spring"

¹⁶⁰ "Linger yet, thou art so fair!" J. W. Goethe, *Faust*, Part 1, Act V line 1700. Under the terms of his wager with Mephisto, Faust is to forfeit his soul if ever he says that to any moment. Not surprisingly, he yields to the temptation of perfection. Still, he escapes damnation, for as Goethe has God say, "Wer immer streben sich bemüht den können wir erlösen" – "We can redeem the one who ever strains to strive" (Part 2 lines 11936/7). Goethe's God, it seems, prefers activity to achievement.

of 1968 evoked hope that what had been misnamed “socialism” could acquire a human face – itself a rather damning admission – though not much more.

That August, Soviet aggression put an end to all that. After the heartbreak of the 1968 occupation, so reminiscent of Munich, there were few believing Communists left. There were, naturally, career Communists a-plenty, women and men who decided to play the game for all it was worth. Most of them were cynical about the slogans they repeated – and often more viciously doctrinaire for it. Yet Soviet tanks made the point, at least as tanks do, that the system was here to stay. The bulk of the population, unwilling to go through the required contortions, increasingly sought just to lead normal, ordinary lives, indifferent to anything beside their weekend cottages and, latterly, their puffy little motorcars. Gradually, they came to acknowledge some practical advantages of the system, but not sufficiently to revive the old faith or to constitute a new one. Except for the outcry of Charta 77, little outward evidence of dissent disturbed the monotonous weariness of the last twenty years.

Czechoslovak society was in effect passing through a classic paradigm shift. The old Cold War “real socialist” paradigm lost all explanatory power, but a new democratic paradigm did not emerge, not even in token and in promise. Such times are not conducive to critical examination of national self-perception. People made do with a simplistic Manichean paradigm of a battle between pure Good and the agents of sheer evil, adapted to Cold War purposes and here stood on its head, as Marx had done to Hegel. Now anything Soviet, including some rather good films and classics like Pushkin’s *Eugen Onegin*, tended to be dismissed a priori as bad, anything American as *GOOD*, including, improbably, cola, catsup and Ronald Reagan. Perhaps that is why it was so easy for the first post-communist Prime Minister, Václav Klaus, to convince the voters that the most urgent task of the new era was not building a social democracy but rather “privatization”¹⁶¹ – placing our

¹⁶¹ Communist Czechoslovakia had been most consistent of the Soviet bloc states in placing all means of production – down to the local equivalent of fish-and-chip stands – in state ownership. Most of it was now “privatised” rather like British Rail under Mr Major – sold on credit at a fraction of its value to people in managerial positions who proceeded to resell it at many times the asking price, frequently first “tunnelling it out”, ie. siphoning off all liquefiable assets. In a matter of months, fabulous fortunes were made and the country impoverished. When last heard from, the question was whether we could save the last two blocs of our

hitherto common property in private hands, never mind whose or how. Liberation, it seemed, required not freedom and justice but *democratic capitalism*. None of its proponents seemed to notice the *contradictio in adiecto*.

Three years after the collapse of the Communist regime, as Czechoslovakia was quietly imploding and taking the vaunted Velvet Revolution down with it, Karel Kosík, whom we met earlier, presented a paper at a conference devoted to Masaryk's idea of Czechoslovak statehood.¹⁶² It was his usual hard-hitting performance, rhetorically brilliant, perceptive in its critique of our cherished truisms but strangely wanting in vision. It was almost as if there were nothing more to say. In fact, that is just what Kosík observed, in a throwaway remark that may have been the most significant part of his presentation. We have repeatedly defined our identity, he said in effect, by finding a threat to defy. (Yes, most recently by *saying NO! to the Devil*.) But now, with the Cold War over, *nothing* is threatening us. Literally, *nothing*. A leering, yawning *naught*. The great threat – and not even anything as definite as a threat, just the crowding, overwhelming prospect – is *naught*, the mindless *naught* flooding into minds and spaces once filled with purposeful activity. *Naught* is what threatens us as the consumer addiction interpenetrates us bone and sinew. *Naught* to live for, *naught* to believe, *naught* to cherish, plenty to eat but *naught* to nourish the heart and the mind. There remains only the cycle of feeding, reproduction and death which Patočka once described as the second, merely animate movement of being human. It is no less *mere* for being incomparably more affluent than once we dreamt it could be. In a close-up, the future whose grimace stares us in the face from American-style magazine advertisements wears the face of a *grinning gaping naught*. Our affluent lives and minds are so filled with emptiness that no room remains for aught else.

common property, our hospitals and our railways. Compare Jan Adam, *Social Costs of Transformation to a Market Economy in Post-Socialist Countries: The Case of Poland, The Czech Republic and Hungary* (London, Palgrave Macmillan 1999) and, in Czech, Tomáš Ježek, *Privatizace české ekonomiky: její kořeny, metody a výsledky* (*Privatisation of Czech Economics: Its Roots, Methods and Results*; Praha, VŠE Oeconomica 2006) and especially Zdislav Šulc, *Vize a skutečnost české transformace...1989–1999* (*The Vision and Reality of Czech Transformation...1989–1999*; Praha 2002), well informed and balanced.

¹⁶² Karel Kosík, "Třetí Mnichov?" (The Third Munich?), in: Jaroslav Opat et al., *Masarykova idea československé státnosti ve světle kritiky dějin* (*Masaryk's Idea of Czechoslovak Statehood in Light of History's Criticism*), op. cit., pp. 130–141.

In Kosík's presentation, that was a marginal remark which he did not elaborate even as much as we did here. He did not need to. A national philosophy consisting of *saying NO! to the Devil* becomes mockingly vacuous when the Devil ceases to exist. Or when we cease to believe in him, which may be the same thing. The Velvet Revolution, growing out of a posture of defiance of what Jan Patočka rather vaguely called *power*, imploded necessarily once the need was not just to defy a fully functional government but rather to replace it – to govern, to bear responsibility. Now the erstwhile dissidents, who once saved our soul with their defiant *NO!*, formed the first post-Communist government. They suffered a massive electoral defeat after just two years in office.¹⁶³ They were replaced by a lack-luster government committed to building what Václav Klaus designated *democracy without qualification* – and Václav Havel, haplessly observing from the side lines of his presidency, identified as “*mafia capitalism*”. *Naught* took on the mask of affluence, filling the cultural and philosophic emptiness of our lives with the flotsam and jetsam of an over-consuming civilization. Masaryk once accused Marx and Engels of projecting a world in the image of a gigantic factory totally devoted to ever increasing production and consumption.¹⁶⁴ The Czech disciples of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan – and, at second hand, of Friedrich von Hayek and Adam Smith – set about acting out Karl Marx's vision. Politics does make strange bed-fellows. Yet were they really so strange, given a world pervaded by affluent *naught*?

¹⁶³ In fairness to the Velvet Revolution, though as a whole it may have failed for want of a programme beyond *saying NO! to the Devil*, it was also a time of immense enthusiasm and prodigious achievements in individual sectors. Most notably Ivan Dejmál (1946–2008) as Minister of Environment of the Czech part of what was still Czechoslovakia fed to the assenting Parliament one law after another in a rapid sequence. Thanks to him, when at the end of the two velvet years the country reverted to politics as usual, it had a complete set of state-of-the-art ecological legislation. In his area of competence, Dejmál had a clear programme. Unfortunately, those who confronted global problems, notably that of resolving the festering conflict of Czechs and Slovaks, had none beyond *saying NO! to devils*, if any. The break-up of the republic was but one of the consequences.

¹⁶⁴ Masaryk charges Marx with making toil its own aim rather than an instrument and describes his conception of labour as aristocratic, not democratic. T. G. Masaryk, *Otázka sociální* (*The Social Question*; Praha, Čin 1947), pp. 407–408 et passim. Partial English translation appeared as *Masaryk on Marx* (translated by Erazim Kohák, Lewisburg, Bucknell University Press 1972). Unfortunately many passages which the translator chose to omit were to prove most relevant two decades later. What fools these mortals be!

Not really. The dominant *naught* has neither meaning nor structure which would warrant some expectations while precluding others. Anything goes. The *naught* is really naught, nothing, a cavernous emptiness left behind by the collapse of the great narratives with which we once *made sense* of the turbulent flow of human existence.

The term *grand narratives* was a fashionable new designation for a familiar old reality – for the overall conceptions, legends, philosophies or “meta-physical” theories which sought to grasp history as one coherent whole. The religious story of humankind from the Creation to the Last Judgement was one such. The conception of Progress was another. Their common underlying conviction was that *reality is intelligible*. They presented the story of human presence on earth as something that *makes sense*, has a direction and at least an asymptotic goal. What exactly made sense of life’s many and varied episodes differed from story to story. Once it was the story of God’s creation, of Adam’s fall and of God’s redeeming grace in Jesus who is the Christ. Then there was the story of Reason dispelling the fog of superstition and leading humanity into a world of light. Then we told the story of Progress raising humans from the slough of backwardness to the *alabaster city undimmed by human tears*.¹⁶⁵ That story actually had a second version in which it was Labour that was the mother of progress and the alabaster city was a collective farm, though otherwise the story remained unchanged. Or again, there was the story of Mother Nature whose green peace we violated with our technology and back to which deep ecology would bring us.

The stories differed, yet there always was a story. Except in our truly apocalyptic moments, History and our collective and individual fortunes within it never appeared random. Our narratives kept at bay what Milton called *thy dread enemy, Chaos*. They gave our lives direction and a meaning structure from which we could derive codes of ethics appropriate to our particular

¹⁶⁵ “O beautiful for patriot dream that sees beyond the years / Thine alabaster cities gleam undimm’d by human tears...” These lines from Samuel Ward’s 1882 poem *America the Beautiful* are an example of another paradigm shift. Early settlers’ dream of America was one of the peaceable Kingdom where lion and the lamb lie down together, ie. nature as God created it, before the fall. A century and a half later, Ward sees it as an alabaster city, fruit of human progress. Ward, writing in an age of greed and corruption, dates his vision “till nobler men keep once again thy whiter jubilee!”. Needless to say, that line was rewritten for popular consumption, asking the Almighty to “crown thy good with brotherhood from sea to shining sea”.

narrative.¹⁶⁶ There was Good, and there was Evil, and, presumably, every elementary school teacher could teach us the difference, usually at the level of sophistication appropriate for primary schools. For all the troubles allegedly brought on by the agents of Evil, we actually lived rather sheltered lives.

Then, one by one, those stories began to fail us. They were never actually *disproved*. Great myths and great narratives can be neither proved nor disproved. They function rather like postulates in scientific theory, convincing not by proofs but by their explanatory power. What makes a global explanatory scheme – a *great narrative* – persuasive is its ability to *make sense* of the world. When such schemata begin to lose that ability, they also begin to wither to irrelevance. Thus the fact that the Messiah has not come (so far) does not actually logically invalidate the messianic belief that the Messiah *will* come. Yet over the pained generations humans grow weary of *waiting for Godot*. There have been too many pogroms, too many delays. The messianic myth has not been disproved, but it has lost its persuasive power, leaving a cavernous *naught* behind. Seeking to counter that weariness with proofs is as futile as offering disproofs had been in its heyday. Faith, like metatheoretical postulates in science, is not about proof and disproof. It is about explanatory power. When that is gone, bewildered humans stagger, grope, grasp for straws in a field day for fantasy and fanaticism until they settle securely on another narrative. Then, on the far side of the killing fields, life starts *making sense* once more. Humans can again build a moral consensus, derive a code of ethics from it and return from their tumults and alarums to the task of living, at least until their new *grand narrative* wears out in its turn.

The problem, though, may be that in our time too many explanatory narratives failed at once, and not contingently, but necessarily. What seems in

¹⁶⁶ The crucial point here is that codes of ethics are not primary but derivative, derived from the intelligible ordering of life structured by a shared narrative. No code of ethics can be derived from a reality perceived as chaotic, as meaning-less. This is why the attempt to deal with *the naught* by requiring a course in ethics in all middle schools is so trivially futile. Humans whose reality is pervaded by *the naught* are immoral because they are first a-moral: in their experience they encounter no order, no moral consensus from which they could derive a code of ethics. Ethnic groups forcibly transplanted in the attempt to repopulate Czech border areas after the post-war expulsion of their German inhabitants provide a text-book example. Yet in the dramatic reversal of our shared ideology after Munich, after the war, after the Communist coup, after the Soviet invasion, after the Velvet Revolution we all manifest typical traits of a displaced population, notably the absence of a moral consensus and of a code of ethics derived therefrom.

doubt is not a particular explanatory paradigm or a particular *grand narrative* as much as the very idea of such a narrative. That is not just a matter of the jejune literary dramatics seeping to us from the West through the Iron Curtain in the 1970's. Nor is it another wave of cynicism. Cynicism is still an idealism, only an idealism disappointed, idealism betrayed. There have been too many lofty appeals to idealism, alternating too dramatically. The dominant mood today is far more one of a vast weary indifference. Disastrously low participation in elections is only one symptom of it. Another are the two thirds of respondents who claim they would prefer a strong authoritarian ruler who would deal with all the problems of governance and not even bother them with it. When Václav Klaus, the Czech president who considers reports of environmental damage a plot of the enemies of free market, stated that *it is always about money in the first place* and refused to differentiate clean and dirty money, he was not stating just his personal creed, however deeply held. In his own hard core conservative fashion, he was responding to the wide-spread, truly cavernous mood of meaninglessness by insisting on repeating the formulae which once expressed the shared values of yesteryear. The Popular Party deputy who proposed to solve *the moral crisis* by making all schoolchildren memorise the Ten Commandments was of a similar persuasion.

Yet having for long left our ideals in the care of elementary schools, whatever their ideology in any given decade, we now discover that the formulae in which we express them have become jejune, reduced to irrelevance. Is there a less trite metaphor which would sum up that sense of emptiness? Patočka's metaphor of World War I trenches, apt in the wake of the Soviet invasion, may well be unduly dramatic for an age which looks so utterly banal in the crooked mirror of the *naught*, Kosík's diagnosis may be most accurate. It is the age of the *naught*.

Lest our own metaphors grow unduly dramatic in turn, some demythologising might be in order. Just what is it that wore out, leaving behind the cavernous *naught*? It was not only one particular narrative, a particular legend or philosophy, but rather an entire type of narrative strategy as such. The narratives we told were almost invariably based on the *Golden Age postulate*, the assumption that once upon a time there was and/or there will be human condition free of all the ills to which flesh is heir, a truly blessed age of peace and justice. The prototypical metaphor is the popular Christian image of paradise lost and regained. It is an image of an original human state free of ills and evils, a time when humans are said to have lived in harmony with

each other and with their world. Its mirror image is one of an ultimate human condition in which all ills and evils will have been eliminated and to which humans will some day return. History is thus anchored by the Peaceable Kingdom on one end and the Alabaster City on the other. The popular imagery may in both cases reflect mediaeval superstition more than Christian faith, but the fundamental *postulate of the Golden Age* remains. Both originally and ultimately, human condition is taken to be one of peace and harmony.

Since our present condition evidently does not correspond to that of paradise either lost or regained, the *Golden Age postulate* requires a derivative *postulate of alienation*. In Christian imagery this figures as The Fall, triggered either by human transgression of God's command (Genesis 3,1–7) or by human crossbreeding with lesser gods (Genesis 6,1–6), but the principle is always the same. According to it, present human condition is the result of an alienation of a part of God's good creation from its maker, to be overcome by restoring the bond between humans and their Creator. The toil and evil we know is thus not an unchanging human lot but rather a temporary state which can and shall be overcome, as, in the case of Christian belief, by the coming of the Messiah.

The basic schema represented by the joint *postulate of Golden Age and alienation* has provided the groundwork for our traditional grand narratives. Already the Hussite attempt at reforming the church gave the story a temporal interpretation, much as early Christians did.¹⁶⁷ Nor was the ongoing effort of the *Unitas fratrum* at educational reform and general social melioration simply civic activism. The Brethren, while awaiting the Second Coming, were building the Kingdom of God on earth. Only the violent termination of their efforts by Habsburg conquest saved them from the disappointment of

¹⁶⁷ In the Christian version, strictly theologically speaking, that schema is a-historical, though it is hard to speak of it without using temporal metaphors. The segment between the Creation and the Fall is not a pre-history, nor is the period after the Second Coming of the Messiah and the Last Judgement an extension of history. Both are a-historical and a-temporal, belonging to an eternity which knows no time, no before and after. In popular imagination, however, the Fall becomes a *long-ago* event, the coming of the Messiah a *some day* one. In the Middle Ages and emphatically in the age of the baroque it became a firmly held part of popular faith. The millennial hope thus becomes a powerful motivator, as it did during the Hussite revolt, but, as a result, in time it will inevitably turn into a *waiting for Godot*.

seeing their efforts fail – or from the discouragement of an endless *waiting for Godot*.

The patriotism of the Czech national revival followed the same pattern. For the early patriots – and “*Oh, patriot!*” (*Vlastenče!*) was the favourite form of address among them – the strategy which made history meaningful followed the same tripartite schema. In the beginning there was the mythical pastoral age of hunters and husbandmen living in a democratic polity, as described by the chronicler Kosmas¹⁶⁸ in the twelfth century and augmented by manuscript forgeries in the twentieth. This peaceful harmony was said to have been disrupted by the rise of wealth, power and privilege (which most Romantic writers in the Czech lands considered a German import). With that History began, with its highs and lows, but again by far the most writers expected a return of the Golden Age once we regained our independence. When it came in 1918, the initial assumption of the crowds celebrating in the streets was that the age of toil and struggle had ended and now there remained only the peaceful labour of building our republic.

For all the vast differences in rhetoric, the Communist narrative followed the same pattern. The story with which first the heirs of Karl Marx, the social democrats and, later, the Communists operated was another variation on the Christian legend. In the beginning there was, once again, a Golden Age of primitive Communism which Karl Kautsky sought in history, including in the Hussite revolt.¹⁶⁹ That idyllic stage was destroyed, this time by the invention of private property. There is again the restorative event: the proletarian revolution. That revolution returns power into the hands of a class so impoverished that it has no vested interests of its own, the industrial proletariat, capable of ruling for the common good. Therewith we have returned

¹⁶⁸ Kosmas (probably 1045–1125), an early Christian cleric at St Vitus chapter in Prague, first recorded early Czech legends intermingled with adaptations of Greek and Biblical legends in a Latin compilation, *Chronica Boemorum*. Retold many times, his compilation served generations of school children as a substitute for history. In Alois Jirásek’s retelling they appeared in an English translation as *Legends of Old Bohemia* (Prague 1963).

¹⁶⁹ Karl Kautsky, *Vorläufer des neueren Sozialismus* (Precursors of Modern Day Socialism), notably its first volume, *Kommunistische Bewegungen im Mittelalter* (*Communist Movements in the Middle Ages*; Stuttgart, JHW Dietz 1920). – Compare, though, his much more sober view in a pamphlet published in Czech, *Proč nejsme komunisty a proč musíme být sociálními demokraty* (*Why We Are not Communists and Why We Need Be Social Democrats*; op. cit.).

to the Golden Age. All that remains now is the peaceful cooperative labour of building a mature Communist society.

There are other examples, no less blatant. There is, in our time, the romantic “ecological” version of alienation from and return to Nature, there are the nationalist versions of glory lost and won again, all testifying to the explanatory power of the Hebrew-Christian schema of paradise lost and regained. One version after another raised hopes, succeeded and therewith failed, yet a new version of the same *postulate of Golden Age and alienation* would arise like phoenix out of the ashes.

What ushers in the age of the *naught* is the failure not of this or that particular version of that postulate but of the postulate of the Golden Age as such. In part we have learned too much about the early stages of human development, both from prehistory and from the study of the putatively “natural” peoples, to believe that once there was a Golden Age.¹⁷⁰ In part, too, we have become too sceptical to believe that one day there will be a Golden Age. Most damagingly, though, we have become aware that life is a process, not a state. A Golden Age would have to freeze life at a point of perfection. It would inevitably be a failure because life, even in an ideal society, brings change and requires it. We have long avoided confronting that realization by blaming the evident imperfection of our various Golden Ages on contingent factors. Now we have run out of excuses.

The grim record of the Communist experiment in social engineering is a case in point. The Communists were able to seize power so handily not only because of the Soviet Army along our borders but equally because they offered a vision of the Golden Age, *come the Revolution...* In 1948, the revolution came but the age it brought on was anything but golden. The story of the first decade of Communist rule is the story of a quest for successive villains to blame. First it was the class enemy. The courts, now wholly under Communist control, handed out death sentences. The pre-war senator Milada Horáková¹⁷¹ was one of many victims. Still the age did not turn to gold. Next

¹⁷⁰ As testimony to the perennial lure of the Golden Age, see Helena Norberg-Hodge, *Ancient Futures* (San Francisco, Sierra Club Books 1991) which locates The Golden Age rather improbably in present-day Ladakh – which proved too much even for the Dalai Lama (see concluding paragraph of his Preface.) There are numerous other examples of the genre available.

¹⁷¹ Milada Horáková (1901–1950), senator representing the Popular Socialist Party before the war, a prisoner of the Gestapo during it, chair of the Council of Czechoslovak Women after it and a noble person throughout was convicted of espionage

came the *kulaks*, frequently smallholders whose skill and diligence earned them the envy of their neighbours. More executions. Then it was the turn of the *enemy within*. This time, the Party sent its own faithful to the gallows. Rudolf Slánský¹⁷² was just one of those. Then Stalin died and the Party ran out of breath and out of excuses. Over the next twenty years, Czech dissident authors would dissect that basic recognition and its inevitable conclusion: the Golden Age paradigm had failed.

Yet hope runs deeper than the perennial vision of the Golden Age. Transposed to earth that vision failed, yet perennial hope adapted it to the demands of temporality. Projected into time, perfection took the form of open ended *Progress*. Somewhat surprisingly, the old vision of The Golden Age – or of the Alabaster City or of Communism – came appear not as hope but as an arbitrary limit. We shall not wait for Godot. We shall strive, Faust-like, ever onward, marching with linked arms into the sun – for some reason, that image in particular captured imagination. Millions marching against the wind.¹⁷³ Not perfection, but endless expansion embodied the hope of a humanity which had lost the vision of a Golden Age.

Like the paradigm of the Golden Age and alienation, the *paradigm of Progress* from rudimentary beginnings to ever nobler, ever brighter, ever open future took on numerous forms. We have encountered a rather genteel early version of it in the humanist hope of a growth to nobler humanity. The technological version represented on American radio by 1950's programmes like *Better Living Through Chemistry* was perhaps most directly appealing. Technological change, exemplified by electricity and steam in the nineteenth century, by personal automobiles in the twentieth, was most tangible. The socialist version, which sought to match technological and social progress, was the most promising though also most demanding. The

and high treason in a staged trial and executed together with a number of others in 1950.

¹⁷² Rudolf Slánský (1901–1952), a staunch Communist, after the war secretary general of the Communist Party and architect of the repressive apparatus which sent Milada Horáková to the gallows, was given the same treatment as he had given so many others. Convicted of espionage and high treason in a staged trial, he was executed with other high ranking Communists in 1952.

¹⁷³ The line comes from a depression-era song of Voskovec, Werich and Ježek, *Až nás půjdou miliony, všichni proti větru* – *When millions of us march against the wind*. To this day, I cannot hum it without feeling a tingling down my spine and rather doubt any who remember can.

Communist version was far the most dramatic and most destructive. All of them, though, held out a common hope – that change is cumulative and so time is on our side. Things will inevitably be better tomorrow, our children will lead better lives than we. The very change which appeared so threatening from the *perspective of the Golden Age* became the principle of hope for the *perspective of Progress*.

In conventional political terms, we could say that it was the conservative strategy of seeking to preserve the present and prevent change which failed with the collapse of the hope of the Golden Age. The strategy that took its place was basically the progressive strategy, promising ever higher levels of achievement and gratification. The means may be those of a state plan and a command economy or those of economy as a *melée* without rules with the outcome guided by an Invisible Hand, but that finally does not matter. What is central is the faith in open-ended progress defined most often as ever greater, more efficient release of energy for human use.

The *Paradigm of Progress*, whether in its Communist or its Liberal version, came to the rescue when the collapse of the dream of the Golden Age seemed to leave a disillusioned humankind confronting the gaping *naught*. When the vision of a perfect Communist society faded on the horizon, the Czech society, together with the entire industrialised world, seized upon the vision of infinitely rising levels of consumption. Critics of consumerism warned us that infinitely rising levels of consumption ignore the real causes of the *winters of our discontent* which Václav Havel diagnosed precisely as *blbá nálada*, collective foul mood. For the most part, we have willed to believe what the advance-men and salesmen – or women – from the West tell us, that the sole reason for our discontent is that we have not yet purchased their particular product. If we could only have everything, we should be content. Since we never shall (see failure of Golden Age), we shall at least seek to win ever more, from a later model of motor-car to world dominion. If we can only conquer one more country, we shall be secure.

It would not be difficult to carry out a critique of the *Paradigm of Progress*. We could point to centuries of human experience. The empirical evidence is overwhelming. Short of acute deprivation, levels of contentment or security have little to do with levels of consumption. In terms of objective indicators, it is usually persons at or slightly above the average level of consumption in their community who report the highest levels of relative contentment. In personal terms, the factors most directly related to contentment appear to be a sense of respect and personal worth. Even on the lowest levels of consumption, persons who have a strong sense of their own worth and feel re-

spected by other members of their community report high levels of contentment and exhibit objective indicators of it. Striving for ever higher levels of achievement tends to have an adverse effect. Experiential evidence simply does not bear out the persistent faith that higher levels of consumption will automatically resolve all problems, social and personal.

The need to believe remains stronger than all empirical evidence. A humankind that has given up the hope of happiness in heaven, in whatever sense, cannot but hope that much more intensely for happiness on earth. Having at the same time lost all understanding of grace, such a humankind must look for works with which to attain it. The *Paradigm of Progress*, assuring us that, though the connexion may be tenuous, as long as we keep raising our levels of consumption, we shall be rewarded with happiness, easily overcomes all evidence to the contrary. If it is urgent enough, the will to believe is far stronger than any will to know.

The problem lies elsewhere. In our time, the Paradigm of Progress has run into the limits of growth.¹⁷⁴ The evidence is overwhelming: we cannot expand infinitely. Unlimited growth is impossible on a very limited planet. The mechanics of it, confirmed by a consensus of the scientific institutions world wide, are not now important. What matters crucially is the conclusion: *if humankind is to survive on this planet and not make it a desert while itself becoming a part of the sixth global die-out which it itself triggers, it needs to limit its growth.* It needs to reduce its numbers drastically and reduce the demand on the Earth's resources of space as well as materials while evening out their distribution so that none would devastate the Earth out of despair or out of frivolous abundance. The details may vary but the conclusion is clear: the *paradigm of Progress* is bankrupt. *Growth* has become as obsolete as the paradigm of *Golden Age*. Both of our grand strategies have run into a dead

¹⁷⁴ The phrase was made familiar by the first Report of the Club of Rome, prepared by Donella and Dennis Meadows, *The Limits of Growth* (New York, Universe Books 1972) and its sequel by the same authors, *Beyond the Limits* (Post Mills, Vt, Chelsea Green Publishing 1992). Since then, their results have been confirmed by every research institution, government or private, in the world and have come to express the consent of the entire scientific community, until Albert Gore received a Nobel Peace Prize for publicising it. The sole dissenting voice is that of the Czech economist, President Václav Klaus, who considers such views a conspiracy against freedom of enterprise. In February, 2008, Mr Klaus was re-elected to another five year term as President of Czech Republic.

end and we have no more grand narratives to recount. We have reached the age of the *naught*.

When we first began to suspect that both our grand strategies have failed, having no more grand narratives seemed rather a lark, a new literary fashion for Paris cafés and Berlin cabarets. We shall all be post-modern. Rejecting the pompous narratives of modernity, we shall just wander care-free through Europe. There is, after all, a precedent in philosophy. Socrates, unlike Plato and his successors, told no grand narratives. He asked questions, puncturing pomp and unmasking hypocrisy. It is a valid and really basic task for philosophy, putting all we believe blindly, all that is pompous and self-assured, to the question. Throughout the history of philosophy there have been not only system-builders but also their critics, not only Hegel but Kierkegaard, not only Schopenhauer but Nietzsche. Humankind needs critics, philosophers who take the role of the gadfly. Especially in Czechoslovakia, where the Communist Party claimed a monopoly on Truth and an extensive security apparatus enforced its claim, all systematic philosophy appeared suspect. Paradoxically, truth had moved from Truth to doubt, from Dogma to questioning.

In retrospect, the post-modern years of Czech dissenting philosophers may well appear a luxury we could afford because the Communist Party was firmly in power and its grand narrative, however problematic, gave the story of human presence on earth a meaning and a direction. For humans can and indeed need question each grand narrative, but cannot do without one. If human presence on earth were wholly random, then all choices would be ultimately arbitrary. Our systems of ethics – not in the sense of tedious collections of precepts but in the sense of ingrained attitudes and habits of mutual respect and good will – are wholly contingent upon a basic consensus about the way our presence makes sense as History. Without it, humans grow bewildered. In the short run, they act arbitrarily – and moralists complain about the decline in morality, possibly recommending compulsory memorization of the Ten Commandments or of Selected Sayings of T. G. Masaryk. In the long run, they grasp at anyone who offers them a new Truth, no matter how far-fetched it may be. That was the story of the rise of Nazism in post war Germany and of Communism in Russian Empire following the disintegration of the Czarist consensus. Today, the same bewilderment, same desperate need for certainty, any certainty, manifests itself in the rise of religious fundamentalism, whether in the Religious Right in the United States, among Israel's ultraorthodox or in the dogmatically Islamist movements in Moslem countries. If philosophers cannot offer a convincing rational grand narrative, make sense of History and of individual humans and communi-

ties within it, fanaticism will become a global phenomenon. Here the Czech sense of bewilderment and quest of self-understanding is integrally a part of its global equivalents. Yet in place of a critical grand narrative there is only the gaping *naught*. What Jan Patočka introduced as heresy had become the new orthodoxy.

When heresy becomes the new orthodoxy, as often it does, a new set of heretical questions is called for. Now that the once heretical vision of bewildered humans adrift in a meaningless universe has become The Truth, is it really so? Or is it just another story, and a not particularly productive one at that? It may well have seemed profoundly true to Heidegger after the collapse of Nazism and the defeat of Germany's *Griffnach der Weltmacht*, grasps at world domination. It corresponded to his personal situation. After the denazification commission suspended him from teaching, there was nothing for him but to retreat into poetic solitude and listen to the voice of *Beyng*. Similarly there was little for Patočka after the collapse of the Czech grasp for democratic socialism and the Soviet occupation. Both men must have lived the loss of meaning as something almost tangible, much like *les philosophes soixante-huit* in the West after the student revolts ran out of steam. Those, though, were specific personal situations. Can we generalise them? Do they really unveil some deep nature of reality (d.b.a. *Beyng*), bringing it up from forgetting in an act of *a-letheia* – or are they superficial and transient, of personal relevance only? When a Heidegger or a Patočka lead us up a blind alley where nothing remains but poetic silence, does that mean that philosophy as such has come to a *Vollendung*, its final completion? Or does it simply mean that they have taken a wrong turn? With the collapse of our cherished beliefs, do we face a vast *naught* – or is there a new uncharted horizon opening before us? After all, seen from a cherished past, the promise of a wide open horizon might well seem like a gaping *naught*.

Here some sober thought is in order. We have lost all faith in a Golden Age by which to measure our present condition or to which we could aim our efforts. The Kingdom of Heaven was so long in coming that we wearied of *waiting for Godot*. Then our faith in endless *progress*, in *ever more and ever higher*, turned to hollow mockery as we realised that it is precisely that striving that prepares our doom. But does the collapse of our two great explanatory models mean that history itself is devoid of an ordering principle which would render it intelligible?

Here we need turn from speculation to reality itself, to the world as we live it before the poets or the scientists interpret it for us. We need, with Mas-

aryk no less than with Husserl, to *see clearly and examine critically the meaning structures of reality as experience*. Is History in the broadest sense of the story of human presence on earth truly meaningless, devoid of any inherent principle of intelligibility? Is all meaning a product of arbitrary choices, losing its explanatory power once we cease to believe in it?

Certainly the faith in a *Golden Age* proved contingent on our ability and will to believe. We had to believe that though actuality is process, reality is perfection – and that perfection is intrinsically possible while only contingently non-actual, not only in heaven but also here on earth. Or, less densely, we had to believe that though all we live and all we know is a changing, unfolding, ever incomplete narrative, the *true* reality – whatever *that* may mean – is so complete, so perfected that there is neither room nor need for any change therein. In addition, we had to believe that such motionless perfection was not only possible but also desirable in time, on earth, and that it would come some day, as we prayed, or that we would achieve it with our effort. That was a faith so counterfactual, so contrary to all experience, that it could survive only when projected onto heaven. On earth, in time, it could not survive the recognition of earthly life as real, not merely actual – and of reality itself as process.

Its modern substitute, our faith in infinite expansion, was no less contingent on our will and ability to believe. We had to bring ourselves to believe that increasing “prosperity” – a code name for material consumption – would automatically resolve all problems, in spite of the deep pockets of poverty amid fabulous affluence, in spite of evident discontent of the affluent. So be it, repeating the mantra about *rising tide raising all boats*, we forced ourselves to believe. We had, however, to believe also in squaring the circle – in the possibility of infinite expansion in a finite space. For several generations, we comforted ourselves with a belief in miracles, specifically miracles of technology. Now, though, the accounts are in and the time of reckoning is upon us. There are no miracles, nor could they change the merciless logic of infinite expansion and finite space. Our second narrative strategy, that of open-ended growth, has proved bankrupt. We have no more narratives to make History with our lives in it intelligible. All that remains is the great *naught*.

Oh, really? Here a truly heretical question is in order. Is History, seen through the environmental prism, truly meaningless, devoid of a principle of intelligibility? Or is it just the opposite? Though such a claim would run counter the entire tradition of German idealism and its descendents, the opposite appears to be the case. Human presence on earth no longer appears as aimless,

waiting for humans to choose a goal and an aim for it. Human effort *makes sense* in terms of *mantinels* built into our reality. It can be read meaningfully as an ongoing effort to maintain an equilibrium between humanity's need to act out its potential and the need of the entire system of life on earth to maintain sustainable conditions for itself. In short, seen through the environmental prism, human life is a quest for a sustainable balance between human desires and nature's needs.

The environmental prism is, admittedly, a rather obscure metaphor.¹⁷⁵ In Czech especially the widely used term *ecology* is itself problematic. In a strict sense it refers to an empirical scientific discipline concerned with interactions within living systems, or, in a word, with the *study of nature* rather than a *concern for it*. In addition, *ecology* – now in the popular sense of *environmentalism* – has at different times meant different things, largely mirroring the development of our civilisational strategies.

What we could call *romantic ecology*, lumping together indiscriminately thinkers as different as Henry David Thoreau, John Muir and Arne Naess, bears a marked similarity to the *paradigm of Golden Age*. It starts with a vision of Mother Nature as fundamentally benign, a self-governing conflicted harmony which does nothing in vain and cares for all of its creatures rather like God the Father used to do. The fall comes when humans displace the order of nature with their arbitrary will, using their technology to force their will upon suffering Nature. The redemptive strategy is one of return to nature, mocked – rather unfairly – as *climbing back into the trees*. More profoundly, it is a call to recapture the natural rhythm of our bodies and our lives, bringing it in harmony with the rhythm of Nature.

Romantic ecology, like the paradigm of Golden Age generally, made a major contribution to our culture. With its moral sensitivity to nature it helped stop the heedless plunder of nature like the deforestation of the Sázava region for building timber and fuel for ever-hungry Prague and the extermination of entire species for frivolous pleasure. It made a major contribution to psychohygiene as well. There is something immensely restorative about animals and about the whole green peace of the forest. Henry David Thoreau was by no means the only one to discover the *vis medicatrix naturae*. As long as humans bear within them the conflict between the natural harmony of

¹⁷⁵ For more detailed analysis of environmental (or “ecological”) options compare Er-
azim Kohák, *The Green Halo* (translated from the Czech original, *Zelená svatozář*,
by the author; Chicago, Open Court Press 2000)

their bodies and the critical penetration of their reason, romantic ecology will always have something to say.¹⁷⁶

It can, however, be hardly considered a significant response to the question of the great *naught* and the quest for meaning, for largely the same reasons as the *paradigm of Golden Age* in general. It, too, is contingent on the will to believe and must face the same fundamental contradiction between time and perfection. There are practical problems – for one, humans have become so many and trees so few that a return to the trees, even were it a solution, would not be practicable. Yet even if we were to disregard all practical problems there would remain the problem in principle. Humans are estranged from nature intrinsically, in virtue of their critical reason. We could return to *nature* – the spontaneity of unreflected being – only at a cost of our humanity. A personified Mother Nature might well think that no great loss; for us, it is not an option – and, most of all, it is not a meaningful framework for our concern, raising the meaning-question of our identity.

The second, pragmatic version of the environmental perspective is in turn analogous to the *paradigm of Progress*. Here again we are lumping together writers as vastly different as James Lovelock, wavering between mysticism and metatheory, and the practical, technology obsessed Ernst Ulrich von Weizsäcker. Yet for all their differences, they do have something in common. They tell no myth of Mother Nature. They regard nature as basically human environment on which humans draw to satisfy their needs, whether noble or crude. To speak of *needs of Nature* can be at most a metaphor. Rules for human treatment of nature need consider only human needs and wishes from which all value derives. Humans – or here more frequently *Man* – are the masters of all they survey. However, they need to be wise masters and careful husbandmen of nature, its caretakers. Man, some religious writers would say, is the shepherd of the creation.

The pragmatic approach, too, has made its contribution. True, many times it served as an excuse for the crudest exploitation of our world, for clear-cutting tropical rain forests and drilling for oil in pristine wilderness. However, it has also made us conscious of the cost of our growth. With deforestation it has led consumers from paper to plastic containers and might in turn lead them from plastic to returnable glass. Recycling is a useful inter-

¹⁷⁶ One of my early books, *The Embers and the Stars*, subtitled *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Moral Sense of Nature* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press 1977) is a pure example of the genre. A portion of it is due to appear in Czech in: Erazim Kohák, *Kopí Dona Quijota (Don Quijote's Lances)*; Praha, Ježek, pending for 2008).

mediate step. The entire conception of *sustainable growth* which, in its day, represented a major step forward in our thinking about nature, is a product of the pragmatic approach.

Still, philosophically speaking, *pragmatic ecology* remains a dead end as much as the entire *paradigm of Progress*. It does not question the suppressed major premiss, the putative right of humans to multiply without any consideration of the impact of their numbers nor the even more problematic putative right of every human to gratify every need, wish and whim. It raises only the question of how best to do it, most efficiently, in the most considerate manner – and that, admittedly, is all to the good. However, it does not confront the basic problem, the unresolved contradiction between infinite expansion and finite space. *Sustainable growth* is a contradiction in terms. Growth is a distraction from the problem of the great *naught*. It does not offer a model of History as intelligible within which we could inquire into the meaning of our personal and collective identity.

The philosophically relevant version of the environmental paradigm is one which, again very unprecisely, we could call *systems ecology* or, rather more accurately, *paradigm of responsibility*. Prototypical under that unlovely label might well be a thoughtful, morally sensitive American forester, Aldo Leopold,¹⁷⁷ or others like the recent Nobel Prize winner, Albert Gore, though few would come up to Leopold's standard. The core of the approach is to think of nature as a system, the system of *all* life and of all that helps sustain it, from the soil through the atmosphere to the warmth of the sun. Within this relatively independent, internally related system we have generated a dependent system, the world of *human* life. That is a radically dependent system. For all its relative internal independence, the system of human life (or, conventionally, *culture*) with all it entails, from the Iraq war through Dnieprostroi and Sputnik to Bizet's *Carmen*, remains parasitic on the system of all life (or *nature*.)

Unlike among humans, in nature being a parasite is perfectly legitimate. A good parasite, however, needs observe one basic rule: it must feed on but not endanger the survival of its host. Otherwise, it will destroy itself

¹⁷⁷ The classic, available also in Czech, is Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanach* (New York, Oxford University Press 1949, with innumerable reprints, which I would match with an author who does not deal with environmentalism at all, Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press 1984). Combined, these two authors present what, not without awe, I should call the *paradigm of responsibility*.

together with its host. The problem with culture – with the world of all human doings – is not that it is parasitic on the world of all life (or Nature) but that it goes about it rather badly. We resemble nothing as much as a crew in the gondola of a lighter-than-air balloon who rip strips of cloth from their balloon to line their gondola for greater comfort. When we make demands greater than nature can sustain, we are endangering the very survival of our life-world – and often for quite frivolous reasons.

We can read the story of human presence on Earth as intelligible in terms of those two poles, Human culture is the product of the effort of humans to live out their lives in their fullness appropriately to their species, which Albert Schweitzer considers the basic call and right of every living being. Conflict between individuals, within and between species, is a part of the conflicted harmony of nature, governed by the structure of their interaction. What constitutes *living our lives in their fullness* is then an internal debate within our species which, in less antiseptic terms, we have traditionally examined under the label of the *meaning of our identity*. Though the answer is not self-evident, the question is not meaningless.

There is, however, a difference between humans and other species. For whatever reason, humans have managed to use their technological skill to circumvent the controlling mechanisms of the world of all nature. We are, for instance, capable of avoiding natural mechanisms of population control by post-natal care and antibiotics. It is a fool's game, of course, because we have not avoided the consequences of overpopulation. Yet it is humanly so understandable and we are able to do it. We are equally able to fish out an ocean or to destroy the earth's green lungs though we cannot change the impact of such measures. We have thus acquired a need and so a *meaning in life*: regardless of any will to believe or lack thereof, we need so to structure our lives as to make the fulfilment of our human potential compatible with the needs of our host, the world of all life.

Human history is not random. It is the story of an effort at the realization of human potential in dialogue with the need to preserve the nature on which we are dependent. After the collapse of the traditional paradigmata of *Golden Age* and of *Progress* we are not just being pushed by the cavernous *naught* up a blind alley. The alley may be opening at a new horizon. There is, emerging out of the recognition of the legitimacy and polarity of the two basic needs, self-realisation and survival, a new paradigm of intelligibility which we could designate as *the paradigm of ecological responsibility*.

It would be too audacious and definitely premature to weigh down this glimpse of a new perspective with excessive philosophical freight. Philo-

sophy in the West has a three thousand year tradition. The recognition of the *paradigm of ecological responsibility* is at most fifty years old. For too long, Nature was so vast and human so few, so puny in their power and so modest in their demands that blissful irresponsibility seemed to pose no problem. Still to Locke with his conception of the limitless *bounty of nature* it might have seemed that we can let nature look after itself and worry solely about realising our potential, grotesquely defined as *being fruitful and subduing the earth*. No more. Humankind has become numerous, demanding and powerful enough to seize what it will. Our task now is the opposite: while ever mindful of human needs, to reduce dramatically our numbers and our desires so as to make them compatible with the survival of the world of all life and our kind within it.

Nor is that just a matter of recycling plastic bags and planting an occasional tree. It may be too early to make dogmatic claims, yet it is intriguing to trace out some of the consequences of the basic insight into our *ecological responsibility*. It might well entail a challenge at last to eliminate oppression throughout the world. Oppression leads to conflict, to revolts and wars which no self-appointed global policemen can stifle, regardless of the number of nuclear warheads at their disposal. Yet we cannot resign ourselves to wars as inevitable, as the last global policeman but one, the British Empire, still could. Today we need face the reality that ecologically wars are absolutely unsustainable. Both the direct environmental damage and the damage to human lives are horrendous. Our human world or *culture* can be sustainable only free of the blight of oppression and of its consequence in armed conflict.

It would be interesting to trace out other consequences as well. So, for instance, ecological responsibility would need to call for an elimination of blatant social injustice. Nor would it do just to reduce all humans to a share as equal as their stomachs are equal. We might need to start with truly basic needs as personal safety a self-respect, as clean water, problem-free sanitation, predictable food source and assured warmth, all regardless of income. Since gearing down consumption to sustainable levels would require sacrifices, we need assure that all share them fairly, in proportion to their ability to contribute. Social justice finally needs mean that none are left behind, that we approach each other with genuine respect for the otherness of the other and equally genuine good will. We have not traditionally thought of such concerns as *ecological*, yet they might follow from the *paradigm of ecological responsibility*.

A thought-out ecological responsibility might also need to include an effort to eliminate involuntary homelessness. *Displaced Persons*, as once we

were called when I first had to leave my native land, are not only morally, but also ecologically problematic. One of the early texts in environmental ethics used the term *cowboy ethic* to describe the code of behaviour of the uprooted who experience no bond to their surroundings. Killing a buffalo, cutting out the tongue to eat and leaving the rest behind to rot as the herd moved on became a classic example.¹⁷⁸ To find oneself at home, with one's own, in a long-familiar place, is also one of the fundamental human needs – and a basic ecological problem since most extinction is due to biotope deprivation. To give all humans the opportunity to love a home place and feel secure therein might well be a major challenge and an ecological necessity.

Perhaps the most basic need might prove to be philosophic. The idea of *ecological responsibility* is a challenge to do nothing mindlessly, heedless of its consequences. If the weary old slogan of *acting naturally* means returning to an unreflecting spontaneity, then *ecological responsibility* might turn out to mean the very opposite of a *return to Nature*. It might call for a turn to responsibility, and that means to reflection, to thoughtful consideration of the implications of our choices. As we think through the recognition that the first need and the ultimate basis of all morality is the conflicted demand of realising human potential while honouring the integrity, stability and beauty of all life, we might encounter a great many surprises. Perhaps only one thing is clear. Our situation after the collapse of the *paradigm of the Golden Age* and the *paradigm of Progress* is not one of bewildered meaninglessness in a chaotic universe. It is a situation structure and rendered meaningful by the *paradigm of ecological responsibility*.

With that we have not resolved all outstanding philosophical disputes, as prof. Ayer once claimed to have done in the concluding chapter of his *Language, Truth and Logic*. We have not even resolved the question of our cultural identity. At most, we have raised a hope of answering it, since we are not raising it amid the meaninglessness of a cavernous *naught* but against a history which has a clear structure of meaning as the story of human self-realization within the context of nature's needs. Against that background, we can pose meaningfully the two questions that seemed so futile as a rhetoric outcry in the echo-less cavern – *what is the meaning of claiming a particular cultural identity, in our case, of being Czech?* and, *is there still any point to it?*

¹⁷⁸ See Erazim Kohák, *The Green Halo*, op. cit., pp. 94–95. The same volume provides also references for all environmentalist authors mentioned here.

CONCLUSION

Cultural Identity in a Global World

*Though I am old with wandering
Through hollow lands and hilly lands,
I will find out where she has gone,
And kiss her lips and take her hand.*¹⁷⁹

Therewith we return to our starting point. When all is said and done, can we still speak of an *idea of the Czech nation*, as Palacký once wrote of the *idea of the Austrian state*? And is there any point to it? We have wandered, Angus-like, along the paths of modern Czech thought and fortunes in quest of the will-o'-the-wisp of our cultural identity. What, if anything, is the *idea*, the cultural and historical tie which binds us not just as the population of the Czech lands or as the taxpayers of Czech Republic, but as a Central European counterpart of Shakespeare's *band of brothers* at Agincourt, a community of pilgrims through history, a *nation*? Having travelled those paths, can we now come to a conclusion?

Here caution is in order. Conclusions ill become philosophy. Life does not conclude. It ever spends and ever renews itself as christenings overlap funerals and as nations wax and wane. Humans whose being is becoming, whose reality is process and whose identity is a story, need be content with progress reports, modest in conclusions.

¹⁷⁹ Mood music: see footnote 9 above. Here from William Butler Yeats, *The Song of the Wandering Angus*, readily available in print and electrons, cited from Louis Untermeyer (ed.), *Modern British Poetry* (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Co. 1950), pp. 111–112. When writing of this in Czech, I used Karel Kryl's song of the open road, "Cesta je prach a štěrk a udusaná hlína" (The Road is dust and gravel and hard-packed clay) from his first album, *Bratříčku, zavírej vrátka* (*Close the Door, Little Brother*; Praha, Panton 1969).

Once in our collective quest for self-understanding we did get a glimpse of what seemed like eternity. When we regained our independence in 1918, it seemed to many as if we had reached the threshold of *forever*. The last battle had been won and there remained nothing but to live out our *happily ever after* in uneventful fulfilment. The bright & beautiful young men and women who set about building our republic certainly acted as if convinced that they were labouring for at least forever or for as long as the old Austrian Empire had lasted, whichever came first.¹⁸⁰ Behind our backs, our German fellow citizens called the same republic an *Interimstaat*. In the end, our *forever* lasted not a full score years.

Returning from another two score and two years of *wandering through hollow lands and hilly lands*, I, too, had my moment on the threshold of *forever*. When I landed at what long had been a sleepy little airport behind the Iron Curtain, it seemed I had reached a conclusion, as prophet Isaiah speaks of it.¹⁸¹ My warfare had ended and now there remained but to live out my long-deferred life. This time, my private *forever* lasted not quite three years. Then there was no more Czechoslovakia.

There are no conclusions. We wonder as we wander through the centuries in quest of self-understanding. If our reflection is not to be eternally irrelevant to humans who live in time, we need avoid finality. We need continuously and ever anew observe and reflect, seeing clearly and articulating faithfully such ideas as can *make sense* of what, with William James, we could call the *blooming, buzzing confusion* of our history and our lives.

Yet in the course of our wandering, there does emerge, on a philosophical level at least, something rather like an idea of a cultural identity. For the cultural-historical communities we call nations are indeed constituted by ideas. In the beginning there is only a random population, contingently linked by common language or territory though often divided by jurisdiction. It is a shared idea, often sensed or felt rather than thematically contemplated, which constitutes it as a nation, capable of acting as a subject of history, not its object merely.

¹⁸⁰ A curious reader can find the photograph I carry in my mind of four of them in: Milena Šimsová, *V šat bílý oděni* (*Clad in White Robes*; Benešov, Eman 2005) on page 220, English text to it in *Revelation to John 7,9–17*, preferably in the King James version.

¹⁸¹ The reference is to Isaiah 40,1 to most people best known from the annual performances of Handel's *Messiah* – "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people; speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem and say unto her that her warfare is ended..."

To a casual observer, the Czech population at the start of the twenty-first century may well manifest few signs of nationhood beyond ethnic kinship and hopping at sporting events. However, as we look over the two centuries of Czech striving since the Napoleonic wars, we can recognise three distinctive traits of a common posture which constitutes something rather like a normative conception of what it means to claim this cultural and historical community as our own.

Throughout those years, we encounter, in one form or another, a shared commitment to a rather egalitarian ideal of human freedom and dignity, not at all common in central Europe. It is the Enlightenment ideal for which freedom is not just an absence of constraint but an achievement and a fulfilment of our humanity. To grow to freedom here means to outgrow the need for tutelage, to be capable of self-direction, but not just that. It also implies a basic self-respect, a sense of human dignity which may actually constitute the most fundamental of all human needs. Humans confident of their own worth, of their own dignity, can live at peace with themselves even in privation and hardship. To external observers, they will actually seem *happy*, though they themselves will not think in those terms. Other things matter more. There is a profound sense of equality ingrained in such freedom. None is master who could look down on his fellow, none serf having to submit to the arrogance of another. Such freedom is both the most basic possibility and the noblest achievement of being human. Through the years of the Czech quest for national identity, that ideal of freedom, right and dignity has been one of the most compelling strands of which the tapestry of the *idea of Czech nation* was woven.

The second, no less persistent strand has been that of social justice. Not surprisingly. The national revival of which modern Czech nation was born was not only a Czech revolt in the name of freedom against German dominance, though it was also that. It was no less a social revolt of the deprived against the privileged, a revolt of the painfully poor against the senselessly rich descendants of their erstwhile conquerors. Social justice here does not mean simply distributive equality, reminiscent of Antonín Zápotocký's slogan that *we all have the same stomachs*¹⁸² – thought of course we do. It means

¹⁸² Another oft quoted and seldom documented statement. However, even if Zápotocký did not actually say it, he should have. He was the second Communist president of Czechoslovakia (1953–57) who signed more death warrants than even his predecessor, Klement Gottwald, but won some popular favour by his populist manner, including statements such as this one.

most basically honouring the equal dignity of all, be they prince or pauper. It also means good will toward all, what the French revolution called *fraternité* and Masaryk biblically *love of neighbour*. Social justice here means treating all humans with respect for their human dignity and good will toward their needs, not just individually, but by building a social infrastructure that will protect them from the vicissitudes of fortune which exceed their power. Economic social justice is a direct consequence. If we approach all humans with equal respect and with equal good will, it will become unacceptable to have one starve while another wastes a vast surplus. It will also become unthinkable to turn over society's responsibility for its members to anyone's hands, be they invisible or all too visible. That commitment to social justice runs no less persistently through the texture of our national consciousness, even if today we honour it mostly in the breach.

There is a third strand woven into the texture we call the *idea of Czech nation*. It is an intense, almost painful love for our land, for our language and for our cultural heritage. That, too, is rooted in our history. The ancestors of the fervent young patriots who revived our nation did not experience our land as an Imperial grant, theirs by a "right" of conquest. It was land that became theirs – ours – by generations of toil. They knew that land intimately, having mixed their sweat, their tears and ultimately their ashes with it. Yet it was a land denied them by their masters. Nor was their language something they could take for granted. The oldest generation remembered a time when that language came close to extinction. More recently, that fate threatened our nation as a whole. Nazi Germany claimed Bohemia as ancestral German land. There was no place for Czechs there. Neither our land nor our language and the culture for which it stands were something we could take for granted. We had to struggle for it. One of the most negative effects of Communist rule was that by making love of homeland mandatory, down to folkloric appearances at no less mandatory school programmes, they made the love of land and language something distasteful. Yet beneath the surface that love of land and culture are still within us, capable of evoking powerful emotions – and, incidentally, making even the most routine border adjustments problematic.

Those three strands make up the warp of the cloth on which our fortunes are woven. Its fundamental motive – and motif – is not fear and hate, as is most often the case with the nationalist infatuation with "nation" in the Anglo-Saxon sense of a state and its taxpayers. Rather, ours is a relation to a cultural (and historical) entity we ourselves constitute. It grows from the love of freedom, the love of neighbour and the love of our land. None of that may

be uniquely Czech, but it is what has shaped our cultural identity ever since our national revival. We have honoured it through the successive generations, even if often in the breach. Still, for my generation, growing up during the Second World War, that triple commitment seemed to most of us the obvious answer to the question of what it means to be Czech. There is reason to believe that Jan Palach still shared it in 1969.

From that metaphor, something important is still missing, perhaps because it is so devilishly hard to put in words. It is no thing but rather the way those three strands are woven into a tapestry. Very inaccurately, very approximately, we might speak of it as of a posture of reflection or perhaps as a commitment to the examined life. All of that, though, is far too self-conscious, too theoretical. Far more, it may be an echo of our religious past, even though long since stripped of overtly religious expression. Still, the Czechs did have a long tradition of reflection and moral seriousness. Once it meant that there was a Bible in every farmhouse and croft. Latterly, it meant that you were likely to find a shelf of books even in working class homes. Not until the spread of electronic media did that cease to be the rule, though book store sales suggest that Czechs remain a nation of readers and thinkers even if the heritage of moral earnestness is heavily overlaid by consumer indifference.

Perhaps that heritage, too, reflects an unintended side-effect of our demographic base. In the absence of a traditional aristocracy as well as of a state apparatus, we have tended to look up to our humanistic intelligentsia – the people of thought and word – for valuation, direction and meaning. It was so from the beginnings of our national revival until the normalization in the 1970's. Only then did the Communist regime decide to punish the *people of thought and word* for their leading part in the Czechoslovak Spring of 1968 by systematic marginalization. The post-Communist era, dominated by Mr Klaus' neoconservatives much as the previous era had been dominated by the Communists, finished the process by adding economic marginalization. Henceforth, entrepreneurs and politicians, many notoriously corrupt but conspicuous in their consumption, were to be the trend setters and opinion makers. In working class homes – and not in those only – television sets replaced book shelves.

Yet the tradition is decades older and has rather different roots. There are the Christian beginnings and the two Slav missionaries, since canonised as St Constantine and St Methodius. There is St Adalbert and St Wenceslas. There is Jan Hus and Petr Chelčický and their heritage. There is the Protestant reformation, fuelled by the religious thirst of the common people.

There is no less the intensive Catholic Baroque religiosity of a later period. When Masaryk treated values not as speculation but as something clearly seen in lived experience, he was not citing theory. He was describing his own sense of value. Masaryk, not given to wearing rose glasses, was convinced that the question of Czech identity is ultimately religious – and it was not the perennial Protestant-Catholic squabbles he had in mind. Though today the Czech society is easily the most aggressively atheist in all of Europe, for centuries the Czech lands were marked by religious and moral earnestness.

To comprehend that – as few festive speakers seem to do – requires that we turn from the outward and visible manifestation of “religion” to the lived experience of faith. That experience begins with the shock of recognition that nothing is certain, nothing secure. Everything might very well *not be*. Out of that dark night of the soul some people at least emerge with the recognition that though nothing need be, *something is*. We could use that rather surprising reality as one of those tedious, unpersuasive *arguments for the existence of God*, though that is trite. The deep recognition of faith is that life and death are not interchangeable, that life is a triumph over death – and the conviction that something about the cosmos favours life. Various religious traditions express that with equally various metaphors, but the basic reality of faith remains and leads to a recognition that all that is, is ultimately a gift, a free, unearned gift. Religious life is at its core a life in gratitude, not in doctrinal conformity. Freely we thank for and rejoice in the gift by passing it on to others. Once we comprehend that inmost reality of faith, then Masaryk’s statement that the Czech question is fundamentally religious is no longer trite. It testifies to something that makes us the people we are.

Those who have learned from Masaryk, not simply celebrated him at suitable anniversaries, tend to be convinced that with Europe’s progressive secularization this religious earnestness did not vanish from our makeup but only shifted. While our grandfathers prayed, we thought through our lives. When Masaryk asserted that religion means life *sub specie aeternitatis*, he may have been reflecting the shift from explicit religiosity to its secular counterpart in philosophic reflection. In any case, he was describing the woof that binds together the three strand warp of our cultural identity, our commitment and our tendency to live our lives thoughtfully, *sub speciae aeternitatis*. In the perspective of eternity.

Altogether, historical reflection suggests an *idea of Czech nation* as morally earnest, with that earnestness reflected in an ideal of freedom and human dignity, a commitment to social justice and an intense love for our land, language and cultural tradition. Whether that is or is not what we have ever

been in fact, it is the conception of our national identity which served as the principle of our cohesion, as a model of our expectations and as the norm by which we measured ourselves. It was, in short, hardly ever the fact but ever the *ideal* of our national community.

Is that what the average Czech in the street is likely to be today? Far from it. Today's empirical reality is rather different. We may still speak of freedom, but usually it means little more than an unwillingness to accept any constraints of our arbitrary will, down to limitations as petty as traffic regulations. Imperceptibly, we have grown infected with the idea that we have a "right" to anything we desire, but no obligations to match. There is little evidence of a willingness to accept responsibility for the common weal. Though more than seventy percent respondents disapprove of the policies of our President and government, a similar seventy percent would increase presidential powers to the point of making him a despot, presumably enlightened, to take over the responsibilities of our freedom. Selfishness seems far more characteristic of our daily reality than solidarity. In 1968, Jan Palach spoke for the vast majority of our young people. Today, his action seems incomprehensible in classroom discussions and his ideas not so much wrong as hopelessly boring.

Altogether, we may well seem to have become a paradox, a *profoundly shallow* society, shallow, so to speak, *all the way down*. We may have once been a nation constituted by deeply reflected ideals of freedom and dignity, of social justice and of love of our land. We seem to have become an ethnic conglomerate marked by impatience with thought, unwillingness to accept responsibility, indifference to others and utter distaste for our cultural heritage or our land, motivated by nothing higher than immediate individual short-range gratification. So at least we seem to appear in our popular press, in the behaviour of our drivers, in our tastes in entertainment, in our political attitudes and generally in all the superficial indicators. Is that the new reality, reflecting a new non-idea of Czech cultural identity?

I think not. Certainly, were anyone to present our traditional ideals in a discussion, they would be met with polite disinterest at best and, more likely, with derision, even hostility. Here I speak from experience. Yet when such an observer is content to smile and listen, he – or she – is likely to witness an escalation of indignation at the many flaws of Czech society which, in a way, are surprising. After all, any of the speakers who are less than sixty years old have never known anything else. They should shrug their shoulders and accept the present state of affairs, its greed, bribery, corruption and cult of self-

ishness as *just the way we are*. Instead, they are likely to wax wroth as if they were measuring our present in terms of the *cultural ideal* we have traced and which they themselves would probably dismiss as unreal illusion or worse. They speak and often act as if in spite of what happened in our country during the war, during the Communist years, during the “privatization” years, they still bore within an *ideal of freedom, social justice, love of land* – and profound moral seriousness – and as if they resented not living up to it.

Nor is it a matter of words alone. There are too many indications to the contrary. While our self-appointed “elites” of the rich and powerful may be loath to speak of it, there is really a staggering number of people engaged in unselfish volunteer activities without thought of reward, just for the good of it. There are enough of them for our President to warn against civic activism as a threat *worse than Communism*. There is similarly a great number of young people opting for careers which offer relatively low material rewards but a great deal of personal satisfaction. There are a great many people who choose to live and work in our country, in effect voting with their feet against the lure of significantly higher salaries abroad. A great many people live thoroughly decent lives and would not think of doing otherwise. They are just very unlikely to speak of it, lest they appear naïve. Though we may be as idealistic as Masaryk, the fashionable rhetoric must be post-modern, affecting a pose of dis-illusioned cynicism. Ideals just are not worn this season.

Young people usually offer a ready explanation for that change in fashion, and a rather convincing one at that. They have seen their elders discard their vaunted ideals at the frown of a party bureaucrat. In 1968, the entire nation – actually, it was 92% – signed a declaration proclaiming that *as long as we live, we shall not leave the path we have taken*. Two years later, great majority of those same people speedily left that path and wrote denunciations of those who hesitated. A handful of idealists signed *Charta 77* and accepted the consequences. Hundreds upon hundreds others signed various declarations condemning the *Charta* signers as traitors and outcasts without even demanding a chance to read the text they were asked to condemn.

Or go back yet another generation, as old-timers are fond of doing. In 1938, the Czechoslovak army, allegedly well armed, well fortified and totally supported by the entire Czech segment of our population, swore to defend the republic against Hitler. When push came to shove, it meekly surrendered with the paltry excuse that President Beneš did not actually order it to resist. The chorus of vocal attacks on Beneš since that time cannot mask the reality that, in that surrender, that generation lost all credibility in the

eyes of their sons and daughters (or now grandsons and granddaughters). Worse than that, that turn-about discredited all ideals. In the eyes of many of the present young generation, that is what made *the naught* an all pervading reality. All that remains is money, however acquired, and the costly toys that money can buy. Today's young drivers of luxury automobiles do not care.

Some, of course, do. The young who still care enough to be cynical do in part believe. Their idol tends to be Karel Kryl who in his exile protest songs mercilessly flailed the Communists and Václav Havel's velvet regime equally. Karel Kryl was truly an equal opportunity cynic, a man of intense love and of a wounded heart. He was angry because he did care, care intensely.¹⁸³ Many young no longer care. Though they still speak Czech, from need if not by preference, they find any overt manifestation of a love of our cultural identity just plain embarrassing. They prefer to think themselves cosmopolitan, world citizens whose Czech is as poor as whatever other language they affect, as free of national roots as the Communists once thought themselves free of *religious superstitions*. Their elders just failed them, they say.

There is a less jaundiced explanation abroad as well. That blames not the moral failure of the preceding generation but simply the fact of too many changes. For two centuries we were patriots, totally devoted to the ideal of our nation. That ideal, though, changed too often, too suddenly and too completely for us to keep up with it. We had just learned to be patriotic Czechs and loyal subjects of the Emperor of Austria when the Empire collapsed. Overnight, we became republicans, casting away our old loyalty for a new one. That lasted twenty years. Then, just to survive, it became necessary at least to act out the role of an inoffensive folkloric minority protected by the Greater German Empire. We survived, but found ourselves called upon to pretend that we were once more in Masaryk's republic even though the violence all around us testified we were not. Three years later the *ideal of the nation* changed again as we were called upon to welcome the proletarian revolution, not just hang out red banners but be enthusiastic about it. We had to learn to lie from the heart. Then came *socialism with a human face*, only to be replaced by a vicious normalization. There was the Velvet Revolution, expecting us to believe that the (new) love and truth must prevail over the (old) love and truth of a generation ago. Three years later we switched to building

¹⁸³ Karel Kryl (1944–1994) was too intensely my friend for me to speak of him objectively. For a personal account, see Erazim Kohák, "Kryliáda čili Kryljáráda", in: Martin Stumpf (ed.), *Jaro desáté (Tenth Spring)*, Praha, Opus Bonum 2004, pp. 33–38.

democratic capitalism (sic). Now the ideal was maximization of profit, by any means. An American con man was touted as a folk hero by our Prime Minister until he skipped town with the proceeds of coupon privatization. Our new opinion makers posed as an elite while unwittingly paraphrasing Mr Vanderbilt,¹⁸⁴ *Public interest be damned!* Under those circumstances, it does not seem at all unreasonable to assume that people have simply grown tired of ideals. There were too many saltos, too rapid changes. The great *naught* might just make for a rather restful change.

It is quite possible that that is the explanation. Or perhaps there is a number of factors at work. Perhaps our present condition is simply the result of fatigue, bone weary exhaustion. Perhaps all we need is thirty years of rest, just plain daily life, uninfected by ideals. If the world would only stop for fifty years and let us catch our breath, as Masaryk hoped! Or perhaps we are suffering from massive revulsion at our own moral morass. Perhaps what we need is a new start, a squeaky clean young generation which is untainted by the moral failures of their fathers and mothers. Or perhaps...

...perhaps there is a wholly different explanation. No, our nation does not live up to our historic *cultural ideal* of freedom and dignity, of social conscience and love of homeland, rooted in moral seriousness. But it did not live up to that *ideal* in Masaryk's day, either. There were a great many noble, idealistic young who loved their land and served it unstintingly in peace and in war. There were also great many sleazy, corrupt men and women in all walks of life, from corrupt bankers to corrupt small town officials. There was the ideal, with Masaryk as guarantor, but there was also the petty reality pursuing private gain at a cost to the country and to fellow citizens alike. On closer examination, the situation then was not that much different from our situation today.

Only one thing has changed, and changed drastically – the people whose activities create the public image of our society, the way we appear to ourselves. The people who created that image in the first republic were people of critical reason, philosophers and intellectuals committed to watching over the idea of our nation. They were *people of thought and word*, guardians

¹⁸⁴ William H. Vanderbilt was an American railway magnate and one of the embodiments of what Samuel Clemens called *the gilded age*. In 1882, he dismissed a reporter's appeal in the name of the public's right to know with these words – which, appearing in *Chicago Tribune* the following morning, gave him lasting fame. Altogether, the Czech decade following the end of the Velvet era gave a rather convincing imitation of America's *gilded age* in the 1870's and 1880's.

of a cultural heritage committed to freedom and human dignity, to social justice and love of our land. Not surprisingly, the ideal of our nation and the image we presented to ourselves and to others reflected that. Those people, who were too democratic to think of themselves as *intellectual elite*, but they projected an image of our nation formed by the best there is in us. Today, when we know that image of the first republic far more than its daily reality, it may well appear to us as the golden age.

Perhaps today the nation is not all that different. At least to a historian most of our complaints have a familiar ring. However, today a wholly different kind of people, a self-proclaimed “elite” of economists and politicians, with few democratic instincts but with high personal expectations, have come to form our public image. They are less teachers than entertainers, newly enriched in “privatization”. Given their profession, their vision is necessarily one of maximization of profit and their commitment not to cultural growth as much as to an economic rationalization of our society. Their ethics are predatory, ethics of ruthless competition which builds wealth, not of cooperation or appreciation of human values which builds societies. That is what the system expects of them, what assures the steady rise in the level of consumption. Falling back on the habits of conformity, they oblige.

When we cast men and women whom we expect to provide the economic foundation of our society also in the role models, we need be prepared that the models they offer will reflect the virtues of their estate. Any normative *ideal of the nation* will appear to them wholly superfluous. After all, to paraphrase the holy writ of a generation ago, *profit has no fatherland*. The great *naught* seeps into the vacuum. After all, *the naught* increases consumer demand – and consumer demand, not human need, is the motor of our economy. We shall produce expensive adult toys to fill the emptiness in our minds and hearts until nature or our Oriental creditors blow the whistle. That, though, is not a new ideal. It is only a pathetic substitute for our loss.

The reality of our daily life does not convince me that the *Czech cultural ideal* has changed. If we are to continue as a cultural community, a band of brothers travelling through history, we can do so only as a community that reflects upon the meaning of its living and being and is committed to the ideals of freedom and dignity, of social justice and of a love of its land, language and culture. That belongs to the rules of the road as we travel on, especially as we increasingly come to be at home in the European Union and in the world. Our open wider homeland will not assure our identity with barbed wire along our borders. Now the cohesion needs come from within, affirming our identity while opening us to the broad horizon of the world.

With no barbed wire to define us, we can retain our identity only through a commitment to an ideal that is affected neither by barbed wire nor by a golden cage.

To be sure, we need not retain any cultural identity at all. We can, if we so wish, dissolve in the easy world of instant gratification. We can become an ethnic manifold distinguished only by an awkward, unintelligible language and gradually melt into a global English-speaking civilization. For a time we might even continue to speak Czech after a fashion, much as we did after the Battle of White Mountain, though that Czech would gradually retreat from salons and lecture halls to taverns and football games until it would vanish altogether, much as Cornish did two centuries ago, Wendic in our time and Irish seems well on its way to doing. It would be no tragedy. Nations emerge and nations dissolve; such is life. We might even grow richer in coin as we channel resources and energy from translations to more tangibly profitable pursuits.

Yet I believe we would be the poorer for it, and so would the world be. Culture is rooted in the heritage of a language, of shared memories and hopes. There is no culture in a language devoid of that depth, however well suited to superficial communication it may be. English stripped of Shakespeare, of King James Bible and the Prayer Book, of seafaring, of theatre, of struggles, defeats and small triumphs and of the intimate riches of centuries of memories and hopes is no longer the language of culture. A multicultural world cannot be based on global superficiality. It is possible only as a mosaic of cultures, each lovingly polished as a precious stone. Diversity of cultures, much like diversity of species in non-human nature, is not a threat. *Gleichschaltung* is that, reduction to uniformity, impoverishing and making cultures vulnerable much as sylvan monocultures produce impoverished and vulnerable forests. We contribute to global humanity precisely as we cherish and share our distinctive cultural heritage, by the richness and purity of a language which offers its own memories and hopes.

It is the ability to cherish and to share that makes diversity possible. To cherish: humans with no cultural distinctiveness to share have little to contribute. And to share: the world suffers from what the Nazis in their time called *Kulturkampf* and what our time thinly disguises as *clash of civilizations*. It does not suffer from a plurality shared. The world needs cultures which cherish their distinctiveness but are inherently willing to share, welcoming plurality, not threatened by it. At its best, our Czech cultural heritage, long forced to fuse a plurality in philosophic reflection, of human freedom and dignity, of social conscience and love of our home-world, may be rather bet-

ter equipped for a global world than the arrogant culture of fear and aggression which sets the tone of our global world. The cultural face our republic has been showing to Europe and the world in recent years may be embarrassing, but the Czech cultural ideal could be so different! We do not need a different ideal and we do not need a different people. We may, though, need to value rather different qualities in the women and men to whom we entrust our fortunes than economic prowess and political ruthlessness. Economists and entertainers are not enough. A culture needs *people of thought and word* as well.

Are we capable of nurturing women and men who would be such shepherdesses and husbandmen of our cultural heritage? I do not know. My generation has fought its struggles and is weary. Now it can only seek to make available a Czech cultural ideal with its language, its memories and hopes to those who are coming after us. The generation of our children was most marked by the era of normalization. It is now the turn of the generation of our grandchildren.

We could hardly blame them were they to shun the effort and the cost of preserving their cultural identity, so many times discredited by their elders. They will need to invent their own idiom, to live their own Czech identity and their global humanity their way, appropriate to their time. Having been a teacher for all of my life, I believe they have the energy and ability to do it. Have they the will? Will they recognise and meet the challenge – or will they choose to avoid it? It takes courage and labour to confront reality. We have not been kind to them. They are, bombarded to superficiality by global drivel on the one hand, repelled by the crude racism of self-proclaimed “patriots” on the other. Are they still capable of loving our land and language and of making its universally human ideals their own?

I choose to trust they are and will, because I love this land, its culture and its community of pilgrims. But I do not know. Perhaps in three, four generations there will remain in these lands only an indistinct ethnic mass of consumers with no sense of identity and no aspiration beyond ever-rising affluence. Still I should say, with František Palacký: “Though I were of a Gypsy people and the very last of my kin, I should still strive with all my power that an honourable memory of my people remain.”¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵ Palacký so replied to Josef Dobrovský who believed it was too late to revive a Czech nation. The discussion resulted in the founding of the *Muzejník*, a quarterly of the Patriotic Museum in Prague, whose Czech version is still being published and read. Its German version, a monthly in which the Museum’s benefactor

H. G. Schauer posed his two questions, *what does it mean to be Czech?* and *is it still worth it?* Having posed them, he chose to become German. A century later, I faced the same two questions and the same choice. Many of my colleagues opted for becoming American, French, German, without really confronting those questions. I grappled with them, and chose to become and be Czech. I believe I know what it means – to live my life *sub specie aeternitatis*, guided by the ideal of freedom and dignity, of social justice and of the love of this land, this language, this culture.

And is it worth it? Yes, many times over, though *sub specie aeternitatis* what seems “worth it” to me is really not very important at all. There are things that matter far more. Freedom. Social justice. Love of my land and language. And, most of all, there is the great freedom of having found something that *makes sense* of our lives. That matters.

Count Kašpar Sternberg invested rather heavily, lasted all of ten years. For details see Jiří Kořalka, *František Palacký – Životopis (František Palacký – Biography)*; Praha, Argo 1998).

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Hearth and Horizon

Cultural Identity and Global Humanity in Czech Philosophy

Erazim Kohák

Editors Magda Králová and Martin Pokorný

Design Václav Pišoft (www.studiopi.cz)

Cover Václav Pišoft

Typesetting Jana Andrlová, 5. května 111, Mělník

Published by Filosofia,

publishing house of the Institute of Philosophy,

Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic,

Jilská 1, Prague 1, Czech Republic,

as its 373rd publication

Printed by PBTisk, s.r.o., Příbram, Czech Republic

Second edition

248 pages

Prague 2013

First e-book edition

Prague 2019

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For many years Professor of Philosophy, now emeritus, at Boston University, returned to his native Czechoslovakia in 1990 after forty two years as a political refugee. After his return, he taught for ten years in the Faculty of Philosophy in Prague's Charles University. Currently, he is a Senior Research Fellow of the Centre of Global Studies at the Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic and takes part in public life as an author and lecturer. He has written widely on phenomenology and environmental and moral philosophy in both Czech and English. His books include *The Embers and the Stars: An Inquiry into the Moral Sense of Nature, Idea and Experience: Husserl's Project of Phenomenology in Ideas I, Jan Patočka: His Thought and Writings, The Green Halo: A Bird's-Eye View of Ecological Ethics* as well as numerous books in Czech, dealing in addition with problems of Czech history and cultural identity. He lives with his wife Dorothy in Prague, the Czech Republic, and is an active member of the Czech Brethren Church and of the Czech Social Democratic Party.

In *Hearth and Horizon* Prof. Kohák combines narrator's skills with a scholar's erudition to produce for his readers a rich tapestry of Czech thought and fortunes since the rebirth of the Czech nation at the dawn of modernity. He provides them with an intimate sketch of Czech history as the Czechs lived it, introduces them to a range of Czech philosophers, notably the two greats, T. G. Masaryk and Jan Patočka, and offers an insider's view of the birth of national identity in the interweaving of Enlightenment ideals with romanticism and modernity. While probing the problems of *the hearth* – of local cultural identity – he never loses sight of the problems of *the horizon*, global human identity, in the turbulently nationalist period between the twilight of the empires and the dawning of the European Union. The result is not only a good read for central European history buffs, though his book is certainly that, but also a thoughtful philosophic reflection of the generic problem of cultural particularity and global humanity seen in the intimate mirror of one cultural community's experience.

ISBN 978-80-7007-285-1



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