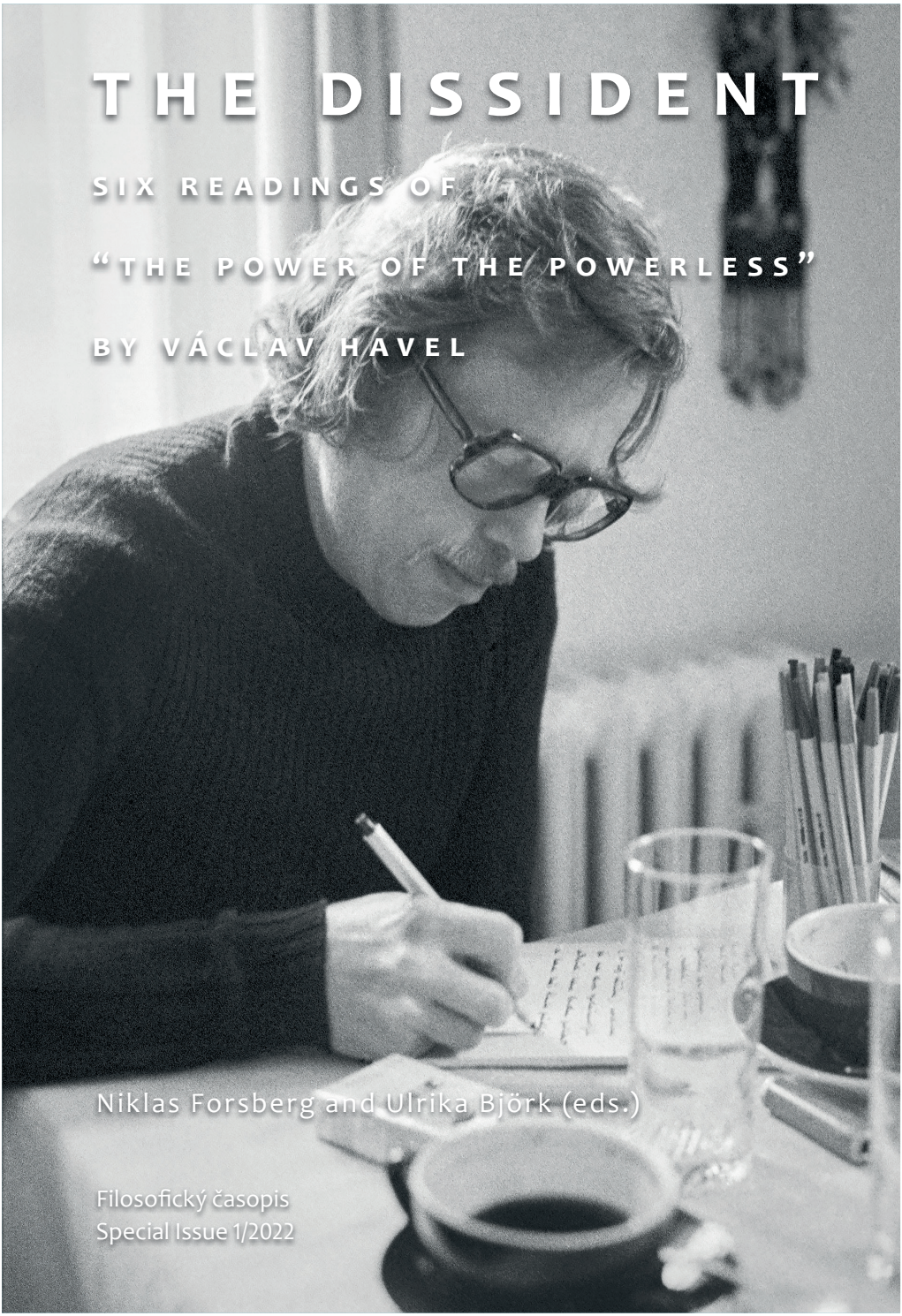

THE DISSIDENT

SIX READINGS OF "THE POWER OF THE POWERLESS" BY VÁCLAV HAVEL

Niklas Forsberg and Ulrika Björk (eds.)

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Editorial: Resounding the Powerless

No society, no matter how technologically advanced, can function without a moral basis, which is not a matter of opportunity, circumstances or anticipated beliefs. However, morality is not here to make society function, but simply because it makes a human being human.

Jan Patočka

Václav Havel's "The Power of the Powerless" ("Moc bezmocných") was written in 1978.[1] Initially, the text was intended for a Polish/Czechoslovakian volume on freedom and power in which all participants would have access to, and comment on, Havel's text. The project didn't reach its conclusion, as only the Czechoslovakian side of the collaboration managed to complete its task.[2] The essay was eventually published as a samizdat, along with nine written responses, shortly after Havel's arrest in 1979. "The Power of the Powerless" quickly took on a status of being one of those text that is necessary to read for anyone interested in power relations in contemporary society. But what is its value today?

In November 2019, two groups of philosophers (one from the Centre for Ethics as Study in Human Value, University of Pardubice, Czech Republic, and the other from the Department of Philosophy, Södertörn University, Sweden), who in various ways have taken an interest in the philosophies of Havel,

1 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless". *East European Politics and Societies*, 32, 2018, No. 2, pp. 353–408, doi: 10.1177/0888325418766625.

2 Havel, V. – Wilson, P., "Translator's Introduction to the 1991 Edition", in "The Power of the Powerless" [special issue], *East European Politics and Societies*, 32, 2018, No. 2, pp. 353–408, https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325418766625.

Jan Patočka and Ladislav Hejdánek, rehearsed the exercise to write articles on "The Power of the Powerless" and gather to talk them through, embarrassingly enough without knowing that the same strategy actually had led to the birth of the text that we focused on. The choice of text was not made in order to imitate its origin, but rather was rooted in a shared sense that this still is a central text, and one whose centrality is even more obvious now than it was a decade or two ago. We gathered only a few days after 17 Listopad (17 November), the Czech Day of Freedom and Democracy (Den boje za svobodu a demokracii), and shortly after history had repeated itself with mass demonstrations in Letna Park in Prague, making the impression of the text's relevance even stronger.[3] The questions of the legitimacy and nature of political power and the shape and hope for a democracy are not questions that will go away, and it might be fair to say that concepts such as "power" and "democracy" are concepts that each generation may have to work with, transform and make their own. As the world turns, so do our concepts, and so power relations will transform, which in turn means that democracy may have to be earned over and over again.

It was with some concern that we went into this project, since only a few philosophical essays allow themselves to be opened up in so many ways, and to provoke so much thought, as to lend themselves to be the focal object of a number of articles and days of discussion. "The Power of the Powerless" proved to have that power.

That is not necessarily evident, since one may think that Havel's text is uniquely tied to its rather specific context: what Havel himself would call a "post-totalitarian regime" and the efforts to contest it and find new openings for an ethico-political thinking and way of living that could follow after it – which were the central efforts of Charter 77. The Charter provides a rather unique setting for that kind of thinking, and Havel's close collaborations with prominent thinkers such as Jan Patočka and Ladislav Hejdánek are clearly visible in "The Power of the Powerless", not only in the fact that it is dedicated to Patočka but also in picking up thrust from their conversations and by means of lending some central thoughts and notions from phenomenological thinking.

3 The history of the Day of Freedom and Democracy goes back to 17 November 1939, when a massive student demonstration was held to protest the Nazi occupation. This date was therefore named "International Student's Day" in 1941. It was named "The Day of Freedom and Democracy" to commemorate another major student demonstration, held on 17 November 1989, in which opposition to the communist regime and the demand to free Czechoslovakia from the bonds to the communist bloc took centre stage, a demonstration that can rightfully be considered the starting point of the Velvet Revolution.

One may say that Charter 77 has at least two trademarks: it was meant to be both a non-political and a non-hierarchical organisation. It was therefore also central to their aim *not* to side with any ideology and to refrain from developing their own. Yet, Charter 77 also, quite clearly, had political ambitions of some sort, aiming, at the very least, to put oppressive and limiting political structures on display and marking out the dangers of current (and future) oppressive forms of power. Thus, the Chartist efforts to pursue a non-political politics that evidently calls for, or aims to make room for, some rather drastic political changes, lead us to reflect upon power relations and pre-political textures, where existential, political and ethical concerns are allowed to come forth as intermingled, not only with each other but also with questions about language, symbolism and truth. What emerges in Havel's analysis of his context, and what the efforts to prepare the ground for a "non-political politics" point towards, is not an attempt to simply say that the personal *is* political, or that all political issues are at bottom existential; rather, it is the call for efforts to unearth the kinds of moral and political undercurrents (of language and life and culture) that are not immediately seen as direct exercises of either power or resistance. The papers collected here are investigations into how these forms of interconnection and intertwining between ethics, existential concerns, authenticity, language, meaning and truth look.

Tomáš Hejduk's "What Form of Existentialism is there in Havel's Concept of Dissent? Hejdánek's Critique of Havel" localises a form of tension within Havel's position. On the one hand, Havel emphasises the moral and existential ways of thinking and being that characterise "the dissident". On the other, he does not wish to speak from the moral high ground. These questions lead us directly into questions about the possibility and nature of the idea of a non-political politics and how such a view, central to the Charter, actually would be different from "normal" or "traditional" politics. Hejdánek argued that Havel had a tendency to focus too heavily on the self and issues of subjectivity, a focus that also had some serious reverberations in Havel's understanding of what non-political politics might be and how the project of Charter 77 was different from "politics." Drawing on Hejdánek's thought that morals must be outward-oriented, aiming away from the self, Hejduk argues that what is missing in Havel's concept of the power of the powerless is a clear understanding of how help from outside, from others, is needed for the most powerless (which means to suggest that the inward orientation of Havel's thinking won't be enough), and that there is too strong a focus on individual motivation, which induces a form of lack of realism.

Gustav Strandberg's essay, "From a 'Life in the Idea' to a 'Life in Truth': Patočka and Havel on Truth and Politics", traces Patočka's influence on Havel's

thinking. Strandberg reveals a "conceptual genealogy" of some of Havel's most central thoughts. In particular, Havel's central notion of a "life in truth" is traced back to Patočka's reflections on a "life in the idea" and a "life in problematicity". Strandberg points out how questions of morality and thus of authenticity, which in Havel's view precedes the political, is pre-political. And this clearly marks out one way to understand Charter's ambition to be non-political. The "dissident" is thus not characterised as someone who is against this or that ideology, but is rather to be seen as someone who is against all tendencies to subsume existential questions to politics. Questions of truth are thus intimately tied to questions of moral authenticity.

It is also possible to trace these lines of thinking back to Patočka's earlier writings, but, as Strandberg points out, Patočka's later writings contain a severe critique of essentialist efforts to define human subjectivity, and Patočka also comes to emphasise the importance of uncertainty and negativity. Thus, there is a question about how well Patočka's later views resonate with those of Havel. Strandberg points out that Patočka's developed thinking suggests that there may be something naive about Havel's notion of truth, since it relies on a problematic idea of the authentic self (in contrast to Patočka's view in which a "life in the idea" implies a life without certainty and truth).

Havel's notion of truth is further examined by Ondřej Krása, who, in "Two Concepts of a Lie: Václav Havel on Living in a Communist Regime", argues that there are two distinct concepts of "lie" in play in Havel's discussions about what it means to live in a lie. One is the familiar notion of intentionally misleading or deliberate pretence. The other is a form of seduction by consumerist values. Krása shows how the idea of a life "within truth" is not merely a philosophical idea, in the sense of being developed by philosophers, but also has roots in underground musical movements, where The Plastic People of the Universe played a crucial role. In particular, Havel's meeting with Ivan Martin Jirous, who, among other things, served as the artistic director for The Plastic People, had also involved discussion of the underground movement as an effort to seek a life within truth. And, much like Havel, Jirous also thought that the problems they faced were not restricted to their own post-totalitarian situation but were rooted in contemporary technological-industrial society at large. This is central to their thought that the consumerist society of the West was not really a viable alternative to communism, and, as Krása argues, this sense of a life in a lie also helps us understand why the "revolution" needed to be existential rather than political.

In "Among the Onions and Carrots" by Niklas Forsberg we see an effort to elucidate the kind of seeping nature of power that is characteristic of Havel's analysis of the post-totalitarian state (and consumerist society), in which

power is not tied to individuals or individual actions but is rather to be seen as structural and cultural. Central to the argument here is how small, seemingly harmless deeds partake in upholding the structures of power. This is also why Havel's greengrocer is so central to the text. What is important to take note of is that there is a form of harmlessness that characterises the greengrocer's putting up the sign. That workers of the world should unite is, in its literal sense, not necessarily an endorsement of the oppressive regime. So the relevant moral failure of the greengrocer is not that he utters a lie, or pretends to endorse a doctrine he honestly doesn't believe in. The moral failure, to the extent that we can call it that, is thus a form of blind trust in semantics. Coming to clarity about the kind of lie that is involved here includes taking responsibility for one's language in a much richer and broader sense than its "semantic" level. The attainment of a sense beyond semantics, and of wide connotative connections, is thus central to the effort required for a life within truth. Havel can thereby be said to have described features of power structures that reach far beyond "willfully performed acts", and he has uncovered registers of our lives in language that are moral in a sense far more profound than the idea of a lie as the utterance of a false sentence, and of truth as the utterance of a true sentence. These two findings are central to, but not by any means restricted to, the post-totalitarian situation.

From the above, it is quite evident that the kinds of explorations of our political landscape that Havel encourages are not limited to the post-totalitarian political regime of post-war Czechoslovakia. Antony Fredriksson furthers this project, of making attention to the powerless of great importance for contemporary philosophical discourse on politics, by reflecting on the roots of totalitarian forms of thinking per se. Fredriksson's paper, "Václav Havel, Simone Weil and Our Desire for Totalitarianism", demonstrates how both Havel and Weil point to ideology's tendency to cancel out subjectivity as one of the most central features of totalitarian power structures. One of the things that Fredriksson picks up on in Havel is his idea that the power structures that characterise post-totalitarian regimes are not local phenomena, tied only to communist societies, but belong to capitalist forms of governance in the "liberal West" too. Attaining a sense of self and establishing an authentic life are difficulties that recur in all forms of society where there are tensions between the official ideology and a parallel polis. At this point, the parallel with Weil's thinking comes to the fore, for she offers us similar analyses of how the logic of alienation is tied to false images of belonging and rootedness. For both Havel and Weil, the route out of alienation is existential rather than ideological. This also helps us to see how authoritarianism feeds on crises – when the need for external rules and orders be-

comes most tempting – and it also helps to unearth part of the "appeal" of authoritarian power structures: the promise of a kind of freedom, a freedom from disorder. That Charter 77 was adamant in stressing that the route forward in politics was, in a sense, not political but apolitical is, Fredriksson shows, precisely tied to the recognition that ideological paths to freedom harbour misunderstandings of what real freedom is. A more genuine "sense of rootedness, community and belonging", Fredriksson argues, is "achieved through acknowledging this moral propensity that is not set by any given rules applied by jurisdiction and force".

Ulrika Björk's paper, "The Dissident and the Spectre: Reading Havel with Derrida", asks the question why the notion of the "dissident" is introduced as a spectre, with an obvious reference to Marx's manifesto. A central aspect of her answer to that question is that Havel's efforts to open up for a different order are centrally characterised by the *lack* of ideology, and hence the lack of a clear idea to be realised. This means that the notion of democracy and the idea of an open society are ideas that always, in a peculiar sense, move ahead of us. The "dissident" is not someone who demands a specific *x*, and feels content when that is achieved. For these reasons, Jacques Derrida's reflections on a democracy (that is always) "to come" help articulate Havel's non-ideological political work. Björk argues that there is an affinity between the dissident in Havel's essay and the spectre in Derrida's readings of Marx. Both evoke Walter Benjamin's historiography, and both are manifestations of a specific modern temporality that Derrida calls "disjointed", because it is haunted by a revolutionary force and claim for justice. Charter 77, rightly understood, is essentially "nonpolitical" in that it anticipates the renewal of moral experiences of responsibility and solidarity. What makes the dissident "haunting" then is his or her lack of ideology, a lack that may prove to be one of the most effective and necessary means to make room for a democracy to come.[4]

Niklas Forsberg and Ulrika Björk

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Orcid Niklas Forsberg: 0000-0001-9129-5534
Orcid Ulrika Björk: 0000-0002-7469-9382

What Form of Existentialism is there in Havel's Concept of Dissent?

Hejdánek's Critique of Havel

Tomáš Hejduk
Faculty of Arts and Philosophy, University of Pardubice
Tomas.Hejduk@upce.cz

Abstract:
The Czech dissident movement included thinkers who searched for a morally pure, parallel polis, and who felt comfortable within its isolation. The philosophers of Charter 77 (Jan Patočka and Ladislav Hejdánek especially), by contrast, rejected the idea of being morally superior to their opponents. It is interesting to consider where Václav Havel stands at this crossroads. Havel very much cooperated with the above-mentioned philosophers and was inspired by them in his own writing and agency. On the other hand, Havel undoubtedly performed a certain moral-existential concept of dissent. In this paper I examine Havel's existential concept. In particular, after distinguishing between two existential approaches in Havel's writings, I analyse two fundamental philosophical critiques of Havel in the work of Ladislav Hejdánek. According to Hejdánek, Havel 1) identifies intellectuals with non-politicians, i.e. he is governed by the incorrect dualism of the political versus the non-political, and 2) is self-focused and moralising, i.e. he keeps too much within his own self (subjectivity) and "a given" (existent, objective) world. Given this critique, I will systematise Hejdánek's objections and suggested solutions. In the first case, I see the solution in a more detailed distinction: we should distinguish between politics and non-politics (intellectuals) but also non-political politics. In the second case, we should look for the essence (focal point) of man not in his morality but outside it: man should orient himself "out of his self".

Keywords: Havel, Hejdánek, nonpolitical politics, dissent

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The Czech dissident movement included thinkers who reduced politics to morality, who searched for a morally pure, parallel polis, and who felt comfortable within its isolation.[1] The philosophers of Charter 77 (Jan Patočka

1 This tendency encompassed the occasional justification of oppositional activity by means of personal satisfaction in connection with feelings of singularity and of catalysing or actually

and Ladislav Hejdánek especially),[2] by contrast, emphasised that, as dissidents, "least of all do they wish to be any moral authority or social conscience. They condemn no one and judge no one."[3] The idea of being morally superior to their opponents was explicitly rejected by these philosophers. It is interesting to consider where Václav Havel stands at this crossroads. Havel very much respected the above-mentioned philosophers, cooperated with them and was inspired by them in his own writing and agency. On the other hand, Havel undoubtedly performed a certain moral-existential concept of dissent. In this paper I examine Havel's existential concept, especially with regard to the philosophers' critique of Havel's approach.

In particular, after distinguishing between two existential approaches in Havel's writings, I analyse two fundamental philosophical critiques of Havel in the work of Ladislav Hejdánek.[4] According to Hejdánek, Havel 1) identifies intellectuals with non-politicians, i.e. he is governed by the incorrect dualism of the political versus the non-political, and 2) is self-focused and moralising, i.e. he keeps too much within his own self (subjectivity) and "a given" (existent, objective) world. Given this critique, I will systematise Hejdánek's objections and suggested solutions. In the first case, I see the solution in a more detailed distinction: we should distinguish between politics and non-politics (intellectuals) but also non-political politics. In the second case, we should look for the essence (focal point) of man not in his morality but outside it: man should orient himself "out of his self".[5] In other words, with regard to

initiating historical events. Compare Pithart, in Otáhal, M., *Opoziční proudy v české společnosti 1969–1989*. Praha, ÚSD 2011, pp. 198–199; Skilling, G. H., *Charter 77 and Human Rights in Czechoslovakia*. London, George Allen – Unwin 1981, p. 52: "marry ghetto". Havel acknowledges a certain introversion: in his own words, he wrote his famous letter to Gustáv Husák self-indulgently: "I actually wrote it primarily for myself… I felt greatly relieved and rejuvenated by writing it." In Vaněk, M. – Urbášek, P. (eds.), *Vítězové, poražení? Životopisná interview*. Praha, ÚSD 2005, p. 135. Nevertheless, generally Havel refuses to organise and understand "the parallel structures… as a retreat into a ghetto and as an act of isolation" – see in detail Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", trans. P. Wilson, *East European Politics and Societies*, 32, 2018, No. 2, p. 396.

2 Charter 77 was an informal civic initiative in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, based on the Declaration of Charter 77, published on 6 January 1977 and bearing the names of the first 242 signatories. See "Charter 77", Wikipedia.

3 Patočka, J., "The Obligation to Resist Injustice", in *Jan Patočka: Philosophy and Selected Writings*, ed. E. Kohák. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press 1989, p. 342.

4 Ladislav Hejdánek (1927–2020) was a philosopher (a student of and later a friend of Jan Patočka's) and one of the founders of Charter 77. After Patočka's death, Hejdánek took over Patočka's position as one of Charter 77's three spokesmen. For Hejdánek's role in Charter 77, see Bolton, J., *Worlds of Dissent: Charter 77, The Plastic People of the Universe, and Czech Culture under Communism*. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press 2015, pp. 186–191. There is a short biography in English at the website "Memory of Nations": https://www.pametnaroda.cz/cs/hejdanek-ladislav-1927.

5 Hejdánek, L., "Filosofie a společnost", *Filosofický časopis*, 38, 1990, No. 1–2, p. 62: "[T]he centre of gravity of human being is not in his morals, but is outside of him himself." Hejdánek, L.,

Hejdánek's writings, I will scrutinise whether there are two things missing from Havel's concept of the power of the powerless: 1) realism, i.e. help for these who need it most acutely (impoverished beings); and 2) objectivity, i.e. regard for the results and solutions of particular problems or situations rather than for the motivations and interests of individuals.

Moderate and radical existentialism

In my opinion, there is a reasonable approach – connected with the rejection of being a moral authority – in saying that politics should not play an existential role, because political existentialism "transforms problems of political decision-making and constitutionality to questions of cultural existence and national destiny. As if (…) the target of building a constitutional state was national self-determination and the finding of some authentic existence and not the formation of representative government limited by civil rights and liberties."[6] We need to reject any "ideology of political existentialism which promises to resolve the absurdity of individual life by the absoluteness of collective will".[7] The approach of the Chartist philosophers agrees with this rejection: "Thus the real question concerning the individual is not at issue between liberalism and socialism, between democracy and totalitarianism, which for all their profound differences equally overlook all that is neither objective nor a role. For the same reason, a resolution of their conflicts cannot resolve the problem of setting humans in their place, resolving their wandering alienated from themselves and from the place that belongs to them."[8]

Here, in my opinion, is the basic contrast with Václav Havel, who inclines to such a political existentialism. He does not hesitate to assert that "[L]iving within the truth in the post-totalitarian system becomes the chief breeding ground for independent, alternative political ideas …"[9] These ideas and the change of political situation stemming from them imply "the fundamental reconstitution of the position of people in the world, their relationships to

"K rozhovorům o J. L. Hromádkovi", in *Setkání a odstup*. Praha, Oikoymenh 2010 (originally 1959), p. 214; Hejdánek, L., "Havel – filosof? Rozhovor Michala Urbana s Ladislavem Hejdánkem (24. září 2008, Písek)", in *Havel je uhlík*. Praha, Sešity Knihovny Václava Havla 2009, p. 103.

6 Přibáň, J., *Obrana ústavnosti aneb Česká otázka v postnacionální Evropě*. Praha, Slon 2014, pp. 14–15.

7 Přibáň, J., "Resisting Fear", in Tava, F. – Meacham, D. (eds.), *Thinking After Europe: Jan Patočka and Politics*. Lanham, Rowman – Littlefield Publishers 2016, p. 41.

8 Patočka, J., *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, trans. E. Kohák. Chicago, Open Court 1996, p. 115.

9 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", p. 372.

themselves and to each other, and to the universe".[10] Besides, it is not only in "The Power of the Powerless" that Havel openly says he is solving "a problem of life itself", not a problem of "political line or program".[11] Politics is a secondary issue: "[L]iving within the truth is … the only meaningful basis of any independent act of political import,"[12] and only "profound existential and moral changes in society" will give rise to better politics.[13] These changes grow out of "the everyday human world" and return to it. Politics is based on everydayness, on "the world of daily tension between the aims of life and the aims of the system".[14] It is possible to say, then, that "… for Havel everydayness was an arena of existential purity, in which people might reveal their genuine needs and desires and once more start to build political life afresh". Dissident life is here "a reaction to the crisis of identity, moral challenge to truth, that cures broken or spoiled identity".[15]

According to the philosophers quoted above, on the contrary, even democrats or liberals in their true form do not need to live within the truth; it is enough when they systematically care about society, when they participate in constitutional government and when they are actively interested in realising ideas about the rightful administration of the life of the city, the nation, Europe or the whole world, and in the execution of these ideas. Living within the truth, in addition to the struggle between the aims of life and the aims of the system, is a moral and existential issue, not a political one. There is no *direct* connection between the truth as it is understood by philosophical concepts of living within the truth (e.g. in Patočka or Heidegger) and politics, which nevertheless does not mean that politics is not interested in the truth at all.

But Havel was not unambiguous and one-sided. On the other hand, I agree with the scholars who say that he – also in "The Power of the Powerless" – justifiably "called for the retrieval of politics as such"[16] and rejected the idea of politics "turning into an existential matter of decision-making related to bare living".[17] Nevertheless, the fact that his activities as a dissident already concerned, at least originally and purposely, the realisation of non-political

10 Ibid., p. 377.
11 Ibid., p. 387.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid., p. 377.
14 Ibid., p. 382.
15 Bolton, J., *Worlds of Dissent*, p. 343.
16 Hlaváček, P., "Moc? Bezmocných? Na okraj jedné havlovské politické meditace", in Suk, J. – Andělová, K. (eds.), *Jednoho dne se v našem zelináři cosi vzbouří: Eseje o Moci bezmocných*. Praha, USD 2016, p. 76.
17 Přibáň, J., "Resisting Fear", p. 41.

politics[18] bears evidence to the fact that the "true politics" he called for, and for which he wanted to make room through his non-politically political activism, has some existential extension (in its association with non-political politics, which is defined by care for the free and critical education, culture and spiritual life of individuals, the nation or humankind).

Why and what political existentialism in the case of Havel, then? From Havel's approach it is better to select "moderate existentialism", which may be grasped as a general motive of at least most of the Chartists and led them to the beginning and continuation of their common civic initiative: "It was a fundamental human need to live in accordance with one's own self. The need not to live within a lie and openly oppose the situation of normalisation, in which all Czechoslovaks were by all sorts of methods forced to pretend an agreement with what they did not agree with."[19] So no radical existential purity, then, but rather the most basic correspondence between act and thought: do not pretend on the most basic level of life. Such an approach does not in any case require a deep effort at authenticity or living within the truth; it does not need any deep self-examination or enforcement in personal and public life. The famous examples of the greengrocer and the brewer can be read as stories of ordinary people who in the first case (greengrocer) do not act in accord with themselves but in the second case (brewer) do. And moderate existentialism does not only insist on unconditional public sharing of what one thinks (greengrocer) nor on a courageous stand against all (brewer). Simply, it takes into consideration the situation, the different significance of different truths, etc. In this moderate sense, Havel himself points out how impersonal and unimportant is the greengrocer's posting of the slogan in the window.[20] From time to time such a compromise is unavoidable: it is important to live in harmony with himself, though not to an absolute extent only, but "to a certain extent at least".[21]

I do not wish to decide here which form of existentialism Havel maintained more strongly; in short, I believe that he oscillated between both forms, and

18 Havel continues in Masaryk's non-political politics as "a means of a long-term internalization of persuasion about democracy, humanity and responsible being as epoch-making entities". Havel in essence wants the moral reconstruction of society as a creation of the groundwork of politics. It means first of all critically handling the consumption character of society. For more detail, see Havelka, M., "'Apolitics', 'Anti-politics', 'Non-political Politics' and 'Sub-politics' as Threats and Challenges". *Social Studies*, 13, 2016, No. 1, pp. 9–22; Hejduk, T., "Charter 77 Still Alive: The Concept of Nonpolitical Politics in the Work of Ladislav Hejdánek". *Comenius (Journal of Euro-American Civilization)*, 4, 2017, No. 1, pp. 67–85; Dalberg, D., *Die nichtpolitische Politik: Eine Tschechische Strategie und Politikvorstellung*. Stuttgart, Ibidem-Verlag 2013.

19 Palouš, M., "Čtyři poznámky ohledně 'zdrojů' Charty 77", in Freimanová, A. (ed.), *Charta vlastníma očima (40. výročí vzniku Charty 77)*. Praha, Knihovna Václava Havla 2018, p. 22.

20 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", pp. 364–365.

21 Ibid., p. 376.

that the moderate one is the more reasonable and realistic. This means abandoning the very demanding idea of "living within the truth" as a political starting point,[22] and the abomination of any system,[23] which is, let us say, a moralistic, judgemental approach (those who do not fulfil this living within the truth are living within a lie) and a one-sided view of the post-modern "consumer" society. Thus, in the radical form of existentialism, the greengrocer, instead of being a reasonable man of compromise who places the slogan "Workers of the world, unite!" in the window of his fruit-and-vegetable shop and then manages the shop and its customers fairly, will never place a slogan in his window that he does not agree with; if he did so, his would be a "'bare life' chained by fear" that would never find and create a meaningful life. In this radical existentialism, Havel (and partly Patočka) identifies the meaningful life only with "'life at the summit', which clearly sees the temporality and finiteness of human existence and is therefore capable of understanding what is at stake in the routines of daily life and transcending them by the resisting spiritual turn – the solidarity of the shaken".[24] Such a "Titan's life" rests on a high-toned refusal of given truth and a eulogy (celebration) of searched truth.[25] Patočka (though similar to Havel only at certain points and in certain texts) calls for the "shaken certainty of given sense", which means refusing any given aims, truths, lives, etc. Thus, he risks "pulling not only against inertia and self-oblivion but also against a certain essential self-understanding of human life as something that is here to be accepted, and in this acceptance to be moved towards and in this moving to be fulfilled – and what in this sense must understand itself teleologically to manage even to be".[26]

If we would then attach ourselves to this radical version of existentialism (in politics), Havel's ambitions would become unrealistic: to sum up, if he wanted to evoke "a genuine, profound and lasting change for the better", and if he wanted to derive it "from human existence, from the fundamental reconstitution of the position of people in the world, their relationships to themselves and to each other, and to the universe",[27] only then, because of these excessive premises, might "living within the truth" become the plat-

22 Ibid., pp. 385, 387.

23 Ibid., e.g. section XIII. See, for example, Havel's emphasis on the "tension between the aims of life and the aims of the system" and his one-sided sympathy for the aims of life.

24 Přibáň, J., "Resisting Fear", pp. 44.

25 On the lack of humility, see Patočka's own description of the philosopher's life from the insight and as a will to insight, in which nevertheless "philosophy does not lose its problematic character and keeps its audacity. Against the insight as a life's directive it is possible to come forward with a reproach of elitism, formality and the menace of scepticism." Patočka, J., *Evropa a doba poevropská*. Praha, LN 1992, p. 32.

26 Karfík, F., "Proč je Patočkova filosofie dějin kacířská?" *Reflexe*, No. 12, 1994, pp. 3–7.

27 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", p. 377.

form of the fight against the government and regime, and the basic programme of this fight might be *the shaking of all certainties and looking for the meaning of life*. In this radical existential approach, or existential revolution, the campaign against the regime would become part of the campaign against consumerism, technocracy, systems and everyday life[28] without any ambition for transcendent meaning or any ambition to relate to its own being in a way that it is concerned with being itself (a totalitarian regime being characterised by the obtrusion of life not concerned with its meaning).

The immoderateness, incorrectness and unreality of this existential approach can be demonstrated not only by reference to a generally mistaken reduction of politics to the moral; it also brings quite concrete difficulties. For example, one of the fundamental objections to the playwright's stance is that it is in no way good to shatter the illusions of people impoverished by a "modern" loss of sense or faith in possible meaning. Any such intervention in the life of people must be responsible, must bear in mind *correction (reformation)*, which is not present in a mere shattering of illusions, which people in any case do not take very seriously. Unless the author at least indicates an acceptable and realistic point of departure for people to extricate themselves from a crisis or absurd situation in a dignified manner, the likely response of those confronted with a sophisticated question, as posited by scholars, will be resignation or cynicism.[29]

In contrast to Havel's sometimes very general and very demanding "living within the truth",[30] other non-politically political politicians (dissidents), and

28 In the case of everydayness, I see a double account in Havel's texts: first, ordinary daily human life is a degenerated life of consumption; second, ordinary human life represents the intentions of life that need to be enforced against the false intentions of the system (see e.g. Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", p. 382). My basic doubt is related to the statement that "the independent life of society develops out of living within the truth" (p. 386), that for example young musicians "wanted no more than to be able to live within the truth" (p. 372). On the contrary, the independent life of society is, in my opinion, the basis for living within the truth. The independent life of society, or daily human life, is formed by all sorts of interests, programmes and desires, and some of them might be focused on truth (but not all of them and not necesarily as the main concern, i.e. this independence is not any guarantee of truth). A struggle between life and the system itself is also very doubtful: "Life is not outside economic, political, legal, or technological structures. It is manifested in them! Every contestation of legitimacy, therefore, is a contestation of self-description of these structures and not some pre-political ultimate power of human reason to fundamentally shake 'manipulative' structures of the system." … "The self-constitution of different social systems, described as autopoiesis in contemporary social theory, does not preserve social totality but affirms and further enhances differentiation of modern society." Přibáň, J., "Resisting Fear", p. 42.

29 Hejdánek, L., "Variace a reflexe na témata vězeňských dopisů Václava Havla". *Listy*, 20, 1990 (originally 1983), No. 6, pp. 6–19 (10–11).

30 Living within the truth sometimes seems to be just living a spontaneous life (suggested by Havel's advocating of the intentions of life against the intentions of the system), whereas in

even Havel himself, know and specify from the beginning what particularly they want to achieve: they want, in distinction to power politics, to gain "only" conveniences such as a functional civil society, the rule of law, the protection of human rights and, with these, a true connected politics consistent with the relation of free fellow citizens. Existential "shaking" is neither the motivation nor the aim. There is a requirement for the individual will of citizens, but this requirement is limited – first of all by a common search for things generally beneficial.

Non-politically political intellectual

One argument that Havel, in his radical existentialism, wrongly identified or associated with the existential and political fields was the immoderate charge he levelled at Czech intellectuals for the irresponsibility of their political passivity and efforts at independence.[31] Ladislav Hejdánek responded to Havel's charge with the distinction between non-political politics and politics and argued that Havel the playwright was for a "deeper and crucial measure of national and social being" more important than Havel the politician.[32] Havel, "under the pretence of false social responsibility, neglects his most serious task, namely, to be a playwright".[33] To be a playwright also implies non-political politics: "Theatre in a political atmosphere is something very important, it is a highly political matter; but theatre is not a political institution in a sense that it participates in power, for example … that it has its representatives in state agency, etc. … [a] position of power creates a barrier for seeing reality in its true dimensions and in the light of truth."[34]

Havel, in moving from the theatre to politics, prefers politics in a narrower sense to politics in a broad sense; he decides for an institutional, technically powerful position at the expense of the crucial, non-conformist, sovereign struggle for a better society and world. Hejdánek, against Havel's decision, quotes Masaryk's urge that political and state life is only a slighter

fact it needs a complete, systematic change of life, because life in its spontaneity is governed by consumption style.

31 Václav Havel's speech, as President of the Czechoslovak Republic, to the US Congress, 21 February 1990.

32 Hejdánek, L., "Dramatik, nebo politik?"; Hejdánek, L., *Havel je uhlík*, pp. 88–96 (95–96): "[F]or this deeper and crucial feature of national and social existence are cultural composers much more important than politicians, … dramatists are more important than presidents"; Hejdánek, L., "Intelektuál a politika", in *Havel je uhlík*, pp. 85–87.

33 Hejdánek, L., *Úvod do filosofování*. Praha, Oikoymenh 2012, pp. 88–89.

34 Ibid., p. 89. The relation between philosophy and politics is parallel: "Philosophy serves society and politics by being proper philosophy; among its tasks are not to govern or to serve governors by anything else than truth" (Ibid.).

part of spiritual life.[35] Spiritual life, which consists in the *deepening of sensibility* (through, for example, the theatre) and *critical, rational reflection* on the "sensed", and in the end also a comprehensible familiarisation of other people with achieved results, is the only thing that might reasonably, and on a long-term basis, transform knowledge and the face of affairs in society (which is also Havel's aim in "The Power of the Powerless"). Only in this way does the intellectual participate in social and political life, which he thus co-constitutes and co-founds: "[E]very thought, moral and spiritual work is also a political work in a broad sense" (hence so-called non-political politics). Any other participation in politics in a narrower sense – technical or professional politics (for example, acceptance of political office) – than through this transformation of consciousness is necessarily a dereliction of this deeper intellectual mission.[36]

This interpretation stands on a refusal of the groovy preconception of the importance of professional politics (for example, understanding the post of president as a "top base"), which in reality should not play a greater role in our lives than do, say, the traffic police, who penalise traffic offences, manage the flow of traffic, etc. but do not interfere with where and when people go. Whereas intellectuals, dramatists or philosophers orient the direction of individual lives and the course of events in society, politicians should only care about the availability of resources and the background functioning that allows people the free and just realisation of all sorts of plans. Havel unfortunately succumbed to the prejudice regarding the importance of power (professional) politics and forgot that his urgent task fell within the competency of non-political politics, which is the only thing that can provide what he expects from professional politics.[37]

Nevertheless, Hejdánek contradicts himself by this critique. When he (together with Havel) differentiates between true and false politicians, then the presupposition of this distinction opposes the simile of the politician as

35 "I treat politics as very important, but not as a main and chief for the nation: we have to care mainly and chiefly about inner politics, about the moral and cultural progress of the society. Our politics only on this broader ground of cultural programme may be succesful." Quotation from Masaryk in L. Hejdánek, *Dopisy příteli IV*, letter no. 3 (60), 1980, Archiv Ladislava Hejdánka (ALH).

36 Hejdánek, L., *Intelektuál a politika*, p. 86. In this spirit, another Czech philosopher Emanuel Rádl (1873–1942) complained that Masaryk, on whom Realists (originally established in the Czech Realist Party) relied after the war, could not fight for new ways of thinking, etc., because he became a professional politician and accepted political office: "[H]e has today his special tasks.": Rádl, E., "Náš úkol". *Realistická stráž*, 1, 1920, No. 1, p. 2.

37 Hejdánek, L., "Dramatik, nebo politik?", pp. 95–96; Hejdánek, L., *Dopisy příteli III*, letter no. 3 (43), 1980, ALH.

a traffic administrator or watchman: the true politician is, according to both thinkers, something more; he or she is a kind of mediator between spiritual people (artistic, scientific and creative) and ordinary folk, and attempts (politically and technically) to implement the best in the state, to implement what scientists, philosophers and other spiritual people reveal or devise. In this sense, a true politician is also a non-political politician and forms an association (albeit one filled with tension) with spiritual people. Instead of doing other things, it is important that the politician also attempts, at least potentially, to preserve the possibility of a direct relation to the truth (philosophers, artists …), as well as the chance to make use of this relation on the state level he controls. In this sense, the engaged intellectual and the true politician overlap and form a fragile unity.[38]

If the politician might also be an inventive individual partaking in "the art of the realisation of the improbable" (whereas the pseudo-politician reduces politics to the art of the probable),[39] then Hejdánek's critique of Havel's entry into professional politics is understandable only if Havel is seen as being in the ranks of pseudo-politicians, which is simply nonsense. The only possible critique of Havel must be based on the fact that spiritual activity (art, science, philosophy, etc.) is deeper than any political activity, which is less demanding of a given person and her qualities. However, a politician may and should participate in this higher activity, more or less, and Havel starts from this premise, though in his radical existentialism he exaggerated this stance. Because of this exaggeration he could disregard the difference (stressed by Hejdánek) between the operations of artists, spiritual individuals, scientists and politicians. Otherwise, in *The Power of the Powerless* he not only upholds the thesis that existentialism (the individual either supports the deceitful regime and destroys her substantive intentions or resists the system and lives according to these intentions) culminates in non-political politics, not politics, as described above. This is in spite of the fact that even during his presidency, Havel was able to preserve certain existentialist features.[40]

38 Not only in Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", does Havel also urge that the consequences of an existential revolution can and must be felt in politics, in the political reconstruction of society (see, for example, p. 403).

39 See Hejdánek, L., "Reflexe v politice a otázka politického subjektu, O místo filosofie v politickém životě". *Filosofický časopis*, 38, 1990 (originally 1976), No. 6, pp. 746–761, where the philosopher writes about politics as "the art of the realisation of the improbable". Havel also later wrote on politics as the art of the unpossible: Havel, V., "Projev k občanům z 1. ledna 1990", in V. Havel (Zelenka, J., ed.), *Spisy, sv. 6. Projevy z let 1990–1992*. Praha, Torst 1999, p. 15.

40 Znoj, M., "Havlova antipolitika na různý způsob". *Soudobé dějiny*, 21, 2014, No. 3, pp. 410–421 (419–421).

Subjectivism and judgementalism vs. realism, impoverishment and non-existent truth

The most fundamental critique of Havel's radically existential approach is the charge that he is self-centred and moralising, i.e. that he keeps too much within his own subjectivity and the "given" (existent, objectified) world (moralising is a problem not because it represents a different area from the political but because it is a sign of limitation). Hejdánek's suggested solution: because man's centre of gravity is not in himself (nor in his existent morality) but rather is outside, he should primarily direct himself "out of his self".

Here we must briefly pay attention to the collision between care for the self and solidarity with the impoverished and oppressed. Whereas political moralists (and at times Havel too) see the essence of contemporary problems in the moral crisis of the individual, and speak of the necessity to proceed from living within a lie to living authentically within the truth, political realists (e.g. Hejdánek) speak primarily of the struggle against human poverty, or the battle on behalf of the weak and oppressed. We should not be concerned with the choice of living within the truth, i.e. with the development of the autonomous and, in this sense, free contemplation, decision and conduct of the individual, but rather with action in support of the oppressed, who, when viewed from the position of the autonomous individual, are not free. This is actually a polemic with a liberal tradition. If Havel, as such a liberal, pushes forward the ideal of freedom building upon the intentions of life and living in harmony with oneself, with one's feelings, opinions and plans,[41] then the (Czech) tradition of realistic thinking,[42] on the contrary, builds upon what these intentions damage and force to collapse. In the first case (liberalism),

41 For example, "The essential aims of life are present naturally in every person", Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", p. 366.

42 "Czech realism", which Hejdánek found inspiring, consists of two streams. The first is *Christian*: God's struggle for man takes place in the here and now, and the Christian fights against the misery of this world, i.e. particular people are "reality" because of which the Saviour descended to the space-time world, to the body. At the same time, this is not individualistic subjectivism; man is not the measure of truth, but rather truth (the Gospel) is a measure of man. The second stream is political tradition: a good politician is more than the instrument of a party; he/she should put forward the political idea of the Czech nation and its new direction, and on this basis he/she should change thought and practice. Realists measure themselves by new events and in light of their truth, but at the same time they regard man as a builder, not simply as a bystander in the world. According to the realists, we have to look for truth (critically, intellectually) and warrant for public actions by our whole conscience and knowledge. The realists, headed by T. G. Masaryk, founded their own political party; Masaryk and E. Rádl are the most famous among them. Compare also the distinction between political moralism and realism in Williams, B., "Realism and Moralism in Political Theory", in *In the Beginning was the Deed: Realism and Moralism in Political Argument*. Princeton, Princeton University Press 2005, pp. 1–17.

each of us follows his or her own interests, and each of us values above all freedom from what leads us away from those interests (an injured man in the street, a helpless child or the system of the post-totalitarian regime), "the elementary need of human beings to live … in harmony with themselves."[43] In the second case, we care about freedom from what leads us away from crucial matters *hic et nunc*. For example, the sight of an injured man in the street who needs help frees us from our plan that we were just about to realise:[44] here, challenges that are external to us govern the need to live in harmony.

Even if, at first sight, a just moral obligation seems to be an example of what carries us away from our intentions, of what prevents us from living purely according to ourselves, in reality this is not completely true. Simple identification with moral or ethical norms (laws, rules) is moralism (judgementalism), and the more responsible and demanding path is to ally oneself with (biblical) realism: "The puritanical absolutism of the requirement not to lie has little in common with the realism of the Old Testament prophets; the more abundant justice in the Sermon on the Mount relates to quite different matters than some kind of scrupulous weighing of truth and untruth. The law of Moses forbids the bearing of false witness against one's neighbour."[45] Hejdánek also attributes such moralising to Havel: "[L]iving within the truth … in Havel's case has an even bourgeois-moralistic hue. For him, living within the truth was to speak the truth, which he demonstrated by not travelling on the tram without a ticket. He rendered it dreadfully superficial."[46] If truth is to mean something, such as moral conscientiousness or the conclusions of the examination of one's inner experiences, then we can occupy a relatively indifferent standpoint in relation to it, and truth for us has no fundamental significance. However well the individual may have penetrated her own inner being and described her feelings, knowledge and intentions, and realised these intentions, this may not always be to the good, and may in itself be harmful. No matter how conscientiously a man has considered, let us say,

43 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", p. 376.

44 Hejdánek, L., "Jaká láska?", in Stránský, R. (ed.), *Sborník k sedmdesátinám Milana Balabána*. Praha, Onyx 1999, pp. 45–55.

45 Hejdánek, on the interviews about J. L. Hromádka, in Hejdánek, L., *Setkání a odstup*, p. 214; Hejdánek rejects morality as the essence of man or as a fundamental framework that must be taken into consideration upon deciding and acting in several places: for example, see Hejdánek, L., "Filosofie a společnost", p. 62: "[T]the focal point of man is not in his moral being but is outside of his self…" Man as a "given" (objective) being is not identical with the self, that in his endeavour to attain an identity (and authenticity) he cannot merely rely upon himself. Today we should in any case know that "man must seek himself beyond himself, i.e. outside the framework of that which he (already) is".

46 Hejdánek, L., "Havel – filosof? Rozhovor Michala Urbana s Ladislavem Hejdánkem (24. září 2008, Písek)" (Havel – philosopher? Interview with Ladislav Hejdánek by Michal Urban /24 September 2008, Písek/), in *Havel je uhlík*, p. 103.

the logical coherence of his thought, or the time he has devoted to an examination of the objectivity of his assertions, what is always more important is where and how he expresses himself and acts: "Truth or untruth, expressed in support of the centre of power, necessarily becomes ideology; in ideology truth and untruth become the same, because they are subordinated to a final goal, which is a limited interest (in our case the interest of the regime)."[47] At the end of the day, it is crucial whether we act on behalf of the weak and oppressed or on behalf of the powerful. Only in this sense of really sticking up for the oppressed and poor is this important matter also truth.

Thus, Hejdánek warns against the "prevalence of judgmentalism … over the approach of the moral person, who orientates on the situation, sensitively considers her stance and makes her decision ever again and again".[48] Instead of a refusal of moralising (characterised by insensitive generalisation that disregards the situation), Hejdánek refers to the difference between moral subjectivism that focuses on purity of moral motivation and moral objectivism that cares about morally justifiable results. He prefers objectivism, being already convinced of the fact that the "Jewish and Christian main tradition is largely objectivistic and situational; though an exaggerated insistence on motivation and the so-called clean decision was not rare, but it represented a dangerous spiritualistic deformation".[49] A good example is forgiveness: forgiveness makes sense only if it "objectively" stops cumulative and assertive evil; it becomes an illusion when we want to reduce it to our relationship to other people, *id est* to our own, private matter.

In other words, a regard for the truth that consists in the reality to come (the non-given, forthcoming future) and in the reality of the situation of the oppressed (*id est* the truth that consists in some activity, responding to both mentioned realities) collides with Havel's regard for (or focus on) the self.[50] In *Letters to a Friend* Hejdánek stresses that the battle taken up by the Chartists should be neither about maintaining the *semblance* of their credibility nor about *actual* care of the self. Focus on the self or one's inner being, tides of emotions and similar endeavours are ultimately sterile. In his criticism of Havel's texts, Hejdánek, in this spirit, stresses – as an example – that the individual requires others in order to attain harmony, inner peace and his own self. Thus, it is not possible to think of the self otherwise than in the second instance, via others: "[T]rue harmony does not come to anyone who en-

47 Hejdánek, L., "K rozhovorům o J. L. Hromádkovi", pp. 207–229 (215).
48 Hejdánek, L., *Dopisy příteli II*, 1978, letter no. 2 (23), ALH.
49 Ibid.
50 Compare Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", p. 366: "The essential aims of life are present naturally in every person. Everyone longs for a little human dignity, for moral integrity, for free experience of being and a sense of transcendence over the world of existence."

deavours to attain it for himself …, but only to one who endeavours towards harmony for others, even at the price of disharmony, conflicts, tensions and anxieties for himself."[51] It must rather concern a serious sidelining of the self, as testified by an emphasis on the surrender of one's *freedom and life.* This connects chiefly to the very fact that it is not possible to comprehend the truth promoted by Hejdánek as contemplated (privately) by an individual or hidden within one's inner being and introspectively perceived, to see the emphasis on *solidarity with the servants of truth*, i.e. solidarity with those living here and now, again also as a reference to history and the situation in which we find ourselves and in which it is necessary to act: "[I]t is necessary really to do something, not only to adopt an attitude, which will be internally comfortable and morally clean."[52] The same is true in the case of freedom. It is indivisible; either everyone has it or nobody does: "There is no peace on Earth while there are oppressed people: we can't really be free if our neighbours suffer violence."[53]

Refusing an orientation towards the self (subject) stems from the fact that it is not possible to seek any more resistant meaning within the framework of objective thought but only in life understood in a broad sense, in "living through a deep integration with that which surrounds us".[54] It is primarily the future that fundamentally belongs to us, and only in accordance with this is it possible to seek or perceive a genuine sense of "our" life, whether within the framework of a time scale that represents our personal past and future, or within the framework of a social level that represents the nation, state and other human beings and societies, including their common history and future prospects, or within a cosmological framework that represents the Earth and the entire universe. According to Hejdánek, then, Havel and similar thinkers are the victims of objectified thought, and in non-objectified matters (e.g. God) cannot see anything other than illusions. As a result, for example, Havel specifically gains the conviction that "a man can find the answer to the question regarding the meaning of everything only in himself" and that God, the ultimate horizon, "has somehow strangely shifted into a certain deeper realm of his soul".[55] In other words, the relationship of responsibility cannot be reduced to the self and the person to whom I relate (as Hejdánek locates in Havel). In the case of regular responsibility, and thus also motivation, there are four essential poles: I, the responsible agent (e.g. a parent); instances to which I am responsible (e.g. God); the person

51 Hejdánek, L., *Variace a reflexe na témata vězeňských dopisů Václava Havla*, p. 8.
52 Hejdánek, L., *Dopisy příteli II*, letter no. 2 (23), ALH.
53 Hejdánek, L., *Dopisy příteli II*, letter no. 3 (24), ALH.
54 Hejdánek, L., *Variace a reflexe na témata vězeňských dopisů Václava Havla*, pp. 12–13.
55 Ibid., p. 17.

for whom I am responsible (e.g. children); that for which I am responsible (e.g.upbringing). Only in this fourfold reduction of the "self" does the individual go "beyond the self".[56] In real responsibility we abandon our subjectivity and answer to something whose basis is neither by us nor in us.[57]

In a same spirit of rejection of subjectivism, spiritualism and psychologism, Hejdánek, in a critical reading of Havel's letters from prison,[58] rejects the playwright's (poetical-literary) "intuitive" approach, residing in an engagement with a tide of emotions and internal contemplations, as sufficient to address the social situation or to gain recognition and meaning in life. Feelings and emotions are firstly to be mastered, and man has to stop being drawn into them, i.e. they mustn't be decisive in life and thinking.[59] Havel connects the tide of emotions (even romantically, impossibly or paradoxically) to a desire for *definitiveness*,[60] whereas Hejdánek, by contrast, in a reflexive, considered philosophical approach, stresses their *indefinite* nature: "We live in a time of great political and social transformations, and it mostly escapes us that the greatest earthquakes and shifts take place on the level of opinions, thought and methods of consideration … If the endeavour towards a final statement and pregnant formulation has no chance, it is necessary to apply other criteria, thus a high intensity of criticism … The best results are attained when it turns against itself."[61]

As well as rejecting feelings, Hejdánek also rejects thought itself, or he distinguishes between open and closed thought. Man is "born" only in the outrightness that Hejdánek explains as a reflection in which the human

56 Ibid.

57 Hejdánek, L., *Dopisy příteli II*, letter no. 2 (23), ALH.

58 Havel wrote these letters (1979–1982) right after writing "The Power of the Powerless" (1978).

59 Hejdánek, L., *Dopisy příteli III*, letter no. 2 (42), ALH.

60 In "The Power of the Powerless" there is a certain definitiveness in the extremism of the solution to the crisis described: the refusal of parliamentary democracy responds to the refusal of its continuous crisis (indefinitiveness). If people really start to live authentically, free of politics and similar "imperfect conquests", then there will be good times once and for all, though it is mere vision – utopia. In other words, confrontation with the area of the prepolitical – between life within the truth and life within the lie – post-totalitarian regime is the wrong solution on the political level, and for Havel this social clash (a clash, let us say, between spiritual people orientated to truth and people orientated to the life of consumption) also relates to the political level: he also wants once and for all to decide it, by which he unambiguously adds truth on the side of life's intentions. Nevertheless, the intentions of the system belong to life too, and we cannot clip them off by calling them "life within the lie". Conversely, we cannot say that the fundamental pillar of the post-totalitarian system is greengrocers who put up the poster, that "there are no terms whatsoever on which [their lives] can co-exist with living within the truth" (Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", p. 368). The fundamental pillars were militiamen and officials of the Party. And the greengrocer, or the individual who goes along with the system, can coexist with living within the truth. See ibid., sections X–XI and here note 28.

61 Hejdánek, L., "Člověk a otázka", in *Podoby. Literární sborník*, ed. B. Doležal, Praha, Čs. spisovatel 1967, pp. 129–141 (139–140).

meets the "non-existent" (challenges, ideas) and so revives or even constitutes herself as integrated with truth (ideas): "[H]uman outrightness does not blend with her subjectivity, with her consciousness and thought. Subjectivity might be a by-product, an accompaniment of action …, it might be only an awareness of what is happening and what is only taken note of. This acknowledgement itself has nothing else in common with truth than any other existent reality. It is still only the psychological level."[62] Havel remains within this level. In comparison to him, we should ascend to a higher level, where we will not relate to all kinds of things but rather to the "thing as it should be", or to a truth that is different to that residing in rules, morals and laws. This level is reached by critical thought effort and by the development of new structures (of reflection) and constitution of the philosophical situation. Within the scope of these, the human might succeed in putting the question and thus outrightly to "go out of the self and organize herself in a way that is not exclusively dependent on psychological stuff, but which is impossible to derive from any other kind of givenness". Thus, through the thought effort of reflection the human reaches the truth, or truth "asserts itself in the middle of subjectivity, because during the questioning is the human opened to something that is not here, that is not given (existent), but might come up to and address a man who listens". Only philosophical reflection provides the two things that absolutely and in no way warrant the "subjective image of an objective situatedness of man". First, it reveals the falsity or inauthenticity of intuitions. Second, it puts the true intuitions into life, explicates and presently enforces them here and now. Because of this, Hejdánek might say that "reflection is practice …, by which all other activity only may become practice, may be detected as a practice and so as a way of humanization of human and of her world"; only in reflection does man "enter on the level of humanity and become a human being", that is, "she alone comes into the question and looks into the answer to herself". Reflection is not the only intellectual achievement by far, but is "an expression of the actual being of man"; without it, man does not exist (she does not stand out from the self and so does not expose herself to the truth), that is, she does not humanise herself, does not open herself to the "normativity of this, what weighs and judges her, accepts or rejects her, what confesses to her or reveals her nothingness and vanity"; she is not on the way of humanity, "which opens itself and goes further always again and again". To return to Havel's "The Power of the Powerless", living within the truth and fulfilling our freedom does not suffice, as in the case of the greengrocer who "begins to say what he really thinks".[63]

62 Ibid., 139–141. All other quotations in this paragraph are from taken this article.
63 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", p. 367.

More is necessary: to bear witness to what addresses us (compare the law of Moses, as mentioned above), to testify by our deeds here and now about the challenges (ideas) that we have reached in reflection.[64] The problem is not that individuals are "alienated from themselves" but that they are alienated from truth ("what should be"). Havel's thesis that in individuals "there is something in them to alienate"[65] is not apt because – as he himself writes – humankind (and each human) is today in a crisis stemming from uprootedness. Modern society and the individuals within it are "spiritually uprooted or at least not anchored". According to Hejdánek, the necessary "endeavour for a deep spiritual and moral anchoring" is characterised above all by a reflection on history, an accurate and integrated understanding of what is happening and what has led to this, and thus also by a criticism of the basis of an overall philosophical conviction and a consideration of the final source of all today's beliefs.[66] The source cannot logically be in the depths of an individual's soul and life, precisely because we ultimately find nothing there but this uprootedness and emptiness. The concentrated life of the individual is important, but only as a component of a historical, cultural, societal and philosophical process.

A necessarily deep life-rootedness or authenticity rests solely in reflection, in the complex understanding of what is going on (and thus also of the events that have led to this point and where events direct and might direct).[67] Havel, then, is doubtful about his firm belief in existent morality and his inclination to the modern human who nevertheless "emptied the future, made a vacuum of it. The future is a forthcoming vacuum that we are supposed to fill up with our deeds."[68] Whereas Havel, all in all, appeals to the autonomous individual who has everything essential, including truth, at his command or even "in herself",[69] Hejdánek appeals to the "non-given" (non-existent) but "substantial" – because of the many challenges to come – future, not to our intentions (the intentions of our lives) but to the intentions of

64 We do not need the reflection here briefly described to associate only with some extraordinary achievement of the philosopher. This reflection belongs to the life of ordinary man. See, for example, one of its first descriptions in Ancient Greece: "Nor suffer sleep to close thine eyes / Till thrice thy acts that day thou hast run o'er; / How slipt? What deeds? What duty left undone?" Porphyry, *Vita Pyth.* 40 (trans. K. S. Guthrie).

65 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", p. 369.

66 Hejdánek, L., "Masaryk a naše dnešní krize", in *Setkání a odstup*, pp. 176–187 (182–183).

67 Hejdánek, L., "Masaryk a naše dnešní krize", pp. 182–183.

68 Hejdánek, L., *Lidská práva* (pro diskusi 12. 3. 1991), ALH.

69 Compare, for example, Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", p. 371: living within the truth, i.e., saying what we really have in mind, "takes individuals back to the solid ground of their own identity".

the truth, which we first have to recognise and then realise in the present conditions – even if these intentions are directed against our intentions. In other words, Hejdánek does not explain the crisis of the human world as existential but rather as a socially practical and ontological matter: he criticises the *reality* of social affairs, which have an ontologically cosmic impact.[70] The question is: what is *true reality*? This is posed as a part of a certain outline of reality; it means that it inquires about the human position in reality (universe). And just such a new view of reality, which forbids us from understanding humanity purely objectively, and nature as separated from humanity, should be the starting point to emerge from the crisis. True reality includes non-given (non-existent) but happening truth that, for its working in the here and now, needs the human and her deeds that arise from the address by this truth. Because of this, it is also crucial to distinguish between the "subjective" as a) "conscious" (human) and b) "creating new", creating activity. Whereas Havel emphasises "the level of human consciousness and conscience",[71] for Hejdánek this is not enough – or is too much – and he demands activity that changes reality (which he finds already on the level of unconscious forms of life).

Some of the critiques presented in this paper may nevertheless be moderated by one fact. Hejdánek, as a philosopher, declares his allegiance to Havel as a writer, and stresses the dependence of philosophy on non-philosophical inspirations. Indeed, in this cooperation philosophy appears to him as "practical":

> But not even philosophy, which undermines its own foundations and systematically cuts away the branches upon which it rests (or has rested hitherto), does not find sufficient indicators by which to proceed. And here, either willingly or unwillingly, it must render itself to the services of those who through their intuitions are closer to reality than philosophy can ever be in its reflections. Intuitions may be shown to be erroneous or misleading – as philosophy well knows – but they may also be accurate and prophetic. Philosophy shall then adopt such intuitions and exert every endeavour in order to assist their application and enforcement.[72]

70 Hejdánek, L., "Pravda a skutečnost", in *Setkání a odstup*, pp. 24–30.

71 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", p. 369. According to Havel, "the profound crisis of human identity [is] brought on by living within a lie" (Ibid., p. 371) – I do not doubt that this living in a lie and conformist way of life exacerbates the crisis, but the core of the crisis is somewhere else, is somehow more essential. And, as well as "the world of appearances" (Ibid., p. 370), it is part of every human life and it is not evil in itself.

72 Hejdánek, L., *Variace a reflexe na témata vězeňských dopisů Václava Havla*, p. 6.

Here I see also the most fundamental justification of Havel's swing to subjectivism, intuition or emotion: it is part of his "job description" as a dramatist and artist. The whole of Hejdánek's critique, which I have systematised here, is weakened by this fact; this critique only belongs to Havel's ambitions other than the non-political agency of the artist. If we read Havel's texts more as the texts of an artist, or as artistic texts, and do not look so much for their philosophical purpose, then they will paradoxically have more meaning and will be more useful – even for philosophers. I believe that this approach might apply even to Havel's so-called philosophical period,[73] because at the bottom he was always an artist, even when he could not practise his art and had to substitute it with philosophy or politics, which he was nevertheless not able to practise properly either (the philosopher cannot become an artist from day to day too).

To sum up, the link between the first and second part is clear: Havel's tendency towards radical existentialism (first part) includes an understanding of the intellectual in sharp contrast to all politics (second part). My swing towards the moderate existentialism in Havel's work (part one) is then supported by the fact that Hejdánek's subsequent critique, (parts two and three) does not so much relate to this. Moderate existentialism, on the contrary, accords well with the recognition of the special *political* role of the intellectual (part two) and with Hejdánek's concept of truth as a non-given challenge coming from the future (part three). Such a moderate existentialism also explains the development of a more objectivist and realist position in Hejdánek's spirit (third part) than does the idealism or radicalism that we encounter in Havel's "The Power of the Powerless" (though this is only one aspect of Havel's work). The critique of Havel in the second and third part is, in my opinion, the argument that Havel's vital and reasonable legacy lies in his understanding of a moderate version.[74]

73 Havel was forced to start writing his philosophical essays. If there had been no totalitarian regime, he would have kept on writing plays. His philosophical or non-politically political essays should be understood as a substitute for his original calling, which was forbidden by the communist regime.

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Orcid: 0000-0001-6445-9281

From a "Life in the Idea" to a "Life in Truth"

Patočka and Havel on Truth and Politics

Gustav Strandberg
Södertörn University
gustav.strandberg@sh.se

Abstract:
This article discusses the relationship between Jan Patočka's and Václav Havel's political writings. By specifically focusing on Patočka's concepts a "life in the idea" and a "life in problematicity" and Havel's notion of a "life in truth", it seeks to draw out the differences and similarities between their respective understandings of the relationship between truth and politics. The paper argues that Havel reinterpreted Patočka's ideas in a way, which in the final analysis diverged from Patočka's original intentions. Finally, the article argues that Havel's, in many ways productive, reinterpretation gives rise to a highly problematic conception of ideology and politics since the "pre-political" form of politics that Havel envisions ultimately tends to naturalize both truth and politics.

Keywords: Jan Patočka, Václav Havel, truth, politics, problematicity, negativity

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Václav Havel's seminal essay "The Power of the Powerless", from 1978, was dedicated to the memory of Jan Patočka, who had passed away under tragic circumstances the previous year. The fact that Havel dedicates his essay, and his most famous and important essay at that, to Patočka is, of course, not a coincidence. In a number of later articles and interviews, Havel time and again emphasised Patočka's importance, both for himself, on a personal and intellectual level, and for Charter 77.

Havel was first acquainted with Patočka through the so-called underground seminars that Patočka led in various apartments in Prague during the early 1970s. It was also Havel who, together with Jiří Němec, suggested Patočka as the third spokesperson for the Charter, and who convinced him to

accept the position.[1] In a later interview, Havel notes that they were in need of a "worthy complement" to Jiří Hájek, the first spokesperson of the movement and the foreign secretary in Alexander Dubček's former government, who did not come from communist circles and who could, as Havel puts it, impart a "moral dimension" to the Charter.[2] Judging from the texts that Patočka wrote in his capacity as spokesperson, it is clear that he would do precisely this. In a time of heightened instrumentalisation, Patočka writes in the essay "The Obligation to Resist Injustice" – written and published shortly after the publication of the Charter – and in a time where the state appears as a "magazine of force that has all other force, both physical and spiritual, at its disposal", what is needed is something that breaks with the hegemonic technical and instrumental rationality; what is needed is a new form of morality, which is "not only tactical and situational but absolute".[3] A new morality, in short, that the people of Czechoslovakia, and its government, would be bound by, since a state cannot function "without a moral foundation, without convictions that do not depend upon customs, circumstances or expected advantages", regardless of how technologically advanced it may be.[4] These lines are clearly in keeping with Havel's and Němec's expectations, but they are also true to the original formulations in the Charter and its original protest, namely, that the regime of Czechoslovakia was obliged to follow the statutes of the Helsinki Declaration, which it had signed in 1975 and which, as its seventh point or "basket", included "Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief". Patočka's statements and articles on the Charter thus helped to strengthen the moral position on which the movement was based, as did his own reputed moral authority.[5] In fact, if we are to believe Havel, almost all

1 At this point in time, Patočka had already signed the first petition of the Charter, which condemned the illegal arrest of the psychedelic rock bands Plastic People of the Universe and DG 307 – two bands that stood accused of having "disturbed the order". Not only did Patočka sign this petition but he also wrote an article addressing the issue. See Patočka, J., "K záležitostem Plastic People of the Universe a DG 307". *Sebrané spisy XII – Češi I*. Prague, Oikoymenh 2006.

2 Havel, V., *Disturbing the Peace: A Conversation with Karel Hvížďala*, trans. P. Wilson. New York, Knopf 1990, p. 135.

3 Patočka, J., "The Obligation to Resist Injustice", trans. E. Kohák, in *Jan Patočka: Philosophy and Selected Writings*. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press 1989, p. 340.

4 Ibid., p. 341.

5 Patočka was widely respected and regarded as a person with high moral standards, at least in intellectual and artistic circles in Prague. This is something that many intellectuals bore witness to at the time and that can be indexed by way of Ludvík Vaculík's literary diary *Český snář* (*A Czech Dreambook*). In one passage, Vaculík describes how he goes to visit his friend Jan Vladislav. Every time Vaculík is there, Vladislav's wife invites him to dinner, and each time that Vaculík hesitates she reminds him that "Professor Patočka was sometimes wont to eat at their

of the work pursued by the Charter after Patočka's untimely death "was in harmony with or was directly based upon his ideas".[6]

However, Patočka's influence on Havel was not limited to their shared work within Charter 77. Patočka also exerted a philosophical influence on Havel, something that manifests itself in "The Power of the Powerless", as well as in other essays.[7] Even though Patočka at times employs the expression "a life in truth", it is not a central concept in his work. Instead, he speaks of "life in the idea" and of "life in problematicity", concepts that Havel in turn seems to have reinterpreted as a life in truth (the dedication to Patočka in the beginning of the essay, together with Havel's comments elsewhere, also seems to suggest that Patočka himself was, in many ways, emblematic of a life in truth and served as Havel's implicit model). This notwithstanding, there are some crucial differences between Patočka's and Havel's respective understanding of what a life in the idea or a life in truth would amount to. These differences are not only conceptual in nature, but also concern the philosophical *and* political content of said concepts, as well as the relation between truth and politics.[8]

For Havel, a life in truth has clear humanistic undertones. The ideology of the post-totalitarian Czechoslovakian regime is a threat to human identity as such, since the "life in truth", Havel writes, is what gives human nature its identity. In a society where the very semblance of truth has been eradicated, the possibility of creating one's own identity is lost as well. At the heart of Havel's argument, we can thus locate the familiar antinomy between identity and alienation, between the proper, authentic, essential and – to speak in Havel's terms – "true" existence of man, and the alienated, inauthentic, inessential and false existence that is represented by ideological phraseology. As Havel himself puts it, "individuals can be alienated from themselves

table," whereupon Vaculík feels morally obliged to accept the invitation: "In Patočka's place, albeit lacking his breeding and intellectual depth, I end up eating things I do not even like, because by then I must." See Vaculík, L., *A Czech Dreambook*, trans. G. Turner. Prague, Karolinum Press 2019, p. 120.

6 Havel, V., "O smyslu Charty 77", in *Spisy*. Prague, Torst 1999, p. 668.

7 Patočka's influence can, in both an implicit and explicit sense, be discerned in almost all of the essays that Havel wrote during the 1970s and the early 1980s. However, apart from "The Power of the Powerless", two essays stand out in this respect: "Politics and Conscience" and "Stories and Totalitarianism". Both have been published in English in Havel, V., *Open Letters: Selected Writings, 1965–1990*, ed. P. Wilson. London, Faber and Faber 1992.

8 Even though this article only addresses the relation between truth and politics in Havel's and Patočka's respective writings, it is important to note that the issue has wider ramifications in the history of Czech philosophy. A more exhaustive investigation would, for example, have to take the writings of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, Emanuel Rádl and Ladislav Hejdánek into account. However, this falls outside the scope of this article.

only because there is something in them to alienate", and this something, the authentic existence of man, is man's life in truth.[9] When the greengrocer finally takes down his sign, he thus rediscovers his own identity. The protest of the "dissident" (whether he or she is a greengrocer, a writer or a philosopher), returns, as Havel puts it, "the individual to his or her essential self" (*vrací člověka k sobě samému*).[10] Hidden within the essence of man there is therefore always a "predisposition to truth", a predisposition that can be repressed and distorted by the illusory veils of ideology but which can never be fully eradicated, since such an eradication would imply nothing less than the death of the individual. It is for these very reasons that Havel can claim that the political protest of the greengrocer, and of the Chartists, is existential, moral and "pre-political" in nature and not political in the ordinary sense of the word.[11] It is not a protest stemming from a political party, nor from a political opposition, but one that is born from within the hidden predisposition to truth in human existence as such.

In the texts that Patočka wrote for the Charter, he also makes use of a humanistic discourse. He calls for an absolute morality that ultimately rests on the inalienable moral value of man. The purpose of morality, he writes in one passage, "is to assure not the functioning of society, but the humanity of humans".[12] This unmistakable humanism can also be found in some of Patočka's earlier texts. However, in his later philosophical texts (texts that paradoxically coincide with his more humanistic political interventions in the Charter) one finds an adamant critique of every essentialist notion of man, be it in the form of human nature or subjectivity, something that culminates in his so-called a-subjective phenomenology and that also inflects his understanding of politics.

The question of how one is to understand the many tensions between Patočka's philosophical writings and his engagement in the Charter, between his a-subjective phenomenology and the humanism of his political interventions, is something that has occupied scholars for some time now, but this is neither the time nor the place to enter into that debate.[13] Instead, I will limit myself to a discussion of Patočka's understanding of the central concepts in

9 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", trans. P. Wilson. *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*, 32, 2018, No. 2, p. 369.

10 Ibid., p. 368.

11 Here it is important to note that Havel's insistence that the Chartists did not constitute a political opposition or were political in any sense of the word – something that other signatories of the Charter expressed as well – has to be understood, at least in part, against the background of the fact that all forms of political opposition were strictly forbidden in Czechoslovakia.

12 Patočka, J., "The Obligation to Resist Injustice", p. 341.

13 For an in-depth analysis of the relation between Patočka's philosophical, and politico-philosophical, thought and the texts he wrote in his capacity as spokesperson for Charter 77, see

Havel's essay, more specifically the notion of a life in truth and its antithesis, ideology, and on how Patočka's understanding of politics differs from the "pre-political" form of politics that Havel envisions in his essay. I will, in other words, try to trace in what way Havel's reinterpretation of some of the key concepts in Patočka's thought diverges from Patočka's understanding of both philosophy and politics. Finally, I will point to some of the problems to which Havel's (in many ways productive) reinterpretation of Patočka gives rise.

A life in the negativity of the idea

I will begin by turning my attention to some of Patočka's early texts from the 1940s and 1950s. The first of these is a short essay entitled "Ideology and Life in the Idea", from 1946.[14] The main purpose of this essay is to distinguish philosophy, which Patočka here calls a "life in the idea", from ideology. Ideology, Patočka writes, "although it engages, conceptually grasps, and binds us" is something that "seizes Man externally".[15] Ideology is a force, Patočka contends, and a force that seizes man from without by presenting him with the false promise of a secure principle and foundation that would lend his finite existence a stability that it, in and of itself, lacks. However, ideology thereby also reduces man to a force among others, and a minor force at that, at least in comparison with the overall aim of the ideology in question. The will, freedom and activity of man thus only receives its significance and meaning from the aim of the ideology. Man is a mere means for the aim and goal dictated by ideology, and a means that can be used or abused in any possible way. Whoever does not fit in, Patočka writes, "is dealt with as a detrimental, useless force – and is necessarily ruthlessly neutralized".[16] Patočka then goes on to delineate what philosophy, and a "life in the idea", would imply, and how it is distinguished from ideology:

> An idea is something distinct from this [ideology]: an idea must be embodied, and this embodiment in life concerns our innermost personal core and can never be indifferent towards this inner core. An idea appeals to us, not so that we put ourselves "at the service of the Idea", but rather to be in the Idea, to exist in the Idea.[17]

Čapek, J., "Le devoir de l'homme envers lui-même – Patočka, Kant et la Charte 77". *Tumultes*, No. 32–33, 2009.

14 Patočka, J., "Ideology and Life in the Idea", trans. E. Manton, in *Living in Problematicity*. Prague, Oikoymenh 2007.

15 Ibid., p. 43.

16 Ibid., p. 47.

17 Ibid., p. 43.

Whereas an ideology seizes man from without in such a way that man can never fully realise him- or herself within it (since it never truly corresponds to one's personal ideals and aspirations), an idea permeates human existence from within, and is something by way of which man can realise his own existence, or his "inner core", as Patočka calls it here. While an ideology encompasses the individual as a force among other forces (other individuals, a class or a collective), the idea has more of a personal meaning: it addresses me and my own existence in and of itself. Ideologies thus generalise human existence, whereas the idea singularises us and forces us to transcend our existence for the sake of *our* existence.

In this short essay, Patočka does not really delve into the details of what philosophy beyond this (admittedly vague) description would imply but is more focused on the question of ideology. (The article was, to a large extent, formulated as a response to the ideologies that permeated the preceding decades, i.e. fascism and communism.)

However, he does provide one example of a life in the idea, namely, the example of Socrates:

> Ideology, as a practiced theory, cannot alone wrench itself out of the limits of the logic of theory, a logic that looks upon its object from the exterior. Conversely, the logic of the Idea has the peculiarity that it is not merely the "contemplation of things", but rather an identification with the Idea. We find such logic in its classical form in Socrates, who contemplates what is good, with the result that he does not state the Good (on the contrary, a definition simply stating what the Good is somehow continuously eludes his contemplation), but that he becomes good – the Good is established in life and thought themselves.[18]

The idea, for example the idea of the good, is thus something that we – following the traditional logic of Platonic thought – strive towards, an idea that forces us to transcend the limitations of our individual existence in such a way that our very aspiration towards the good is instantiated in our life – making us, just as Socrates, into good and virtuous citizens. However, in this early essay Patočka does not really analyse how we are to understand the nature of ideas. Instead, the essay ends with this insistence that the idea has to be instantiated or embodied. The text is also permeated by a form of essentialism and humanism, which Patočka would later renounce. He will, for example, speak about "the Idea of man" as something that remains when

18 Ibid., p. 47.

all ideologies have faltered, and notes that this idea "remains essentially continuously the same" through all historical and societal changes.[19] This idea of man, is, first and foremost, an idea of freedom, according to Patočka, and even though he will later criticise humanism, at least philosophically, he will never recant the idea of freedom, but will rather attempt to conceptualise freedom in way that transcends the confines of subjectivity.[20]

Patočka continues these reflections in a later text, from 1953, entitled "Negative Platonism", but whereas the earlier essay is marked by a certain uncritical humanism, Patočka now tries to develop an understanding of the "life in the idea" that explicitly excludes any form of humanism, and which instead points towards his a-subjective phenomenology.[21] In this essay, Patočka proposes what he calls "a nonmetaphysical interpretation of Plato".[22] What he turns his attention to is the experience of freedom and its role and importance in philosophical thought. Patočka also understands the Platonic theory of ideas as an expression of freedom. The experience of freedom, Patočka writes, is "always an experience of the whole, one pertaining to a global meaning" and Socrates' dialectic "was intended precisely to show that no sense object, no factual experience, can either pose or answer this question [i.e. the question of the whole of existence]".[23] In distinction to positivism and empiricism (which are the main targets of Patočka's critique in this essay), true philosophical thought – and here the reference to the phenomenological understanding of the world as the "horizon of all horizons" is unmistakable – concerns itself with the whole, i.e. with that which transcends the given, and which in turn imparts meaning to the given. This negative experience is something that Plato had recognised, according to Patočka, but that to a large extent has been overshadowed by the history of metaphysics,

19 Ibid.

20 The question as to why Patočka gradually adopted a more critical perspective on humanism, and on the category of subjectivity as such, is difficult to answer in any clear-cut way. However, it is important to remember that Heidegger's "Letter on Humanism" was published in 1947, that is, the year after Patočka published his essay, and that Heidegger's interventions had huge ramifications for the continued work within the field of existential phenomenology, as well as for Patočka's later work.

21 Patočka, J., "Negative Platonism", trans. E. Kohák, in *Jan Patočka: Philosophy and Selected Writings*. For an analysis of the emergence of negative Platonism in Patočka's thought, and of its continued importance in his later work, see Hejdánek, L., "Nothingness and Responsibility: The Problem of 'Negative Platonism' in Patočka's Philosophy", in *La responsabilité/Responsibility*, eds. Petr Horák and Josef Zumr. Prague, Institut de philosophie de l'Academie tchécoslovaque des Sciences 1992; and Cauly, O., "Patočka, un platonicien sans l'être – Sur le platonisme négatif", in *Jan Patočka – Phénoménologie asubjective et existence*, ed. R. Barbaras. Paris, Vrin 2011.

22 Patočka, J., "Negative Platonism", p. 197.

23 Ibid., p. 193.

a history by and through which this negative experience was replaced with a "positive" transcendent object (god, nature, man, etc.).

On a more conceptual level, this experience manifests itself through the Platonic conception of *chorismos*, the gap or divide separating the sensible world from the world of ideas. However, the *chorismos*, Patočka adds, should not, as is often the case, be understood as a division separating something from something else, or as the division between two regions of objects. Instead, it originally implied, Patočka notes, "a separateness without a second object realm":[24]

> *Chorismos* is a separateness, a distinctness *an sich*, an absolute one, for itself. It does not entail the secret of another continent, somewhere beyond a separating ocean. Rather, its mystery must be read out of the *chorismos* itself, found purely within it. In other words, the mystery of the *chorismos* is like the experience of freedom, an experience of a distance with respect to real things, of a meaning independent of the objective and the sensory which we reach by inverting the original, "natural" orientation of life, an experience of a rebirth, of a second birth, intrinsic to all spiritual life, familiar to the religious, to the initiates of the arts, and, not least, to philosophers.[25]

It is also this understanding of Plato that warrants the notion of a *negative* Platonism. Platonic ideas do not, Patočka claims, constitute a supersensible realm of transcendent objects; instead, these ideas are a form of non-being that makes it possible for philosophers to de-realise or de-objectify the world, that forces the reflection of the philosopher to transcend that which is given. If we return to Patočka's earlier notion of a "life in the idea" we can thus see how these reflections on a negative Platonism alter his earlier understanding of what a life dedicated to thought, and truth, implies. By now, it is clear that a life in the idea differs radically from a philosophical life in which ideas would be the purported possession, or the embodied knowledge, of the philosopher, or something of which he or she would have a positive and scientific knowledge. A life in the idea, a life dedicated to thought and philosophy, is, on the contrary, understood as a life in negativity: a life permeated by the negative nature of thought itself. But this also means that there is, in contrast to the false promises of ideology, nothing permanent, lasting or stable in philosophy that could provide finite human existence with a support – nothing, except for this negative transcendence, that philosophy can call its own. And

24 Ibid., p. 198.
25 Ibid.

this holds true in both an objective and a subjective sense. In distinction to his argument in "Ideology and Life in the Idea", Patočka now writes that man certainly is the place of freedom, the placeholder of this negative transcendence, but that this "does not mean that he is adequate to that experience".[26] On the contrary, "it stands above both objective and subjective existents", in such a way, Patočka continues, that this specific idea of freedom avoids "all subjectivism".[27] The idea of freedom, or the idea understood *as* freedom, thus remains, but in distinction to Patočka's previous discussions surrounding the life in the idea it is no longer an idea found *within* man; it is no longer something that we, as human beings, possess but something that makes all subjective self-assurance tremble. The emphasis has, in other words, shifted from a humanist, or subjectivist, understanding of freedom to an understanding in which freedom has to be based on the inherent negativity of the world, and not the other way around. The negative form of Platonism that Patočka envisions is thus, as he himself concludes, "that precarious position of philosophy that cannot lean on anything on earth or in heaven".[28]

The problematicity of politics and thought

Already in the essay "Negative Platonism" it is clear that a life in truth has a different meaning for Patočka than it does for Havel. Even though Havel would probably agree that a life in truth, in some respects, involves the uncertainty and negativity that Patočka keeps returning to, he seems, at times at least, to fall back on a rather naive understanding of truth, and on a naive understanding of man's relation to it. In his essay, Havel makes clear that truth is something natural to man, that we, by virtue of our very humanity, have an understanding of what truth means, and of what a life in truth implies, that we can always fall back upon, but that we, under conditions of political oppression, simply are too afraid to adopt or, for that matter, express. For Patočka, on the other hand, a life in the idea, or a life in truth, implies a life without certainty and a life *without* truth – at least if truth is understood as being something that man possesses and on which he can always rely. Truth is not something that man has any natural or uncomplicated re-

26 Ibid., p. 201.

27 Ibid., p. 200. It is especially important to stress the break with humanism that takes place in the essay "Negative Platonism" since some commentators, such as Eric Manton, have tended to disregard it in favour of a reading that views "Ideology and Life in the Idea" and "Negative Platonism" as if they constituted one consistent argument. If anything, Patočka's arguments in "Negative Platonism", and then especially his stress on negativity, point towards his later philosophy. See Manton, E., "Patočka on Ideology and the Politics of Human Freedom", in *Jan Patočka and the European Heritage*, Studia Phaenomenologica XII. Bucharest, Humanitas 2007.

28 Ibid., p. 205.

lation to, but it is, on the contrary, something that can only be approximated by way of the transcendence of the given, a transcendence that thereby discloses that the truth about the given is, in and of itself, *not* a given, but resides in the world as a whole, which, strictly speaking, never appears but instead withdraws in each presence.

These differences between Havel's and Patočka's conception of truth become even more pronounced if one considers Patočka's later philosophy (which Havel, incidentally, must have been much more familiar with) and then especially his reflections on the relation between philosophy and politics, and between truth and politics.[29] In his later magnum opus, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, Patočka turns his attention to what he deems to be the common origin of philosophy, politics and history. This origin, or perhaps this lack of origin, is, like his previous reflections on the inherent negativity of philosophical thought, found in what Patočka now describes as a disorienting experience of a loss of meaning. This experience is, Patočka holds, common to philosophy, and perhaps the most notable example is to be found in the Greek understanding of wonder (*thaumazein*). Philosophy arises through wonder, but through a wonder that is felt as a shock, as the shocking discovery of a loss of meaning. However, in distinction to nihilism, this loss of meaning does not necessarily imply a form of resignation (even though it, quite naturally, can take this form) but is that which instigates philosophical thought and its quest *for* meaning. In a way that reminds us of his earlier understanding of a life in the idea, Patočka now states that "meaning can only arise in an activity which stems from a searching lack of meaning, as the vanishing point of being problematic, as an indirect epiphany".[30] He goes on to add:

> If we are not mistaken, then this discovering of meaning in the seeking which flows from its absence, as a new project of life, is the meaning of Socrates' existence. The constant shaking of the naive sense of meaningfulness is itself a new mode of being, a discovery of its continuity with the mysteriousness of being and what-is as a whole.[31]

29 Even though Havel only attended Patočka's later seminars, something that indicates that Patočka's later thought would have been more familiar to him, he did familiarise himself with Patočka's earlier work as well. In an interview he notes that he had "hungrily devoured" some of Patočka's texts already in the 1950s, despite the fact that no one was allowed to borrow them from the library ("a librarian looked the other way"). See Havel, V., *Disturbing the Peace*, p. 26.

30 Patočka, J., *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, trans. E. Kohák. Chicago, Open Court 1996, pp. 60–61.

31 Ibid., p. 61.

However, in distinction to his earlier texts, Patočka now adds that this experience, this shaking upheaval of meaning as such, is not only found in philosophy but in politics as well. Political life, Patočka writes, is "a permanent uprootedness, a lack of foundation".[32] Politics lacks its own foundation, just as philosophy lacks truth and meaning. This is not, however, a deficiency that one should try to redress but concerns the very nature of politics, and especially the nature of a democratic society. There is, in short, no foundation upon which a democratic society might rest. If there is such a thing as a foundation for democratic political life, it is a contested foundation, something that can only be determined by way of the conflicts that permeate, or at least should permeate, a democratic society. Patočka describes this as follows, by referring to *polemos*, one of the many Greek divinities of war, which Heraclitus made famous in a philosophical sense:

> *Polemos* is what is common. *Polemos* binds together the contending parties, not only because it stands over them but because in it they are one. In it there arises the one, unitary power and will from which alone all laws and constitutions derive, however different they may be.[33]

In an adjacent passage, Patočka then adds that "the spirit of the *polis* is a spirit of unity in conflict, in battle. One cannot be a citizen – *polites* – except in a community of some against others, and the conflict itself gives rise to the tension, the tenor of the life of the *polis*, the shape of the space of freedom that citizens both offer and deny each other in seeking support and overcoming resistance."[34] This understanding of politics, which Patočka developed in the years leading up to his engagement with Charter 77, also sheds light on his understanding of ideology. Ideology is not only a false promise of stability, which we as finite individuals are drawn to in the form of a political demigod, it also represents a false understanding of politics since it leads us to believe that our own position, be it socialist, liberal or conservative, is transcendent or neutral vis-à-vis the conflicts of political life. In light of the above, we could even say that the main problem with ideologies in Patočka's understanding, is that they tend to depoliticise politics – at least when their proponents fail to recognise the ideological nature of their own position and instead regard it as objectively true. On the basis of this, it is clear that Patočka would belong to what has today been called "post-foundational political thought", a strand of thinking that stresses the contingent and historical

32 Ibid., p. 38.
33 Ibid., p. 42.
34 Ibid., pp. 41–42.

nature of each political foundation and emphasises the antagonistic nature of politics.[35] To be sure, the antagonism in and of politics is to a large extent ideological in nature, something with which Patočka would surely agree. The target of his critique is thus not ideologies per se, but the way in which ideologies function as purported (neutral) foundations that mask or overshadow the true abysmal and antagonistic nature of the political domain.[36]

Philosophy and politics are thus related since both revolve around a certain openness to the abysmal and inescapable loss of meaning, which characterises human existence as a whole. Philosophy is forever haunted by the absence of meaning, and politics is, to paraphrase Claude Lefort, forever haunted by its own "empty place", an emptiness that offers itself up as its only foundation – as the contested absence that dictates political life.[37] Philosophy and politics are thus two expressions of what Patočka calls a life in problematicity, a life that does not seek to avoid the disorientation of existence but instead faces it undaunted.[38] However, the relation between philosophy and politics is not only based on a certain experience of a meaningful loss of meaning; the bonds between these two domains stretch further back than that. Both politics *and* philosophy are, Patočka contends, conflictual in nature. They are, as he repeatedly stresses in the *Heretical Essays*, both constituted by *polemos*. A life in problematicity is therefore not only a life in which the experience of a finite disorientation has centre stage, it is also a life that is permeated by conflict. It is, to be sure, a life that is characterised by a certain openness to the world, but by an openness that, as Patočka writes, concomitantly "warns us that we should not yield to the inclination to absolutize particular ways of understanding meaning and the meaningfulness appropriate to them".[39]

35 See Marchart, O., *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau*. Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press 2007.

36 Having said this, it is, however, clear that what we encounter in Patočka's thought is not a full-fledged political theory. Instead, his reflections on the nature of political life are embedded within his wider philosophy of history. For this reason, there are no reflections or analyses in his work that address how ideologies function within parliamentary democracies, nor do we encounter any sustained analysis of how modern political parties operate.

37 See Lefort, C., "Permanence du théologico-politique?" *Essais sur le politique – XIX^{e}-XX^{e} siècles*. Paris, Éditions du Seuil 1986.

38 The concept of "problematicity", which is central to Patočka's argument in the *Heretical Essays*, is originally a reformulation of Wilhelm Weischedel's concept "*fraglichkeit*". One should therefore try to hear both the connotations of questionable and of uncertain (from *fraglich*) in the concept. See Weischedel, W., *Skeptische Ethik*. Frankfurt, Suhrkamp 1976, p. 36.

39 Patočka, J., *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, p. 58.

Conclusion

Returning to Havel's essay, I would first like to point out that there are many similarities between Havel's and Patočka's respective understanding of ideology. Havel's idea that the primary function of ideology is to "provide people with the illusion that the system is in harmony with the human order and the universe" reflect Patočka's conception that an ideology presents itself in the form of a false promise of stability and structure for the finite existence of man.[40] However, as I hope to have shown by now, matters become more complicated when it comes to the notion of "a life in truth". Contrary to Patočka's later understanding of a life in problematicity, I would argue that Havel presents what one could call an unproblematic understanding of truth. Whereas a life in problematicity, according to Patočka, represents a life in which truth appears as an "indirect epiphany" or as a vanishing point in the distance that is always permeated by conflict, truth is something natural, according to Havel, something that is congenial to human nature as such. According to Havel, man always possesses the possibility of tearing the veil of ideology asunder in favour of a natural existence in truth, devoid of any political conflict. It is for this very reason that Havel can call the position he expounds in "The Power of the Powerless" existential or "pre-political". The political philosophy of Patočka is certainly existential in nature as well, but whereas the existential form of politics that Havel envisions seems to be devoid of conflict – devoid of politics we might even add, which is why it can be qualified as *pre*-political in the first place – the existential basis of politics is more of an abyss than a secure foundation in Patočka's work.

Whether or not Havel misunderstood or misinterpreted Patočka is not the main issue here, and if he did, it was in many respects a fruitful misinterpretation. But if we leave the question of interpretation aside, it is clear that this productive misinterpretation gives rise to a highly questionable understanding of the relation between truth and ideology, and between philosophy and politics. I think this point is explicated quite clearly by Jacques Derrida in a text in which he discusses the political stakes of any form of teaching in philosophy. In this text, which in English is entitled "Where a Teaching Body Begins", Derrida writes:

> By naturalizing, by affecting to consider as natural what is not and has never been natural, one neutralizes. One neutralizes what? One conceals,

40 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", p. 360.

> rather, in an effect of neutrality, the active intervention of a force and a machinery.[41]

Something quite similar to this can be said about Havel's attempt at naturalising truth. By naturalising truth, Havel neutralises truth and thereby conceals, to quote Derrida, "the active intervention of a force and a machinery". In Havel's case, he conceals the active force of his own ideology that he neutralises in the form of a pre-political factor. In relation to this, we can then add that the problem of ideology, and its inherent danger, lies not, first and foremost, in its content, nor in its direct effects, but in the fact that it constantly conceals itself in order to function. It conceals itself as ideology, by taking on other masks (the mask of truth, for example) and by hiding behind institutions, but it also conceals the problematic nature of truth as such. What one finds behind the veil of ideology, if it is at all possible to thoroughly break through this veil, is not then, as Havel suggests, reality and truth, which, unhindered by ideological phantasms, would once more shine forth in their moral and epistemological purity, but rather political conflict, and a political conflict that is waged precisely in relation to truth. When one fails to see this, it is to a large extent due to the fact that one is blinded by one's own ideological position, which is regarded as true and natural, whereas every other position is false and unnatural. Perhaps the main lesson to be drawn from Havel's essay is that a pre-political form of politics is not only impossible but also inherently dangerous since it tends to naturalise not only truth but also those who possess it, thereby – potentially at least and against Havel's own intentions – turning any opponent into something far worse than a political opponent, namely, something false, unnatural and thereby potentially inhuman.

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41 Derrida, J., "Where a Teaching Body Begins", trans. J. Plug, in *Who's Afraid of Philosophy? – Right to Philosophy 1*. Stanford, Stanford University Press 2002, p. 69.

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Orcid: 0000-0002-1136-2977

Two Concepts of a Lie: Václav Havel on Living in a Communist Regime

Ondřej Krása
University of Pardubice, Faculty of Arts and Philosophy
Ondrej.Krasa@upce.cz

Abstract:
According to Václav Havel's famous essay "The Power of the Powerless", life within a lie is at the core of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia. Life within a lie is characteristic for the great majority of people and is contrasted with life within the truth which is characteristic of dissent movement. In this paper, I will try to shed some light on the concept of "living within a lie." I will show that Havel develops not one but two concepts of a lie: on the one hand, lie is deliberate pretence; on the other hand, lie is seduction by consumerist values. The first meaning of a lie is derived from Havel's analysis of the specifics of the Soviet sphere of influence, namely central role of ideology with omnipresent demands on public support of the regime. The second meaning of a lie is heavily influenced by a critical assessment of modern society from the leading figure of the Czech underground movement Ivan Jirous and leading Czech philosopher Jan Patočka. This double meaning of a lie enables Havel to capture both specific problems of living under the communist regime and general problems of living in modern society anywhere in the world. In the final chapters of this paper, I will show that Havel is not clear about how these two meanings of a lie are connected and that there are problems resulting from these unclarities both for Havel's analysis of the communism and his proposed solution of the crisis.

Keywords: Václav Havel, truth, lie, dissent, Jan Patočka, underground

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In "The Power of the Powerless", one of the most influential texts from the Soviet sphere of influence, Václav Havel analyses the nature of the communist regime and the nature of the opposition movement. According to Havel, life within a lie is at the core of the regime. Life within a lie is characteristic for the great majority of people in Czechoslovakia, and is contrasted with life within the truth, which is characteristic of the dissident movement.

In this paper, I will try to shed some light on the concept of "living within a lie". I will show that Havel develops not one but two concepts of a lie: on the one hand, it is a deliberate pretence; on the other hand, it is seduction through consumerist values. The first meaning is derived from Havel's analysis of the specifics of Czechoslovakia. The second meaning is heavily influenced by the critical assessments of modern society by the leading figure of the Czech underground movement, Ivan Jirous, and by the pre-eminent Czech philosopher, Jan Patočka. This double meaning of a lie enables Havel to capture both the specific problems of living under the communist regime and the general problems of living in modern society anywhere in the world. In the final sections of this paper I will show some points that are unclear and problems left open in Havel's concept of living within a lie.

Fruits and vegetables

"The manager of a fruit-and-vegetable shop places in his window, among the onions and carrots, the slogan: 'Workers of the world, unite!' Why does he do it?"[1] Václav Havel's answer to this question is rather complex. The manager does not believe in the ideal of the slogan, and he does not want to "acquaint the public" with it. In the late 1970s in Czechoslovakia, almost no one believed in the ideals of communism. Why does he do it, then? The first answer is that he does it with no specific purpose, he acts out of habit, he does not deliberate about it at all, "it has been done that way for years".[2] The second answer is that he does it out of fear; if he refused, there could be trouble, he might be eventually "relieved of his post as manager", his salary might be reduced, his vacation plans might be ruined, and his children's access to higher education might be threatened.[3] The third answer is that the manager pursues a specific kind of life, the "tranquil life 'in harmony with the society.'"[4]

The exact relationship of these three answers is not crystal clear. However, it is obvious that the answers are not supposed to represent wholly separate motivations but are somehow parts of one complex motivation. The manager is afraid of the consequences of not following the usual practice, but this fear is nothing new to him; it has been omnipresent in the society and in his life for years. Fear is a central aspect of the atmosphere in Czecho-

1 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", trans. P. Wilson. *East European Politics and Societies*, 32, 2018, No. 2: sec. 3, p. 359, https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325418766625.
2 Ibid., sec. 3, p. 359.
3 Ibid., secs. 3, 7.
4 Ibid., sec. 3, p. 359.

slovakia. Therefore he places the slogan in the window without even deliberating about it, he has done it many times in the past, and he will do it many times in the future. Placing the slogan is at the same time an integral part of his life; he tries to be a respectable member of society and to have a decent job and a happy family life. Following the usual procedures makes it possible to attain this life.

Picturing the motivation of people living under a communist regime as complex is nothing new for Havel. "The Power of the Powerless" was written at the end of 1978. In his open letter to President Gustáv Husák in April 1975, Havel asks: why do people seemingly support the government?[5] The answer, once again, has many layers. The main driving force of the seemingly pro-government behaviour of the majority of the citizens is fear, mostly based on permanent and omnipresent danger, which is part of everyday life and is not experienced with abrupt intensity but as a "substantial component of the natural world". This fear has several other components, some of which are existential wrongs such as bullying at work, while others are closer to the brutal force of repressive machinery. Conformity with the regime is influenced also by resignation and indifference to public activity, and by turning one's attention to private affairs. Acceptance of consumerist ideals also plays an important part in conformity with the regime, and Havel mentions selfish reasons, such as careerism and opportunism, as ingredients in the mixture.

Ideology and the lie

In section three of "The Power of the Powerless", Havel portrays life in conformity with the regime and its complex motivation as reflecting "vital interests". In the following sections of the essay, Havel characterises this life as a "life within a lie" that is "alienated" and "inauthentic".[6] The latter analysis is central to his understanding of communism and the dissident movement in general.[7] How do "vital interests" change into a "life within a lie"?

The key to understanding this change is Havel's concept of ideology. "Workers of the world, unite!" is one of the most famous slogans of commu-

5 Havel, V., "Dopis Gustávu Husákovi", in *O lidskou identitu: úvahy, fejetony, protesty, polemiky, prohlášení a rozhovory z let 1969–1979*, 3. Praha, Rozmluvy 1990, pp. 19–49. For further details about Havel's open letter, see Bolton, J., *Worlds of Dissent: Charter 77, The Plastic People of the Universe, and Czech Culture under Communism*. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press 2012, pp. 202–207; Suk, J., *Politika jako absurdní drama: Václav Havel v letech 1975–1989*. Praha, Paseka 2013, p. 25ff.

6 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", secs. 4, 8.

7 For the history of the term "dissent", see Bolton, J., *Worlds of Dissent*, pp. 218–220.

nist ideology,[8] and the manager takes part in keeping the ideology and system in power by placing the slogan in his window. Ideology is, according to Havel, a "bridge" between the system and the people.[9] It allows mediation between the aims of the system and the aims of life by pretending that the aims of the system are derived from the aims of life, and by allowing the people to pretend that the aims articulated by ideology are their own. The basic aim of the system is its self-preservation through automatic movement, but this aim is hidden behind the ideology. Although the aim of the system is to maintain itself, it communicates this aim by speaking about the protection of the working class through the leading role of the Communist Party, by speaking about popular government, etc. In the late 1970s in Czechoslovakia, people did not believe in the ideology, but in order not to be in conflict with the system, they had to publicly affirm the ideology, they had to place the slogans, go to the May Day parade, go to the polls, etc. This discrepancy between ideology, on the one hand, and both the aims of the system and the aims of life, on the other, makes the lie a central term of Havel's analysis. The lie is at the core of the system. Life in conformity with the system is life within a lie.[10]

The key role of the lie is further reinforced by Havel. At first, ideology is understood as a "bridge … across which the regime approaches people and the people approach the regime";[11] ideology serves power. This subordination of ideology to power leads to the emancipation of ideology from reality: ideology has to serve power and not primarily reflect reality. However, together with the growing importance of ideology to power, ideology subordinates power to itself: "[R]ather than … ideology serving power, power begins to serve ideology."[12] Rather than the bureaucrats in positions of power making decisions, ideology itself makes the decisions and bureaucrats and the people have to accommodate themselves. The ideology becomes a "king-maker".[13]

Ideology is a key element of the communist regime; it is not only a mediating bridge between power and the people but also the very essence of the regime. Ideology is at the same time necessarily connected to a lie, it reflects neither the aims of political leaders nor the opinions of the people, but both

8 Marx, K. – Engels, F., "Manifesto of the Communist Party", in *Marx/Engels Selected Works, Vol. One*, trans. S. Moore and F. Engels. Moscow, Progress Publishers 1969, p. 56.
9 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", sec. 3.
10 Ibid., secs. 4, 5. To characterise life in Czechoslovakia in these terms was perhaps familiar to the readers of Havel's text, since the regime "institutionalised" some of the most striking lies; see Bolton, J. *Worlds of Dissent*, pp. 222–223.
11 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", sec. 3, p. 360.
12 Ibid., sec. 5, p. 363.
13 Ibid., sec. 5.

leaders and citizens have to act as if they believe in ideology. Since ideology is central to the regime and is connected to a lie, Havel calls life structured by ideology life within a lie.[14]

Complexity and lie

There is no doubt that the lie captures an important aspect of the action of the manager of the fruit-and-vegetable shop. Similar situations were not limited to managers of local stores but were widespread in Czechoslovakia. Even though no one believed the slogan, everyone acted as if they did. There was no one to fool; not even the highest officials wanted you to actually believe the slogan, but everyone had to act as if they did believe,[15] and by doing so they created a "panorama of everyday life".[16] Such a demand for pretence was not at all exceptional:

> [L]ife in the system is so thoroughly permeated with hypocrisy and lies: government by bureaucracy is called popular government; the working class is enslaved in the name of the working class; the complete degradation of the individual is presented as his ultimate liberation; depriving people of information is called making it available … Because the regime is captive to its own lies, it must falsify everything. It falsifies the past. It falsifies the present, and it falsifies the future. It falsifies statistics. It pretends not to possess an omnipotent and unprincipled police apparatus. It pretends to respect human rights. It pretends to persecute no one. It pretends to fear nothing. It pretends to pretend nothing.[17]

Although acts of pretence were not exceptional and had a great impact on life under the communist regime, Havel's examples are public activities with a political aspect. We can think of many actions in professional and personal life where no direct pretence was needed: daily routines at work (e.g. replenishing supplies of onions and carrots), going on holiday with the family, helping children prepare for the university entrance exam, furnishing a flat with a new bed, etc. Is it right to call the life of people in Czechoslovakia as life within a lie, when the lie is present only in one domain of life? If we look clos-

14 Alexander Solzhenitsyn developed a very similar concept of the lie and its connection to the communist ideology in his text from 1974; Solzhenitsyn, A., "Live Not by Lies", 21 May 2021, https://www.solzhenitsyncenter.org/live-not-by-lies. I want to thank the anonymous reviewer of *Filosofický časopis* for bringing this text to my attention.

15 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", sec. 4.

16 Ibid., sec. 6.

17 Ibid., sec. 4, p. 361.

er at activities in the professional and private spheres, we can see that the lie from the public domain deeply permeates these domains. These professional and private activities were possible only as parts of the overall life within the system, in which actions with important aspects of a lie were necessary. Without placing the slogan, one could not replenish stock as a manager but maybe only as a shop assistant. Without public support for the regime at the managers' meeting, say, it might be difficult, if not impossible, to go on holiday abroad. Without a flawless political profile, the chances of your children being admitted to university are problematic.[18] Without good relations with the caretaker, who is associated with the Communist Party, you might have problems at home. Thus, the nature of the system also permeates many actions that are not subject to straightforward pretence and lying.

Although nearly all actions were necessarily parts of the life in which the lie played a very important role, in order to understand these actions, it is not enough simply to refer to life within a lie. Havel reflects this fact when he describes the multiple motives of the manager and characterises his action as reflecting his "vital interests". By placing the slogan in the window the manager not only takes part in a lie out of fear, but this activity is also part of furthering his career, he follows his plans to go on holiday abroad, keeps his political profile flawless so his children can go to university, etc. These motives reflecting "vital interests" are more dominant in actions where no direct pretence is present. Going on holiday with the family was possible only in the context of the regime and its demands for pretence, but in order to understand this action, aspects of motivation other than the lie and fear must also be foregrounded. In order to understand the preparation for the university entrance exam, attention should be paid not only to the relevance of the political profile but also to other interests of the parents and their children, their interest in doing a job they like, their interest in specific subjects, their career and financial prospects. The importance of the cottage tradition during the period of so-called normalisation was immense. Although going to the cottage on weekends was very beneficial for the regime's stability (citizens cared more about private affairs and less about public and political life), we have to look to other sources of the cottage tradition to understand it more adequately (e.g. "tramping" movement). Thus, there are many layers of life in conformity with the regime, and "living within a lie" captures only one, however influential, of its facets.

In some parts of "The Power of the Powerless", Havel is very much aware of the complexity of life in accord with the communist regime. In section six, he says that the dividing line between the aims of the system and the aims

18 Ibid., sec. 7.

of life cannot be drawn between different social groups, but runs through each person. Therefore, it is not possible to characterise life in accordance with the system as life within a lie, because each life in accordance with the regime is a mixture of coerced pretence and the realisation of "vital interests"; it is characteristic both of a lie and of other more or less independent motives.

However, in most cases, Havel seems to make rough distinctions, and speaks as if there is room only for life within a lie or life within the truth. The nuanced and complex view of life in conformity with the system is replaced by the simplifying tendency only to call it life within a lie. In these places, Havel tends to draw the dividing line between living within a lie and living within the truth differently than before. The division does not run through each person but between different people and groups of people: "There are thousands of nameless people who try to live within the truth and millions who want to but cannot."[19] Life within the truth is sometimes defined negatively as "any means by which a person or group revolts against manipulation".[20] To live within a lie is to succumb to manipulation, to pretend to believe what you do not believe, to place the slogans in your windows. To live within the truth is to resist manipulation, to not pretend you believe what you do not believe, to stop putting up the slogans, and to stop voting in elections that are but a farce.[21]

Havel's emphasis on the binary opposition between people living in accordance with the demands of the system and people resisting the manipulation of the system is understandable in the overall aim of the essay. Havel wants to understand the dissident movement, and one of the most apparent features of dissent is opposition to the demands of the communist regime.[22] These demands touch people with "ideological gloves on",[23] and ideology plays a central role in Havel's analysis of the communist regime. Conforming to the demands of the system thus involves claiming allegiance to the ideology that no one believes in. Because Havel wants to give an account of the dissident movement, it is understandable that life within a lie overshadows the complexities of life in accordance with the system, within which the lie plays a decisive but not exclusive role.[24]

19 Ibid., sec. 13, p. 381.
20 Ibid., sec. 8, p. 370.
21 Ibid., sec. 7.
22 For Havel's discussion of opposition, see Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", sec. 12.
23 Ibid., sec. 4.
24 For a critique of Havel's characterization of dissent by life within a lie and life within the truth, see Rezek, P., "Život disidentův jako 'život v pravdě'?", in *Filosofie a politika kýče*. Praha, Jan Placák – Ztichlá klika 2007, pp. 64–85.

Truth and lie in the underground and in philosophy

However, there is another reason why Havel characterises life in accordance with the system as life within a lie. The formation of the Czech dissident movement was heavily influenced by the Czech underground movement.[25] This was a mainly music-oriented cultural movement, originating in the late 1960s, that stood as an alternative and in opposition to official culture. The trumped-up criminal trial of members of the underground movement (known as The Trial of the Plastic People) led to the formation of the leading dissident initiative Charter 77, and some of the thinking supporting the underground was appropriated and transformed into dissent.

Ivan Martin Jirous, known as "Magor" (this might be translated as "Loony"), was a leading intellectual figure in the Czech underground movement. In his most famous theoretical treatise on the underground, "Report on the Third Czech Musical Revival" (1975), Magor characterised the underground as an effort to "live within the truth"[26] with a radical rejection of any concessions to the establishment.[27] Magor thought that the Devil speaks in disguise as the establishment, and that in order to live within the truth, one has to resist the temptation to make any compromises with consumerist society.[28]

Magor met Havel in 1976 and gave him his "Report", and the meeting of two prominent figures of the underground and dissident movement had a formative influence on further developments in Czechoslovakia.[29] There are several similarities between Magor's thoughts in the "Report" and Havel's thoughts in "The Power of the Powerless". Both members of the underground and members of the dissident movement are characterised as trying to live the truth. Living within the truth is in both cases connected to opposing the demands of seeming authorities. However, there are also differences at first sight. In the case of dissent, authority is represented by the ideology of the communist regime; in the case of the underground, authority is the establishment and consumerist society. According to Magor, the underground is in opposition to the establishment both in the East and, no less importantly, in the West.[30] According to Havel, ideology is specific to the East,[31] and opposition to the communist regime thus has a unique character.

25 For details about the influence of the underground on the dissident movement, see Bolton, J., *Worlds of Dissent*, p. 115ff, and especially pp. 139–143.
26 Jirous, I. M., "Zpráva o třetím českém hudebním obrození", in *Magorův zápisník*, ed. M. Špirit. Praha, Torst 1997, sec. 1.
27 Ibid., sec. 5.
28 Ibid.
29 Bolton, J., *Worlds of Dissent*, p. 135.
30 Jirous, I. M., "Zpráva o třetím českém hudebním obrození", sec. 13.
31 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", secs. 1, 5.

However, "The Power of the Powerless" also contains a different tendency to characterise living within the truth, one that is very similar to Magor's views. On the one hand, Havel characterises the communist regime through a specific ideology, not transferable to the West. On the other hand, he understands the system in Czechoslovakia as being "built on the foundations laid by the historical encounter between dictatorship and the consumer society".[32] Havel makes his understanding of the problem we face even more similar to Magor's, when he sees the problem with the system in the East as an "inflated caricature of modern life in general" and a "kind of warning to the West, revealing to it its own latent tendencies".[33] The specifics of the system in the East, i.e. its specific ideology, is not the real problem. The essential problem of the regime is not at all limited to the East; it is "the crisis of contemporary technological society as a whole".[34]

Havel thus provides two analyses of the problem we face. On the one hand, he emphasises communist ideology. On the other hand, he criticises modern technological and consumerist society as a whole, in which communist ideology has no central role. When ideology is in the foreground, the lie turns out to be a central feature, since pretence is demanded from everyone living in a system controlled by ideology. The concept of a lie and the truth in this context is rather simple and mundane: consciously pretending is a lie, not pretending, i.e. resisting the false demands of the ideology, is truth.[35] When ideology is not in the foreground, the concept of a lie is not so obviously at hand to characterise life within the system.

We have already seen that Magor uses the concept of "living within the truth" as the opposite of life according to the establishment and its consumerist demands. Havel develops a similar concept in "The Power of the Powerless". Besides the influence of the underground, philosophical thinking on the nature of the contemporary crisis and alternatives to it had a major impact on this aspect of Havel's essay. He explicitly relates the idea that "technological society" is at the core of the crisis to the ideas of Martin Heidegger.[36] However, in the Czech dissident movement these thoughts were mainly mediated and developed through the work and lectures of Jan Patočka, a student of Husserl and Heidegger at Freiburg and, together with Havel and Jiří Hájek, one of the first three spokesmen of Charter 77. Havel was heavily in-

32 Ibid., sec. 6, p. 367.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid, sec. 20, p. 403.
35 Ibid., secs. 8, 15. For a critique of this concept of truth and lie within dissent, see Pithart, P., "Dizi-Rizika", in *O svobodě a moci*, by Adolf Müller and Václav Havel, Doba: Vol. 8. Köln – Roma, Index – Listy 1980, sec. 2; Rezek, P., "Život disidentův jako 'život v pravdě'?", pp. 73, 76–79.
36 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", sec. 20.

fluenced by Patočka, and even dedicated "The Power of the Powerless" "to the memory of Jan Patočka", since Patočka's recent death was very much present in the atmosphere of late 1970s.[37]

Patočka's *Heretical Essays* (1975) analyses modern society in terms of technological civilisation and suggests that humankind is under the threat of a complete orientation towards everyday concerns on the one hand and orgiastic and demonic outbursts on the other. Technological civilisation emphasises the satisfaction of the individual's ever-clamouring needs and desires and orients people from the search for the meaning of the world towards constant preoccupation with the everyday. The other threat of technological civilisation is that it changes everything into mere force, which sometimes needs to be unchained on a great scale in order to discharge itself. The greatest release of force occurs during world wars, which change even human beings into mere force that discharges itself in mutual conflict.[38]

Heretical Essays also contains one of the central ideas of Patočka's thought: the concept of the three fundamental movements of human life. From the perspective of this paper, the third and highest movement, the "movement of truth", has major relevance. For Patočka, life within the truth is oriented from the world towards its transcendental source, from manifestation towards Being, which makes every manifestation possible.[39] The movement of truth is thus the opposite of the tendency of technological civilisation, i.e. it is the opposite of the orientation of life towards immersion in the world of everyday things and basic needs.[40]

Although there are important differences between Magor, Patočka and Havel in their respective concepts of living within the truth,[41] they all contrast it with the tendency of technological society. However, unlike Havel, neither Magor nor Patočka use "living within a lie" to characterise life in accordance with the system. For Patočka, the movement of truth is the highest

37 For details of the role of Patočka in dissent and details of his death, see Bolton, J., *Worlds of Dissent*, pp. 143–147, 155–160.

38 Patočka, J., *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Dodd. Chicago, Open Court 1996, chap. 5, "Is Technological Civilization Decadent, and Why?" At the same time, technological civilisation provides, according to Patočka, a great opportunity for humankind by allowing the majority of people to see the depth of the crisis (Patočka, chap. 6, "Wars of the Twentieth Century and the Twentieth Century as War"). This motif is also present in Havel's thinking, but following it would lead us astray from the topic of this paper.

39 Patočka, J., *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, chap. 2.

40 For further discussion of the philosophical influences on "The Power of the Powerless", see Karfíková, L., "Intence života: filosofická východiska Havlovy Moci bezmocných", in Suk, J. – Andělová, K. (eds.), *Jednoho dne se v našem zelináři cos vzbouří: Eseje o Moci bezmocných*. Praha, Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR 2016, pp. 101–107.

41 For the differences between Patočka's and Havel's concept of life within the truth, see Rezek, P., "Život disidentův jako 'život v pravdě'?", pp. 65–71.

of the three fundamental movements of life, the other two being the movement of acceptance and the movement of defence.[42] The movement of truth is always present but is often subordinated to the other two movements.[43] For Patočka, the alternative to living within a truth is not living within a lie, but rather life that has at its centre the movement of acceptance or defence. For Magor, the alternative to the underground and living within the truth is mass culture, consumer society and living according to the demands of the establishment.[44]

There is therefore a double meaning to Havel's concept of living within a lie. The first is developed in reaction to the concept of ideology: living in a lie means deliberately pretending that you believe in the communist ideology, even though no one does. The second is opposition to the authentic life: life within a lie is life seduced by consumption and characterised by a preoccupation with the everyday, and is contrasted with authentic, positive, and responsible life.[45] These two accounts amply complement each other. The characterisation of life in accordance with the system as life structured by pretence captures a pervasive aspect of life under communism, but it oversimplifies the "vital interests" of such a life, as we pointed out in section 3 of this paper. Characterising life in accordance with the system as a surrender to consumption and the everyday pays attention to some of the neglected aspects of the first characterisation but fails to highlight the specifics of life in the East. Although different, these two concepts of life within a lie thus enable Havel to highlight both the general problems of modern society present in both the East and the West (consumerism, technological civilisation) and the specific problems peculiar to the Soviet sphere of influence (communist ideology and pretence).

East and West

In previous sections of this paper, I used "technological society" and "consumerism" as the two main concepts of Havel's characterisation of the crisis present both in the East and in the West. Although these two concepts are prominent in the essay, Havel uses many others to describe the crisis and its causes. He speaks about industrial society,[46] inauthentic life,[47] alienation,[48]

42 Patočka, J., *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, chap. 2, p. 29.
43 Ibid., chap. 2, p. 33.
44 Jirous, I. M., "Zpráva třetím českém hudebním obrození", sec. 5.
45 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", secs. 8, 9, 12, 18.
46 Ibid., sec. 2.
47 Ibid., sec. 6.
48 Ibid., secs. 6–8.

moral crisis and the lack of higher responsibility,[49] manipulation,[50] modern science and modern metaphysics, enslavement, the "coldly functioning machine", and the inability of humanity to master its own situation.[51] Unfortunately, Havel does not go into the details of how exactly these concepts hold together and create one problem, but it is clear that he considers them to be aspects of a single phenomenon.

Havel's most elaborate effort to show the fundamental problem of the East and the West is in section 20. Here, he identifies the core of the crisis as being the manipulation of the people in technological civilisation, so that "modern humanity" is unable "to be the master of its own situation". In the West this manipulation is, according to Havel, "infinitely more subtle and refined than the brutal methods used in the post-totalitarian societies". It is carried out by mass political parties, by the centres of capital, consumption and advertising, and by a flood of information.

In the East the manipulation is similar in terms of consumption. A person living in the East "has been seduced by the consumer value system".[52] Havel is a bit ambiguous as to the source of the consumerist nature of the East. In "The Power of the Powerless" it seems that consumerism precedes the post-totalitarian system and is adopted by it, as it were, from the outside. Consumption is a prerequisite for post-totalitarian society: "[T]he post-totalitarian system has been built on foundations laid by the historical encounter between dictatorship and the consumer society. Is it not true that the far-reaching adaptability to living a lie and the effortless spread of social auto-totality have some connection with the general unwillingness of consumption-oriented people to sacrifice some material certainties for the sake of their own spiritual and moral integrity? With their willingness to surrender higher values when faced with the trivializing temptations of modern civilization?"[53]

On the other hand, there is a tendency to see consumerism as an effect of the specific nature of the communist regime. In his open letter to President Husák in 1975, Havel speaks about the cause of people's turning away from the public sphere into the refuge of the private domain and into consumption behaviour. The cause of this turn is closely connected to historical developments in Czechoslovakia. The cause of consumerist behaviour is a loss of faith in the future, in the possibility of a rectification of public affairs. This loss of faith is in turn the consequence of the invasion of Czechoslovakia by

49 Ibid., sec. 9.
50 Ibid., secs. 15, 20.
51 Ibid., sec. 20.
52 Ibid., sec. 9.
53 Ibid., sec. 6, p. 367.

Warsaw Pact troops in 1968 and the subsequent "normalisation" era of the political system, in which the leaders did not want the people to interfere in public affairs.[54]

Apart from consumerism, Havel places great emphasis on the role of communist ideology in the manipulation of the people in the East, as we have seen in section 2 of this paper. In the East, this manipulation thus has two major forms: one is manipulation by the consumerism of technological civilisation; the other is ideological demands for pretence. These two forms are connected: ideological demands can be effective either because the people are ready not to engage in politics in order to secure consumerist well-being or because the demands of ideological pretence make people resort to the private sphere and consumerism. We will consider this double role of consumerism in the final section of this paper.

What is the relationship between manipulation in the East and manipulation in the West? Sometimes it seems as if Havel thinks that the problems of the East and the West are only seemingly specific but are in fact shared. He claims sometimes that the specific problems of the East are but intensified problems of a general kind. He sees the communist regime as "merely an extreme version of the global automatism of technological civilization".[55] However, instead of shoving in some details that the problems of the East are actually only extreme versions of the general problems of our era, Havel spares no effort in picturing the problems as resulting from the specific political situation of the East. These problems are, as we saw in section 2, connected to the communist ideology and its unique role in the system. How can the demands for ideological pretence be understood without these specifics?

There may be a similar difficulty with the problems of the West. From the list provided by Havel in section 20 of "The Power of the Powerless", only one kind of problem is explicitly shared by the West and the East: consumerism. What about other problems in the West? For example, there is the "flood of information", a problem we experience even more intensively today. This problem was unique to the West and not present in the East, where information was very strictly regulated. Can we understand this problem if we concentrate on the problem common to the East and the West?

Havel's analysis of the relationship between the problems of the East and the problems of the West is not always that these are only variants of the same problem of manipulation. In some passages it seems that some prob-

54 Havel, V., "Dopis Gustávu Husákovi" (Open Letter to Gustáv Husák), p. 4. For further information about this topic, see Suk, J., *Politika Jako absurdní drama*, pp. 30–31.

55 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", sec. 20, p. 404.

lems of the East and the West are not shared, that there are actually problems specific to the East and specific to the West, but that these specific problems are not the most serious ones. By solving specific problems one does not solve the gravest problems of our societies. In this context Havel writes that if it were possible to create "democracy in some countries of the Soviet bloc …, it might be an appropriate transitional solution", but it would be "at the very least short-sighted" to set "traditional parliamentary democracy as one's political ideal".[56] The return of traditional democracy might be helpful but "would provide no permanent solution to the most important problems".[57]

The most serious problems are found in either variant of the relationship shared by the East and the West. These consist in living an inauthentic, alienated life in consumer society, which is not limited to a specific political system. To solve these problems, it is therefore necessary not to think in traditional political terms, because any abstract political programme can easily degenerate into "new forms of human enslavement".[58] Solving the gravest problem in the East is not possible by a change of politics in the traditional way; this would be "utterly inadequate": "For some time now, the problem has no longer resided in a political line or program."[59] Therefore, Havel's proposed solution to the most important problem is not based on a political programme of the traditional kind. Instead, there have to be "profound existential and moral changes in society", which consist in "the fundamental reconstitution of the position of people in the world, their relationships to themselves and to each other, and to the universe".[60] Only after this existential change occurs, or at best along with it, might some political consequences be drawn, not vice versa: The "approach, in which people are first organized in one way or another … so they may then allegedly be liberated, is something we have known on our own skins only too well".[61]

The real solution to the crisis cannot be sought in a "revolution that is merely philosophical, merely social, merely technological, or even merely political".[62] The priority of existential revolution over any political solution of the problem gives rise to Havel's unwillingness to think about the political organisation of society in advance. We shall think about political solutions

56 Ibid., sec. 20, pp. 404–405.
57 Ibid., sec. 11, p. 377.
58 Ibid., p. 376.
59 Ibid., sec. 16, p. 387.
60 Ibid., sec. 11, p. 377.
61 Ibid., sec. 16, p. 388.
62 Ibid., sec. 20, p. 403.

only in a particular situation, when we face the specific task: "It would be presumptuous, however, to try to foresee the structural expressions of this new spirit without that spirit actually being present and without knowing its concrete physiognomy."[63]

Conclusion

Václav Havel starts his analysis of the dissident movement and the communist regime by pointing out their specific features. He speaks about dissent as the "inevitable consequence of the present historical phase of the system",[64] and he distinguishes the communist regime from other dictatorships as a post-totalitarian system.[65] At the end of his essay, Havel connects his analysis of communism and dissent with the crisis of technological civilisation in general, and with its alternative. He explicitly places demands of generality on his analysis,[66] and he thinks about the dissident movement as a "rudimentary prefiguration", as a "model" for the general solution of the crisis,[67] a crisis not specific to the East but one affecting the technological civilization present throughout the world.[68]

Following this change in understanding of the crisis, Havel develops the two concepts of a lie. Most of his essay is dedicated to an analysis of the communist regime, in which ideology plays a central role, and in this context, the meaning of a lie is a conscious pretence. Havel develops the other meaning of a lie together with his adoption of some of the thoughts of the underground movement and phenomenological philosophy. According to this analysis, the problem is technological civilisation and its consumerist ideals, and it is thus not limited to the East but is present all over the world. A lie in this context means to orient oneself to the everyday in opposition to an orientation to the meaning of the world; to live within a lie is to immerse oneself in the world of things, to sink into consumerism.

The relationship between these two concepts of a lie is not clear. Sometimes it seems that Havel thinks that the first meaning is but a radical version of the second one, that pretence is a variant of sinking into consumer-

63 Ibid., sec. 21, p. 407. Compare also sec. 19.
64 Ibid., sec. 1, p. 355.
65 Ibid., sec. 2.
66 Ibid., sec. 18.
67 Ibid., secs. 21–22.
68 However, Havel connects the East and the West from the beginning of his essay, e.g. in section 2, Havel says that the Soviet sphere of influence "is simply another form of the consumer and industrial society". Nevertheless, in the beginning his emphasis is on the specific features of the East, mainly on ideology.

ism. However, it is not clear from Havel's essay how to understand ideological pretence in terms of consumerism. The other way in which Havel understands their relationship is that ideological pretence is a specific, but not the most important, problem of the East. The most important problem is the second concept of a lie, a problem common to both the East and the West. We should therefore concentrate on the second problem instead of on the first, that is, we should concentrate on the problem of consumerist and technological society. According to Havel, this problem does not have a political solution. The way to deal with it is through existential and moral revolution; a political solution must at best accompany this more fundamental change and not structure it or precede it.

In conclusion, I want to formulate three questions with respect to Havel's scepticism towards political solutions. First, from the perspective of his scepticism, it is not clear how one should deal with the first concept of a lie, pretence arising from the demands of the ideologically driven communist regime. Havel pictures in great detail how devastating the necessity to lie is to the society and to individuals under the communist regime. Is it not worth the effort to try to politically change the regime so that ideological pretence is no longer central to the lives of the people? Such political change does not solve all the problems of the society. Is it so marginal that we should not concentrate on political solutions to this problem?

Second, can we be sure that the problems of consumerism have no political solution? In section 5 of this paper I noted that, in his earlier text, the open letter to President Husák, Havel suggests that consumerism arises from specific developments in Czechoslovakia. The occupation of Czechoslovakia and the subsequent "normalisation" period had the effect that people resigned from caring for public affairs and concentrated instead on their private lives. What arguments does Havel have to show that political measures cannot help to solve the alienation of the people and their sinking into consumerism, if political measures probably gave rise to this problem or at least intensified it?

Third, Havel was the single most influential figure during the Velvet Revolution of 1989. As Jiří Suk meticulously shows in his book *Into the Labyrinth of Revolution*, Havel's thinking had great impact on the transitional period in Czechoslovakia.[69] As we have seen, Havel was sceptical about the possibility of thinking about politics in advance. Even at the very end of "The Power of the Powerless", when he dares to draw some "political consequences" from his analysis of society, his "political" suggestions are far-fetched. He does not

69 Suk, J., *Labyrintem revoluce: aktéři, zápletky a křižovatky jedné politické krize: (Od listopadu 1989 do června 1990)*, Obzor: Vol. 50. Praha, Prostor 2003.

elaborate on the system of political parties, the organisation of the economy, the position of public broadcasting, etc. Instead, he pictures the ideal society as an extension of small, informal dissident groups, which will come into existence and dissolve according to actual need, and which will be held together by shared feelings and not by any formal rules, organised around a leader's authority without a set position.[70] It is clear that Havel initiated and materialised many of the most important changes in Czechoslovakia. Could he have been better prepared for this position had he made more room for traditional political thinking?[71]

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70 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", secs. 21–22. For a critical discussion of the idealisation of dissident structures, see Pithart, P., "Dizi-Rizika", sec. 3; for a critique of the generalisation of the dissident experience, see Suk, J., *Politika jako absurdní drama*, p. 12. Cf. the famous dissident concept of the parallel polis, in Benda, V., "Paralelní polis", in *O svobodě a moci*, by Adolf Müller and Václav Havel, Doba: Vol. 8. Köln – Roma, Index – Listy 1980, pp. 101–129.

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Orcid: 0000-0001-8071-8618

Among the Onions and Carrots

The "dissident" and the countersignature of post-totalitarianism

Niklas Forsberg
Centre for Ethics as Study in Human Value
Department of Philosophy, University of Pardubice
niklas.forsberg@upce.cz

Abstract:
This paper explores the notion of "power" prevalent in Václav Havel's understanding of the post-totalitarian regime. With this notion of power, which is "seeping" in nature, rather than rooted solely in an individual agent's actions, the role of the individual in the formation of the political "we" becomes a central issue. The starting point is Havel's well-known example of "the greengrocer," that illustrate how Havel pictures the way out of the post-totalitarian regime as one in which individuals move from *living a lie* to *living in truth*. I show how Havel's talk about truth and authenticity, and his emphasis on a life in truth (which may appear judgemental, naive and cliché-like) is best understood. The wrong way to understand this is simply to say that people who merely obeyed that government, as the greengrocer did, are to be held accountable because they did not put up a fight against their oppressor. Such an understanding goes wrong because it fails to take into account the complexity of the relationship between power and language. In contrast to this, I argue that the central issue here is not that particular agents are to be held responsible for countersigning messages that they think are false. More precisely, I argue that the moral difficulty here is that the greengrocer's deeds, which appear as countersignatures of the regime, are possible because the messages conveyed are "innocent" on the surface, in a "literal" sense. The moral dimension of the greengrocer's actions, aiming to shed light on the complex relation between the government and the individual, is revealed as located in a field of tension between inherited sense and new projections. This, in turn, can help us to see the real nature of the transition Havel's grocer undergoes when he moves from *living a lie* to *living in truth*. It is not a matter of negating a false statement or utterance, nor of replacing it with a true one. It is a matter of realising that the responsibility for meaning is, ultimately, ours – and that the way in which he, the grocer, is one of us is something that has to be earned.

Keywords: Havel, meaning, power/knowledge, ideology, truth, authenticity

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The seeping power

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, and after Foucault (who serves at least as a name for this discovery), it is very easy to see that one of the most dangerous forms of political power is not the power of the "royal" intervention, where a strong and brutal man acts and then retreats to the comfort of his fortress, but rather the forms of pressure that do not feel like pressure, the forms of intervention that do not look like interventions, that is, power that is seeping. Systems can be just as powerful and frightening as dictators.

Václav Havel's essay "The Power of the Powerless" is a document that testifies to the importance of this recognition.[1] As far as I know, Havel had not read Foucault by the time he wrote "The Power of the Powerless". We know, of course (for example, through the works of Jan Patočka), that classic phenomenology (such as Husserl and Heidegger) and early existentialist thinking (such as Sartre) were known, studied and discussed, and we also know that Havel had read some Levinas (since he mentions his work in letters to his brother during the time he was imprisoned in the 1980s). But, to my knowledge, Foucault was not read, and his texts were not translated into Czech at that point, which means that he was not widely read and discussed. That, however, makes the Foucauldian point even stronger. Havel is not applying a theoretical model he has been taught. He is merely describing something that is real, that is there and in plain view. "The Power of the Powerless" is not an illustration of a theory. It is a picture of the world. It is, of course, a picture of a world that is no more, and which had its very special contexts. But it is still, in a very important sense, our world. What it is a picture of is much more than what it meant to disagree with communism. It is a picture of how power works, of politics, of language, and of how communality is formed, threatened and lost – and sometimes also regained.

The notion of a seeping kind of power comes into view immediately in the text and is integral to Havel's understanding of the distinctive features of a post-totalitarian political system. In contrast to a more "traditional" dictatorship, based on "unadulterated, brutal, and arbitrary application of power",[2] where power is clearly visible since it is based on a "small group of people

1 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless". *East European Politics and Societies*, 32, 2018, No. 2, p. 353–408, doi: 10.1177/0888325418766625; Cf. Falk, B. J., "The Power of the Powerless and Václav Havel's 'Responsibilityism'". *East European Politics and Societies*, 32, 2018, No. 2, pp. 328–333, doi: 10.1177/0888325417745130; Foucault, M., *On the Punitive Society: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1972–1973*, ed. B. E. Harcourt, trans. G. Burchell. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan 2015, p. 228; Lukes, S. M., "Guilt-Tripping the Greengrocer". *East European Politics and Societies*, 32, 2018, No. 2, pp. 294–300, doi: 10.1177/0888325417745132.

2 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", p. 356.

who take over the government of a given country by force";[3] and where the instruments of power are visible and direct; and the men in power are "easily distinguished socially from the majority over whom they rule";[4] the communist regime of post-war Czechoslovakia has a much more complex power structure. Thus, he calls it "post-totalitarian". Power is not local, and there are a great number of people who can be held to be responsible. In fact, the responsibility of upholding the system is everyone's, and it is everywhere. It is no one's. It is nowhere. "[I]ndividuals confirm the system, fulfill the system, make the system, *are* the system."[5]

We easily associate political freedom with the freedom to act and to respond. Thus, the political notion of freedom, just like the predominant notion of morality, is locked into a scheme in which the defining poles are action and accountability. Someone does something. The others judge. But what happens to the notion of freedom if there is no acting subject, or if all subjects are responsible? Who should be blamed? Who praised? What is there to judge? What is the place, role and responsibility of the individual? What is the right inflection of the concept of responsibility here?

The answer to these questions is to be found among the onions and carrots:

> The manager of a fruit-and-vegetable shop places in his window, among the onions and carrots, the slogan: "Workers of the world, unite!" Why does he do it? What is he trying to communicate to the world? Is he genuinely enthusiastic about the idea of unity among the workers of the world? Is his enthusiasm so great that he feels an irrepressible impulse to acquaint the public with his ideals? Has he really given more than a moment's thought to how such a unification might occur and what it would mean?[6]

The example of the greengrocer is one that Havel returns to on several occasions throughout the essay. And this is not accidental. The centrality of Havel's greengrocer, and the sign placed among the onions and carrots, is the exact image of how power is produced and the system upheld, and of the people of the post-totalitarian state, both responsible and innocent. I think it is fair to assume that we all understand that the greengrocer partakes in

3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid., p. 361.
6 Ibid., p. 359. The famous slogan "Workers of the world, unite!" is obviously the famous closing sentence from *The Communist Manifesto*. See Marx, K. – Engels, F., *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 and the Communist Manifesto*, trans. M. Milligan. Amherst, Prometheus 1988, p. 243.

spreading the ideology of the post-totalitarian government. It is equally clear that the greengrocer himself knows that, at least on some level, and that he does not agree with the message he conveys. So why does he do it?

Well, the first answer that may come to mind is that he does it out of fear, and there is probably something to that. But I think this is far too simplistic an answer to really help us. Later on in the essay, Havel expands the example and asks us to imagine "that one day something in our greengrocer snaps and he stops putting up the slogans merely to ingratiate himself".[7] He also pictures the greengrocer as no longer partaking in sham elections and beginning to speak his mind at political meetings.[8] As Havel notes, "The bill is not long in coming. He will be relieved of his post as manager of the shop and transferred to the warehouse. His pay will be reduced. His hopes for a holiday in Bulgaria will evaporate. His children's access to higher education will be threatened. His superiors will harass him and his fellow workers will wonder about him."[9] So he would be punished. So he certainly has some very good reasons to fear retribution. But is that why he does not do it? Is the fear of retribution the *full* answer to the question of why he keeps the sign in his window?

No. That answer does not at all account for what we might call the automatism of the signposting. The idea that that the greengrocer puts up the sign merely out of fear (or lack of moral integrity) makes it look as if the problem is one of dictatorship (and not post-totalitarianism) – there is a limited group of people that demand that you countersign their message, and if you don't, brute force will be knocking on your door. In a dictatorship, in contrast to a post-totalitarian government, the posting of the sign would have been forced, and the content of the message would have been crystal clear, not up for grabs. In a dictatorship, where force and the threat of violence is immanent at all times, it is given, a starting point, that the message is false, or not at all the shopkeeper's. In a dictatorship, the greengrocer would put up *any* message, and the public would know that he has put up that sign in order to spare a finger, avoid a year in prison, save the lives of his children. He does it to avoid the infliction of pain. But in the case of Havel's Czechoslovak greengrocer, the system depends on a rather strange form of countersignature. He does not put up a sign with a message he disagrees with in any obvious straightforward manner, and the people passing by don't know what the shopkeeper's thoughts about the sign are. There is no "Do this, or else…" But there is a "This is simply what we do."

7 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", p. 367.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.

I feel inclined to say that the differences between Havel's shopkeeper and my imagined dictatorship counterpart are blurred if we think of both of these scenarios as "a lie uttered, or posted, as a response to threat". The personal relationship to the words uttered, or posted, are far from on a par here. Thus, the structures of intentionality (and hence of responsibility) look different. So it is not a matter of truth vs. lie, or threat vs. non threat. It is a matter of *meaning it*. And I think we need to make these things clear in order to understand another fundamental distinction that Havel draws – between "living a lie" and "living in truth".[10]

My impression is that this distinction (between living a lie and living in truth) runs the risk of distorting Havel's actual point, for it makes it seem as if there is a simple fact of the matter (rulers lie) that can be combated by the really brave and strong (who expose the lie and tell the truth). And this makes it seem as if the presence of the communist regime was due to people being afraid to speak the truth. This is still too much phrased in the action/reaction model of the moral and political. Somewhat paradoxically, perhaps, one might say that one misunderstands the distinction between living a lie and living in truth if one thinks about this as a question of truth vs. lie. It is not the meaning (itself) that is at stake; it is the *meaning it*.

So let us think a little bit more about our shopkeeper and try to see what "meaning it" is and is not, and how that can help us attain an understanding of "living a lie" and "living in truth" in a way that goes beyond the simplified notion of true/false that is so intimately intertwined with the action/responsibility model. We need to find ways to see how "meaning it" is tied more to "living" than to facts and semantic content. We need to find this, in order to really see how "power" cannot (at least not in this case) be reduced to intentional action, or to the mere use of an already established semantic content.

A matter of meaning it

So how do we cash out "meaning it" in relation to "living in truth" and "living a lie" if not in terms of lying by saying something with an established meaning while thinking (privately, secretly) that it is not true? Answering that question must go via finding the right kind of emphasis on the *living*. Words and sentences are not just things we say. They are lived, and not merely uttered. One aspect of how a phrase such as "Workers of the world, unite!" may be lived (and not just said) is that it is employed with a form of automatism. Speech and expression can be lived as being habitual. We might mean it "habitually" (as in contrast to, perhaps, "wholeheartedly"). For somebody well

10 Ibid., pp. 367–369.

versed in Merleau-Ponty, one may say that this is the distinction between "utterance" and "expression".[11] Our grocer is speaking, but is not expressing himself.

> I think it can safely be assumed that the overwhelming majority of shopkeepers never think about the slogans they put in their windows, nor do they use them to express their real opinions. That poster was delivered to our greengrocer from the enterprise headquarters along with the onions and carrots. He put them all into the window simply because it has been done that way for years, because everyone does it, and because that is the way it has to be. If he were to refuse, there could be trouble. He could be reproached for not having the proper decoration in his window; someone might even accuse him of disloyalty. He does it because these things must be done if one is to get along in life. It is one of the thousands of details that guarantee him a relatively tranquil life "in harmony with society," as they say.[12]

There is a delivery coming, and he puts all of the goods – the carrots, the onions, the sign from the bureau – in the window. Like he has always done. Like the owner of the neighboring store does. We may say that he does this thoughtlessly, but it doesn't really make sense to think of the arrangement of the shop window as done either intentionally or *un*intentionally. (This is one example where philosophers sometimes go wrong believing that if an action was not done intentionally, it must have been done unintentionally – as if all terms must be understood as open to an "either/or". The problem here is a diminished understanding of what performing an action is.[13]) The sign is just as familiar and everyday as onions and carrots are. Yes, there is a threat of being reproached if he doesn't do it. But, as it is here portrayed, the reason why he does place the sign in his window it is not that he is forced to do it. I also think it would be wrong to say that "he does it because he wants to be in harmony with society", because even that ascribes too much intentionality to the act. Rather, he does it because he *is* in harmony with society.

11 Merleau-Ponty, M., *The Prose of the World*, ed. C. Lefort, trans. J. O'Neill. Evanston, Northwestern University Press 1973. See especially Chapter 2.

12 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", p. 359.

13 Stanley Cavell describes this erroneous conception well when he says, "The philosopher who asks about everything we do, 'Voluntary or not?' has a poor view of action (as the philosopher who asks of everything we say, 'True or false?' or 'Analytic or synthetic?' has a poor view of communication), in something like the way a man who asks the cook about every piece of food, "Was it cut or not?" has a poor view of preparing food." Cavell, S., "Must We Mean What We Say?", in *Must We Mean What We Say?: A Book of Essays*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1976, p. 36.

The difference between "wanting to be in harmony with society" and "being in harmony with society" can be spelled out as the difference between *conformism* and *communality*. "Conformism" suggests that he acts with the intention to fit in. "Communality" suggests that he does fit it. This is also one of the reasons why Havel has such strong reservations about the word "ideology". In the post-totalitarian state, power does not work by forcing a culture's inhabitants to countersign the doctrines of the system. They *are* the system.

Another way in which the employment of the phrase "Workers of the world, unite!" – as used by Havel's grocer – is not an expression that is being countersigned by being used, comes into view if we try to unpack the various ways in which the sentence may be said to mean.

> Obviously the greengrocer is indifferent to the semantic content of the slogan on exhibit; he does not put the slogan in his window from any personal desire to acquaint the public with the ideal it expresses. This, of course, does not mean that his action has no motive or significance at all, or that the slogan communicates nothing to anyone. The slogan is really a *sign*, and as such it contains a subliminal but very definite message. Verbally, it might be expressed this way: "I, the greengrocer XY, live here and I know what I must do. I behave in the manner expected of me. I can be depended upon and am beyond reproach. I am obedient and therefore I have the right to be left in peace." This message, of course, has an addressee: it is directed above, to the greengrocer's superior, and at the same time it is a shield that protects the greengrocer from potential informers. The slogan's real meaning, therefore, is rooted firmly in the greengrocer's existence. It reflects his vital interests. But what are those vital interests?[14]

Here, Havel claims that the grocer says he is *indifferent* to the semantic content of the poster. I don't think that this is the best way to spell out the grocer's relation to what we may call (though not without some hesitation) "the semantic content" of the sign, and, as we will see in a little while, Havel himself will help us see why this formulation is too simplistic.[15]

What "indifference" is supposed to mean in this passage is that the grocer does not have a "personal desire to acquaint the public with the ideal it expresses". And that is probably true. The grocer does not think that he has

14 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", p. 359.

15 This means that it is too simplistic to say that Havel's talk about living in truth can be summarised as "Responsibility innately involves a rejection of what is ideologically prescribed or proscribed." Falk, B. J., "The Power of the Powerless and Václav Havel's 'Responsibilityism'", p. 329.

a message, that he has countersigned, that he wants to inform the people passing by about. But, in what sense does that explicate, or even describe, what "the semantic content" of the slogan is? Put otherwise, one does not necessarily have to *disagree* with the thought that workers, or all proletarians, of the world should unite, in order to hesitate to be uncomfortable about displaying the power's poster. In fact, I want to suggest that it is precisely the semantic content of the slogan that makes it bearable for the grocer to post it without much thought or much hesitation. It is precisely the semantic content that makes it possible for the grocer to *live* the lie. I mean, why shouldn't all the workers of the world, who are exploited by a ruthless capitalist logic, join forces?

As we follow this paragraph through, Havel makes a distinction by spelling out something like the "connotative logic" of "Workers of the logic, unite!"

First, we have the sentence itself, the slogan.

> "Workers of the world, unite!"

But then he goes on to say that "as such it contains a subliminal but very definite message", namely:

> "I, the greengrocer XY, live here and I know what I must do. I behave in the manner expected of me. I can be depended upon and am beyond reproach. I am obedient and therefore I have the right to be left in peace."

What we need to really take note of here is the "as such" in the phrase "*as such* it contains a subliminal but very definite message". The "as such" places the phrase in a very special context – the context of the post-totalitarian regime.

Thus, there is in fact a double countersignature here. On the one hand, the grocer can countersign what we may call "the semantic content", that is, the idea that people in need, or people who are being used, people whose work primarily feeds someone else's pockets, should join forces. On the other hand, being a grocer in a post-totalitarian regime *means* being someone whose belonging to a community depends on partaking in the charade. But partaking in the charade does not mean endorsing it. If there is an intentional level here, it is that of not wanting to be shouldered out, of wanting to be left in peace, of actually being a man who sells onions and carrots, of actually being a greengrocer.[16]

16 This means that I think Falk is right to stress that Havel claims that the greengrocer is "indifferent to the semantic content of the slogan" (Ibid.) but wrong to conclude that "the ideological nature of the slogan helps to conceal his obsequiousness. Ideology helps negate any sense of

But, what are we now to make of the idea of his living a lie? I mean, if there is a dual, though not necessarily intentional, countersignature, where is the deception?

> Let us take note: if the greengrocer had been instructed to display the slogan "I am afraid and therefore unquestioningly obedient"; he would not be nearly as indifferent to its semantics, even though the statement would reflect the truth. The greengrocer would be embarrassed and ashamed to put such an unequivocal statement of his own degradation in the shop window, and quite naturally so, for he is a human being and thus has a sense of his own dignity.[17]

Thus, the first answer to the question about where the deception lies is to be found precisely in what we may call "the semantic content". Havel continues:

> To overcome this complication, his expression of loyalty must take the form of a sign which, at least on its textual surface, indicates a level of disinterested conviction. It must allow the greengrocer to say, "What's wrong with the workers of the world uniting?" Thus the sign helps the greengrocer to conceal from himself the low foundations of his obedience, at the same time concealing the low foundations of power. It hides them behind the façade of something high. And that something is ideology.[18]

I want to call this "the pressure of the literal" meaning to suggest that the idea of a literal meaning sometimes pushes us into confusion.[19] Of course, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with workers of the world uniting, and one does not need to be a radical leftist to think so. It is precisely because of the fact that this is a thought one might very well countersign that the ideological commitments are obscured from view. The way in which our grocer is living a lie is that he has handed over the responsibility to mean to language itself. He is, as it were, hiding behind the benign "literal" meaning of the phrase. The words are, one may say, mentioned but not lived. The lie is precisely rooted in the living, and not in the lie. The lie comes about because

personal responsibility." Ibid. As I understand it, it is precisely the idea of "semantic content" that makes it possible for the greengrocer to avoid feeling engaged in an ideological connotative logic.

17 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", p. 359.

18 Ibid.

19 This thought is further developed and discussed in Forsberg, N., *Lectures on a Philosophy Less Ordinary: Language and Morality in J. L. Austin's Philosophy*. New York, Routledge 2022.

one *can* trust language to carry enough meaning on its own, and one does not have to own one's utterances, to live in and through them. And he can do that because we *must* be able to do so. The emphasis on language as lived, or on the importance of expression over utterance (to echo Merleau-Ponty), does not mean that language is not an inheritance, and that the meanings handed down to us can be circumvented.

Let me take a banal example, even though I know that the parallel line of thought is not an analogy. Think of it as an object of comparison, aiming to shed light on how the idea of literal meaning may seem as obvious to us as formal forms of reasoning. Suppose I say, as I have been told, that SJ (a company formerly known as Swedish Rail, but now privatised) actually did state, in trying to attend to public relations, that "A cancelled train is not a train running late." This comment was made as a sort of response to the accusation that SJ was not honest in their statistics of how many trains were on time and how many arrived too late. In order to make the numbers look better, they came up with the rule that if a train had not started its journey by X number of minutes after its scheduled departure, it was to be cancelled altogether. And, as it turns out, there were quite a few trains that were cancelled. But the statistics started to look much better! Trains were on time – the few that were running, that is.

Clearly, there is a form of belief that literal meaning functions as forming an excuse of sorts here. This is what these words mean! Literal sense, literal sentence-meaning, may be felt as a force in itself that exercises formal pressure on us and our thinking. For it may seem tempting to say, "Yes, of course, in one sense you are right – a cancelled train is not the same as a train that is running late." The expectation of a literal meaning may indeed seem as pervasive as formal syllogisms do: "Yes of course, if all women are mortal, and if Xantippa is a woman, then Xantippa is mortal."

But what happened here, and what we must learn to pierce through, is that one power source in our house of being (in this case, SJ) has rejected its own responsibility to mean – denied its own linguistic vulnerability, if you wish – and handed over the responsibility to mean (I am inclined to say "tried to hand over", thus meaning to imply that deep down they did not succeed) to language itself, to a meaning-structure external to all human endeavours (doings, wantings, desires, wishes, hopes, etc.) that supposedly guides and controls these activities.

Of course, it is reasonable to assume that even the good people at SJ suspected that their audience would look at their literal excuses as unfair twists and turns of a shared language. But it is nevertheless true that the PR people of SJ also assumed that deep down, undoubtedly unconsciously, most people do think that literal sense is original sense. To rely on literal sense is also

a way to refrain from taking responsibility for one's words, one's wordings, one's effort to be part of a community. But we should not go so far as to say that there is no sense at all to the idea of literal sentence meaning. We feel the pressure of it quite often. Thousands of jokes (and bad puns in conversations) depend on our recognising that.

But the pressure of the literal is a strong one. And it must be. Imagine, for example, that someone attempted to sue Swedish Rail/SJ for not providing a refund because he or she did not reach their desired destination in time. But if it says in in the fine print of the travel documents, which the poor passenger agreed to when he or she made the purchase, that he or she will get a refund if the train was delayed by more than X minutes but says nothing about trains that are cancelled, this would be an open-and-shut case.

I take it, however, that most of us would say that SJ is still to be held responsible, and that no reputable company should treat its customers that way. That is, we would say that they are morally wrong. What we cannot say is that they broke the law. And that is, in its own way, perhaps frustrating. But that is what moral life often is like. We *want* something outside us, something external, to rely on when we fall short. In one sense (and I really mean *one* sense, so I do not mean this to be exhaustive, though I do think this sense is very important) morality *is* exactly an effect of our being caught between inherited sense (the sense handed down to us, the lexical "definitions", the "law of language", if you wish), on the one hand, and the fluctuating, muddled, tangible, stretches and twists and turns that our lived language harbours, on the other.

On truth, lie and non-political politics

This description of morality as existing in a field of tension between inherited sense and new projections can help us see the transition Havel's grocer undergoes when he moves from "living a lie" to "living in truth". It is not a matter of negating a false statement or utterance, and replacing it with a true one. It is a matter of realising that the responsibility for meaning is, ultimately, ours, and that the way in which he, the grocer, is one of us also is something that has to be earned. This is, so far as I can see, one of the most important effects of Stanley Cavell's recognition that "Grammar cannot, or ought not, of itself dictate what you mean, what it is up to you to say."[20] It would be mistaken to think that this means that linguistic sense is a free-floating subjective matter. It obviously is not, and thinking about this in terms of our existing in a field

20 Cavell, S., "The Politics of Interpretation (Politics as Opposed to What?)", in *Themes out of School: Effects and Causes*. San Francisco, North Point Press 1984, p. 45.

of tension between inherited sense and new projections helps us see why. The point is rather that inherited sense can always be altered (but not on a whim), and that we are just as responsible for the effects of our words as we are for their "literal" meaning. The "lie" in question here is thus not a matter of expressing false belief but of shunning the consequences, of pretending that there are no effects and causes of words put to work.

Thus, "living a lie" is a matter of the grocer's externalising sense: since "Workers of the world, unite!" just means "Workers of the world, unite!" no harm can be done in posting it. And realising that something might be wrong here is not to realise that it was, after all, false that the oppressed might do well to join forces. "Living in truth" does not mean rejecting the slogan, and replacing it with another, but rather starting to move away from a reliance on inherited sense and taking responsibility for the effects of one's utterances. The recognition of this point also serves to lessen the appeal of the accusation that Havel is judgemental, that he is "morally wrong in that he blames the most vulnerable".[21] Thinking that Havel blames the morally weak is a thought that is rooted in the idea that the citizen of a post-totalitarian regime is a person who endorses a view that he or she *knows* to be false, but endorses it nevertheless out of fear of retribution or lack of moral standing. But this is not the case here. Havel is describing how we "support" the system by saying something that is harmless, or maybe even true, with no other intention than to actually be a greengrocer. What Havel shows is that subordination to the system is not a matter of supporting falsehoods that one wouldn't support if one was brave enough. Havel's image of how individuals "are the system"[22] is not the image of weak people who would speak up if they only had the courage, or would speak the truth if they had the financial and moral resources to do so; it is the image of a system that feeds on the fact that we all belong to a linguistic community, where the possibility of handing over the meaning of our words to language itself is always present.

To make this schematic:

> "Living a lie" *means* handing over the responsibility to mean to language as a system of established meanings. This is what sustains ideology.[23]

> "Living in truth" *means* making language one's own, making it owned. Taking responsibility for what one means to say. This is a moral effort.

21 Ost, D., "The Sham, and the Damage, of 'Living in Truth'". *East European Politics and Societies*, 32, 2018, No. 2, p. 302, doi: 10.1177/0888325417747971.
22 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", p. 361.
23 Ibid., p. 359.

This way of understanding the movement from living a lie to living in truth also helps us see that the core thought of the whole movement of Charter 77, and indeed what motivates the use of quotation marks around the word "dissident". One "ideology" is not to be replaced by another. One thought is not to be replaced with another. Or, to put it somewhat provocatively, the point is to see that "Workers of the world, unite!" should be replaced with "Workers of the world, unite!" The sense must be transformed to truly be inherited. External decree should not be replaced with an external decree.

> A genuine, profound, and lasting change for the better (…) can no longer result from the victory (were such a victory possible) of any particular traditional political conception, which can ultimately be only external, that is, a structural or systemic conception. More than ever before, such a change will have to derive from human existence, from the fundamental reconstitution of the position of people in the world, their relationships to themselves and to each other, and to the universe. If a better economic and political model is to be created, then perhaps more than ever before it must derive from profound existential and moral changes in society. This is not something that can be designed and introduced like a new car. If it is to be more than just a new variation of the old degeneration, it must above all be an expression of life in the process of transforming itself.[24]

It is because the change required – required because the form of the power structure they are dissenting from is seeping, no one's and everyone's – is a transformation from externalised to lived, from political to moral *in contrast to* from false to true; it is because "real political force is due exclusively to its pre-political context",[25] that Charter 77 "offers no new conception, model or ideology".[26]

Ideology is an effort to transmit a determinate content, to dictate what the central doctrines are (although this certainly can be done in manifold ways, some slightly less explicit than others). In traditional politics, ideologies are in conflict. But these conflicts are apparent, visible to everyone. Two opposing thoughts stand against one another. What Havel has seen, though, is that at a very important level, "the political" (understood as competing options, different ideologies) is something that is secondary to a more fundamental level: living. The existential aspect of Havel's non-political politics

24 Ibid., p. 376ff.
25 Ibid., p. 386.
26 Ibid., p. 387.

can thus be described as the effort to earn one's language, which is not something one achieves by simply endorsing or rejecting a doctrine or an ideology; that kind of countersignature is derivative, and if one does not see that it is so, it is a lie. Given that this "sphere" is non-doctrinal, indeed in opposition to the very idea of doctrines, it remains *hidden* to the political eye. But it is in this hidden sphere "that life lived openly in the truth grows; it is to this sphere that it speaks, and in it that it finds understanding. This is where the potential for communication exists. But this place is hidden and therefore, from the perspective of power, very dangerous."[27]

There is good reason, then, to think that one of Havel's main complaints against ideology, as well as the hope for a non-political politics, is rooted in a recognition that locked, doctrinal sense is precisely that which blocks true philosophical reflection and makes it impossible for us to own our own language, thereby handing over the effort to mean to doctrines (that are countersigned but never one's own). On this particular point, one can see that Havel and Ladislav Hejdánek (who also has some reservations about Havel's position[28]) were both gesturing towards the same thought:

> Not a group, nor an organisation, not society, nor even the state, is capable of reflection, because they do not have the ability to open themselves with authentic openness of language, of the world and of truth. As the products of man, they are capable of only a type of distancing, that is, of alienation; they are capable of emancipating themselves from human management in order to position themselves against man and eventually to sweep even him to alienation.[29]

If the core of ideology is the transmission of one determinate message – to be implemented by force or without – the effort of non-political politics is to show that ideology begins in a faulty conception of language, and that fundamental formations of political life begin, not in doctrine, but in life.[30]

27 Ibid., p. 369.

28 See Tomáš Hejduk's "What form of existentialism is there in Havel's concept of dissent?: Hejdánek's critique of Havel" in this issue.

29 Hejdánek, L., "Reflexe v politice a otázka politického subjektu," *Filosofický časopis* 6 (1990): 746–61. The passage is translated by Tomáš Hejduk.

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Orcid: 0000-0001-9129-5534

Václav Havel, Simone Weil and Our Desire for Totalitarianism

Antony Fredriksson
University of Pardubice, Faculty of Arts and Philosophy
Antony.Fredriksson@upce.cz

Abstract:
Given our troubled history in the 20th century, how is it that nationalism and populism have come to raise their heads again in Europe over the past 20 years? What have we lost? What is it about our liberal, democratic political structures that creates the current atmosphere of mistrust, xenophobia and shortsightedness? How has this development come about, and what is driving it? How should we understand this desire for authoritarianism?

In this paper, I will address these questions through a reading of two essays that can be considered to have been written as warning signs regarding a very common tendency within social psychology that entails a development of communities towards authoritarian structures. Simone Weil's essay "Human Personality", written in 1943 during her wartime exile in London, and Václav Havel's "The Power of the Powerless", written in 1978 during his house arrest in Czechoslovakia, both address the potential relapse of Europe into authoritarianism. Neither of these essays should be read as developed theories within political philosophy. They are notes from a dire predicament of crisis, on both a personal and a macro-political level, that investigate the relationship between the subject and society in order to understand the dynamics of totalitarianism. Their strength lies exactly in that they address a present unfolding situation that the authors perceive to have potentially unbearable consequences. This tone of urgency, their way of addressing us from a positionality void of any real power or privilege, and their bold demands for envisioning change beyond given political ideologies, make these essays into unique backdrops for thinking about our current political questions.

Both Weil and Havel advocate an open society that permits the subject to cultivate a form of life beyond collective ideology. Both essays address the sensibilities of the subject that do not appeal to identity, common ideology or collectivity in order to thrive. The aim of this paper is to outline this redefinition of the relation between the individual and society in Weil and Havel, as a remedy for our desire for authoritarianism.

Keywords: Authoritarianism, belonging, collectivity, moral agency, Simone Weil

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> *Power is a uniquely human situation. It affects both rulers and ruled, and threatens the health of both.*[1]
>
> Ludvík Vaculík

Introduction

I will address the questions concerning the nature of the socio-psychological dynamics that pull us towards authoritarian systems through four steps.

In the first part, I will articulate Václav Havel's warning. Based on the philosophy of Jan Patočka, Havel outlines how a new form of totalitarianism builds on ideological indoctrination through circumscribing our understanding of lived life experience, rather than through forceful and explicit repression. As a remedy for this development, Havel advocates the cultivation of a dissident movement that builds on a plurality of ideological forces that find their common ground in appeals for a society that prioritises the dignity of each unique life-project.

The second part addresses a problem concerning the notion of dissidence. If by dissidence we refer to any contrarian movement that aims at replacing one form of political system with another, then all kinds of authoritarian movements will also fall under this category. I bring in the example of Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán who constantly challenges liberal values in European politics, by appealing to a plurality of values. I show how his rhetoric builds on a paradox. In order to defend the authoritarian measures that his regime actively maintains in Hungary – oppressing minorities, limiting the possibilities of open dialogue and free speech, closing down universities, limiting the sphere of artistic and cultural expression, and silencing political opponents – Orbán appeals to the sovereign right of Hungary to determine its own political values, within a plurality of European values. This kind of push from authoritarian movements, within liberal democracies, easily amounts to a pull towards totalitarianism. As a remedy for this paradox of the open society, I will analyse how this tension builds on a certain blindness concerning agency. How can Orbán claim that Hungarian values are subjugated by global liberalism, while he, as the prime minister, is instrumental in oppressing minorities in Hungary? What is the nature of this blindness?

1 Ludvík Vaculík, as quoted in Bolton, J., *Worlds of Dissent: Charter 77, The Plastic People of the Universe, and Czech Culture under Communism*. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press 2012, p. 153.

In the third part, I will answer this question by bringing in Simone Weil, and her warning concerning the potential aftermath of the German occupation of France during the Second World War. Weil's treatise reveals that the reason why subjects, and institutions, easily become blind to their own agency resides within subjective psychology and affectivity. Weil shows how there is something within our desires for establishing collectivity through identity and power that drives us towards self-blindness. By establishing a dialogue between Weil and Havel, I will show that they both are concerned that if political life becomes a task of heeding a certain given totalising order, the potential outcome is a common loss of our sense of moral agency. The important point of agreement between Havel and Weil is that they appeal to a sense of meaning and belonging that does not depend on the unity, and identity of ideology and life form. The remedy for uprootedness and alienation, for them, is not a certain set political and societal order, but rather a moral sensibility: the ability to cultivate an understanding for what a dignified life entails, beyond a set order with distinguishable criteria. Through this acceptance of contingency, and open-endedness, subjective agency may be revitalised.

This introduces a further question that I will address in the final part: how can we have communities without a collective? Or, to put it differently, is there a benevolent form of collectivity that lacks this notion of identity and subjugation to an ideological power? Weil speaks of a "warmth" in our social life that is needed in order for us not to fall into the vicious form of collectivity. She advocates relationships built on attention and love, which acknowledge the vulnerability of the other. She distinguishes between the juridical concept of rights and the moral concept of justice. Her thoughts resonate with Havel's appeal to a dignified human life. This ethos, common to both Weil and Havel, that builds on moral perception rather than ideology, identity and rule following, resides beyond the discourses of political power. The dynamics of power means that belongingness in a community always takes the form of submersion, i.e. the compromising of one's subjective agency for the gain of conformity. Both Weil and Havel show how this involves an ailing form of belongingness. For them, true belonging implies an acceptance of the plurality and contingency of human experience. Through this reading of Weil and Havel, I aim to show that our sense of community and belonging are based on our propensity for moral perception rather than on authoritarian values of a common ideology and identity.

Havel and the hidden aims of life

How should we understand the origins of our desire for authoritarianism? In Václav Havel's "The Power of the Powerless" we can find some potential answers to this question. Although Havel's text was written in 1978 and should be understood in the context of a specific development within the relations between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union, it points at a broader evolution of Europe that still reverberates within our current political discourses. As a critique, it is not solely aimed at the Soviet Union or the communist form of totalitarianism; Havel also points a finger at the liberal West. He articulates two specific reasons for the success of what he calls "post-totalitarianism":

1. A lack of alternatives and political layers: the dynamics of polis and parallel polis have been lost.
2. The conformity of our liberal democracies creates a desire for authoritarianism.

Havel addresses a shift from totalitarianism to post-totalitarianism, the latter being a political structure that refrains from forceful indoctrination of its subjects. Rather, post-totalitarianism aims at circumscribing our understanding of lived life experience in order for the subjects to wilfully succumb to a totalitarian social order:

> Ideology, in creating a bridge of excuses between the system and the individual, spans the abyss between the aims of the system and the aims of life. It pretends that the requirements of the system derive from the requirements of life. It is a world of appearances trying to pass as reality. […] The arbitrary abuse of power is called observing the legal code; the repression of culture is called its development; the expansion of imperial influence is presented as support for the oppressed; the lack of free expression becomes the highest form of freedom.[2]

In this way, a self-governed form of totalitarianism is established. The lack of alternatives, the unification of ideology and the uniformity of life-projects, creates fertile ground for the subjects to impose the rules and ideology of the governing political order on themselves. The post-totalitarian society should not be seen as a political structure that has transcended totalitarianism;

2 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless". *International Journal of Politics*, 15, Fall–Winter 1985–1986, No. 3–4, p. 30.

rather, it entails a new form in which the totalising order generates itself, in opposition to an open society in which personal development can take different forms that do not adhere to a unified ideology. Havel writes: "By pulling everyone into its power structure, the post-totalitarian system makes everyone an instrument of a mutual totality, the auto-totality of society."[3] This entails an order in which a clear-cut division between those who inflict power and those who are powerless is muddled. The line between the subjugating power and the subjugated runs through each and every individual, whether we are talking about the prime minister or a small shopkeeper.[4]

Havel opposes the idea that a functioning society that provides its subjects with a sense of belonging would be founded on a homogeneous form of life, shared identity and common ideals. When Havel formulates his arguments in support of the dissident movement in Czechoslovakia at the end of the 1970s, the problem for him is not the lack of unified ideas about politics and values, since, in his understanding, the desire for unification carries the seed of totalitarianism within itself. Instead, he talks about our need to live a truthful and dignified life – an experience of our life as an open-ended project – in contradiction to constricting authoritarianism and a shared ideology.

For Havel and the Czech dissident movement, this emphasis on dignity did not spring from political theory but from the influence of phenomenological and existential philosophy, via philosophers such as Jan Patočka.[5] In the same vein, Merleau-Ponty writes: "Someone will say: it is through a relation to a project. If you like, but there is a non-decisionary project, not chosen, [an] intention without subject: living."[6] If we agree that a dignified life has this open-ended character, then the strife of unifying our life-projects should be understood as a potential problem, at least if the unification becomes too extensive and minimises the space for a plurality of life-projects – even projects that do not have a given end. In a certain rationalistic and utilitarian conception of politics, all our projects are understood as consisting of actions that are means defined by a given goal. This understanding leaves us with a view of politics as a deterministic system, "like a collection of traffic signals and directional signs, giving the process shape and structure".[7] Havel builds his critical perspective on the idea that there are modalities of our experience that go beyond this means-to-an-end structure. There are "hidden

3 Ibid., p. 37.
4 Ibid.
5 See, Bolton, J., *Worlds of Dissent*, pp. 26–27.
6 Merleau-Ponty, M., *Institution and Passivity: Course Notes from the Collège de France 1954–1955*. Evanston, Northwestern University Press 2010, p. 6.
7 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", p. 32.

aims of life" that do not manifest themselves as goal-driven but rather as expectations of a dignified life.[8]

This aspect of our experience – that to some extent our actions and intentions lack a clear understanding of a defined end – is hardly integrated into our political discourses. Nevertheless, it is exactly this contingency of life that Havel, time after time, holds on to as an inspiration for the utopia of an open society. And it is this open-endedness that constantly poses a threat to totalitarian systems. Havel's teacher and intellectual inspiration, Jan Patočka, notes:

> Man is such a force, controllable from without as well as from within: take care of his economic security, give him a place within the mass self-consciousness, organize his mind with propaganda and his recreation and entertainment with the appropriate measures, and he will belong to you completely, and he will even think that he is free and that all of this is the authentic realization of Man.[9]

This is similar to Havel's critique of liberalism, which articulates how the conformity provided by liberal democracies may also cater to totalitarian goals. Patočka goes on to claim that there always is a part of the subject that can detect this false liberty; he calls it the "inner core".[10] Even when living in a totalising order there is something within us that can experience openings, a freedom that permits our judgement and understanding to stretch beyond the encompassing order. By cultivating this notion of freedom, the Czech dissidents aimed to change the political structures by establishing ruptures in the totalising order. The historian Jonathan Bolton describes this tactic: "They can cross against the light and walk on the grass, reinterpreting restrictions to make them more amenable to their personal projects; they cocreate the contours of their lives, rather than passively accepting dictates from above."[11]

According to Havel, there is a natural tension between the polis and the parallel polis – the individual and the prevailing ideological system – that is beneficial for our sense of belonging. This tension is the vitalising force of politics. When this tension subsides, it creates political disillusion and stagnation. Even a totalitarian system has to appeal to the substructure of lived experience in order to keep up an appearance of legitimacy: the Soviet

8 Ibid., p. 42.
9 Patočka, J., *Living in Problematicity*. Prague, Oikoymenh – Karolinum Press 2020, p. 47.
10 Ibid., p. 49.
11 Bolton, J., *Worlds of Dissent*, pp. 26–27.

project appealed to the experience of the working class; national socialism appealed to both national identity and the working class (it was, after all, called socialism); today's populists appeal to cultural identity, rootedness and fatherland. All in order to show that the ideology aspiring to totalitarianism is speaking from the perspective of subjective experience. When this tension between personal life, which strives towards dignity and truth, and the ideological order is suspended – when the ideological order becomes near-equivalent to personal understanding of lived experience – the post-totalitarian system is established.

Another aspect of the dynamics that drives the subject towards authoritarianism is alienation. In Havel's view, inspired by Patočka, it stems from grasping onto false or illusory remedies for the uncertainties of life, i.e. alienation does not stem directly from the challenges of the uncertainties or contingencies of life, but rather from a false sense of security provided by ideology.[12] This is not to be read only as a specific case study of events in 1970s Czechoslovakia, but rather as a warning sign: a reminder of a vicious circle empowered by our common desire for authoritarianism. Havel writes:

> When people are being uprooted and alienated and are losing their sense of what this world means, this ideology inevitably has a certain hypnotic charm. To wandering humankind it offers an immediately available home: all one has to do is accept it, and suddenly everything becomes clear once more, life takes on new meaning, and all mysteries, unanswered questions, anxiety, and loneliness vanish. Of course, one pays dearly for this low-rent home.[13]

The wandering nature of man can in this way become negotiable; the promise of a clear order may outweigh the freedom and creative nature of the subject. What is lost here is the possibility to comprehend other ways of life. Other paths and directions become hardly imaginable. The possibility to create new paths and directions for one's life-projects requires at least some room for, and tolerance of, uncertainty and open-endedness. This challenge entails that the community finds unity without falling back on any conception of a given order and finds new possibilities from this open-endedness.[14] Without this tension between the ideological order and the reflective and wandering subject, totalitarianism gains a foothold.

12 See Patočka, J., *Living in Problematicity*, p. 61.
13 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", p. 25.
14 See Patočka, J., *Living in Problematicity*, p. 56.

This invites the question of alienation, since, if Havel is right, it is a kind of natural state for the subject not to know or understand their place in the world completely. In a totalising order, the loss of clearly defined goals and contours of life becomes acute and problematic, and drives the individual even deeper into subjugation. Both Havel and Patočka try to point out another path of embracing the uncertainty and contingency that inevitably is an aspect of our lives. Thus, alienation is not constituted by the uncertainties and contingencies of life. Rather, alienation is brought about by the illusory sense of order and control, which totalising ideological systems advocate as remedies to the inevitable uncertainties that we are bound to encounter. Both Patočka and Havel advocate a societal order that is supportive of individual growth and agency, and both point a finger of warning at the illusory comfort provided by totalising ideologies.

This distinction between the movement towards a unity of ideology and life form, and the movement towards an open society that enables its subjects to pursue personal and unique life-projects and freedom of thought, provides a partial answer to the challenge of authoritarianism. In a time of crisis, we are psychologically inclined to seek the remedy for our alienation and uprootedness in strictly defined rules and order. This move towards authoritarianism is what Havel and Patočka point out as the dangerous route that will take us to (post-)totalitarianism.

However, this is not the whole story. There are some intricacies here that need to be addressed, since authoritarian movements do also appeal to a certain conception of freedom, and historically many of them also start out as contrarian and critical movements that stand in opposition to the established order. The notion of the dissident who opposes and questions a prevailing order is in many ways a quite neutral term. As I will show in the next part, this notion of the dissident is vague in the sense that even authoritarian political movements build on a certain expression of dissent. Jonathan Bolton points out this ambiguity: "In February 1979, Zdeněk Mlynář – an architect of the Prague Spring reform movement in 1968, who was later expelled from the Party and helped formulate the human-rights proclamation Charter 77 – wrote: 'The term "dissident" is one of the least precise in the contemporary political vocabulary.'"[15] Bolton describes how Western historians projected several narratives onto the dissident movement. He notes that none of these, however, work as an exhaustive description, since Charter 77 was unique in the sense that it included several different political ideas and strategies.[16] The main goal was not to replace one political order with another, but rather to

15 Bolton, J., *Worlds of Dissent*, p. 2.
16 Ibid., p. 24ff.

infuse several expressions and forms of communal life within the oppressing regime. Václav Benda, who coined the term "parallel polis", saw the goal in establishing parallel structures "that would supplement the broken institutions of the regime".[17] The distinction here is essential, as I will show, since it reveals the ambiguity of the concept of dissent. In the context of Charter 77 it does not simply signify contrarianism or opposition to the regime, but rather an embracing of ambiguity and plurality. It is a tool for decentralisation.

The authoritarian paradox

We could, with Havel, ask: who are the dissidents of today?[18] One uncomfortable answer to this question is that it is the populists and nationalists who claim to be working in opposition to the political mainstream of liberal globalism. In other words, it is the powers on the far right that claim to be in opposition to a current totalising order. I am not claiming that the far right are dissidents in the sense that Havel uses the term, since there is something that does not ring true with that statement, due to the distinction I mentioned above. However, it seems quite clear that many right-wing populists who appeal to authoritarianism sincerely experience themselves to be dissidents. We might call their self-proclaimed dissident status a bluff. But for them it is not a bluff. They build their personas around contrarianism, right-mindedness, honour and opposition to the prevailing forces: the elite, the globalists, the multiculturalists, the feminists, the cultural Marxists, the environmental movement, Zionism, the liberals, the queer, that is, in opposition to whatever they believe to be the current political ideology in power. They conceive of themselves as the righteous who stand up against an order that suppresses their true way of life.

There is a certain irony in this. People who drive authoritarian, nationalistic and totalitarian goals in a supposedly liberal democracy appeal to their right to express themselves freely and their right to drive their common political agendas publicly. As long as they do not understand the irony of the paradox of the open society, their understanding of themselves as dissidents will prevail. However, what I have aimed to show in my reading of Havel and Patočka so far is that there is something within the common dynamics of political power per se that easily caters to movements towards authoritarianism. They both point out a circular movement within the politics of power that regenerates totalitarian tendencies. If the dissident solely aims at toppling one political order and replacing it with another, this kind

17 Ibid., p. 30.
18 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", p. 23.

of contrariness is applicable as a description of the rise of some of the most authoritarian societies, as well as of many social struggles for a more decent and plural society.

One thing that should be clear is that even nationalists and populists who appeal to strong authoritarian politics require some kind of understanding of the dynamics between individual freedom and ideological order. Paradoxically, even authoritarian movements have to appeal to freedom and plurality, at least to some extent. In order to clarify this, I want to bring in a recent example.

On 11 September 2018, the prime minister of Hungary, Viktor Orbán, gave a speech in the European Parliament, in which he defended Hungary's position and criticised the proceedings under way to strip Hungary of its voting rights.[19] The European initiative was based on a report by Dutch Green MEP Judith Sargentini. The report disclosed that Hungary was not complying with the values of the European Union (EU), and thus the question of revoking Hungary's voting rights was brought to the parliamentary floor.

Since 2012, Orbán had instigated a "constitutional counter-revolution" through which the constitution of Hungary was fundamentally renegotiated.[20] The political consequences included restrictions on immigration and heavily circumscribed constitutional rights for minorities. For the European Parliament, this signalled an escalating "crisis of values".[21]

Orbán's speech was given on the eve of the parliamentary vote.[22] He begins by describing Hungary as a defender of European liberal and democratic values. He refers to the fight against communism and the historical wars in which the people of Hungary shed their blood to protect the nation and the rest of Europe. However, what is interesting for the context of the dynamics of authoritarianism is that Orbán goes on to speak about how the EU, by virtue of its liberal-democratic values, should be able to contain differing opinions, ideologies and political systems. Orbán defends Hungary's restrictive immigration laws, and circumscribed constitutional rights, by appealing to plurality and liberalism: "If we mean that we want Europe to be unified in diversity, this reason cannot be to brand any of the countries and for it to be excluded from joint decisions. We would never go as far as silencing those who disagree with us."[23]

19 The speech is available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6oqhwvPj5mo.

20 See Mos, M., "Ambiguity and interpretive politics in the crisis of European values: Evidence from Hungary". *East European Politics*, 36, 2020, No. 2, p. 4.

21 Ibid., p. 1.

22 On 12 September 2018 the vote was held and resulted in 448 against 197 voting for sanctions against Hungary.

23 My transcription from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6oqhwvPj5mo.

Here, Orbán speaks from the perspective of the dissident. Hungary and the governing Fidesz party, of which he is the leader, are the victims of the repression of the globalist agenda of the EU. Hungary is the dissident in the totalitarian project of the EU. The irony mentioned above is highly present in Orbán's self-understanding. If the rule of the European Parliament means restricting Hungary's right to have differing ideological values set in place by the constitutional counter-revolution, Orbán appeals to plurality and liberal values, values that he, as the prime minister of Hungary, has attacked viciously during three terms in office. Martijn Mos writes:

> When labeled an autocrat, Orbán cited his electoral track record and his use of national consultations; when accused of violating LGBT rights, he noted the Union's obligation to respect Hungary's constitutional identity; when charged with undermining the rule of law, he reminded his critics of the subsidiarity principle; and when urged to show solidarity during the migrant crisis, the Prime Minister claimed his country's restrictive policies were an act of solidarity toward the other member states.[24]

In this way, the strategy of the authoritarian does not build singularly on authoritarian rhetorics. Even Orbán understands that he needs the notions of plurality, democracy and liberty in order to successfully manoeuvre the political project of Fidesz. This split between Orbán the authoritarian, and Orbán the prime minister who appeals to democracy and plurality echoes Havel's sentiment about a post-totalitarian order in which the line between the oppressor and the oppressed runs within the singular subject, whether it is a shopkeeper or the prime minister. Even the authoritarian leader is subjugated to the tension between the ideological order and personal (or national) freedom. The contradiction in Orbán's sentiment is that he speaks simultaneously from the perspective of power and the perspective of the powerless.

We could claim that the philosophical job is done by pointing out the paradox in Orbán's claims. Quite clearly, there is a self-blindness in his appeal to democracy and the principles of an open society. Alternatively, Orbán is not blind at all, but is simply using a strategy of double standards quite intentionally to achieve his authoritarian goals. Whatever the case, this shows the complexity in the question of the appeal of authoritarianism. Even when the apparent paradox of driving authoritarian aims by appealing to democracy is brought into view, it does not dissolve the authoritarian project.[25] As Ben-

24 Mos, M., "Ambiguity and interpretive politics in the crisis of European values", p. 14.

25 Some argue that this strategy of using double standards even fortifies the populist movements; see Mos, M., "Ambiguity and interpretive politics in the crisis of European values".

jamin Ask Popp-Madsen notes, Orbán's manoeuvre amounts to a split within the institution of the EU, and so the question that arises is:

> How much political disagreement can exist *in* a democracy before such disagreements become disagreements *about* democracy? Is the normative ideal of liberal democracy being threatened by "illiberal democracies," such as Viktor Orbán's Hungary, and/or by "undemocratic liberalism," such as the market-oriented politics of the European Union?[26]

When reading "The Power of the Powerless" we find that Havel foresaw the importance of the question of this ambiguity. It is a central characteristic of the definition of the post-totalitarian system that the people who inhabit such a society develop a certain blindness towards their own agency in creating and supporting the system. Orbán's persona seems to be split in a fundamental way. On the one hand, as the prime minister of Hungary he is a key agent in oppressing minorities, limiting the possibilities for open dialogue and free speech, closing down universities, limiting the sphere of artistic and cultural expression, and silencing his political opponents. On the other hand, on behalf of Hungary he claims to be oppressed and silenced by the totalising order of liberal globalism.

Despite the apparent contradiction in Orbán's message, he is able to threaten the democratic order from within, since this same split is potentially generated in the encompassing institutional order of the EU. By aiming to bar Hungary from the decision-making process of the European Parliament, the EU also becomes potentially smitten by authoritarianism. As Mos points out, the strategy of the European Parliament, which imposes a hardline policy on member states, and which pressures them to comply with a defined set of values, "may limit the interpretive wiggle room that politicians have. As definitions, indicators and benchmarks proliferate, fundamental values become less abstract."[27] Through this dynamic, the space for pluralism and ambiguity grows smaller within the union, due to the pressure from authoritarian movements. The strategy to exclude or isolate authoritarian member states might be necessary in order to protect institutional democratic values, but this aim also reveals the vulnerability of the open society.

If the pressure from authoritarianism always leads to limitations within the democratic order, this seems to entail an unresolvable clinch. As I have

26 Popp-Madsen, B. A., "Review essay: Should we be afraid? Liberal democracy, democratic backsliding, and contemporary populism". *Contemporary Political Theory*, 19, 2020, p. 161.

27 Mos, M., "Ambiguity and interpretive politics in the crisis of European values", p. 14.

shown, the problem here does not solely stem from the explicit and intentional form of authoritarian movements. The tendency of democracies to move towards authoritarianism is driven by conflicts that push democratic institutions to limit the interpretational frameworks of their values. In this way, the project of the open society easily becomes sidetracked. We can, like Orbán, eagerly point out the wrongs done to us and the repression we are subjected to, but we fall short when we are pressed to formulate an alternative as to how a pluralistic and open-ended political society is to be established. The reason for this is that ambiguity is in itself an aspect of an open-ended society. The temptation to rid our political order of ambiguity caters to the vicious circle of post-totalitarianism, since any vagueness can, at least seemingly, be remedied by a stricter order and more authoritarian measures. In this way, the very characteristics of plurality and ambiguity of an open-ended society are at the same time its vulnerable point. Havel writes:

> While life, in its essence, moves towards plurality, diversity, independent self-constitution, and self-organization, in short, towards the fulfillment of its own freedom, the post-totalitarian system demands conformity, uniformity, and discipline. While life ever strives to create new and improbable structures, the post-totalitarian system contrives to force life into its most probable states.[28]

In this sense, an open society cannot be established through uniformity and discipline, or, to put it another way, it cannot be *established* at all, since all appeals to a new establishment potentially cater to new forms of authoritarianism. The opposite of totalitarianism is a society that permits the unpredictability contained by parallel structures, subcultures and alternative ways of life. And as long as we do not find it in ourselves to embrace this ambiguity, we will potentially fall back into the temptations of authoritarianism.

It was this embrace of ambiguity that was the driving force behind the Charter 77 movement, in which Havel played an important role. This was a loosely knit community of artists, punk rockers, playwrights, former communists and philosophers with the common aim of responding to the communist regime. The tenacity to act, respond and enter into dialogue with the regime was not solely a strategy of contrarianism and opposition. More importantly, its aim was to regain a certain agency of the subject. Patočka, who became one of Charter 77's main intellectual figures, saw it as a Socra-

28 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", pp. 29–30.

tic political movement. Eric Manton writes: "He emphasized that Charter 77 was not a typical political act, it was not an organization nor an association, but rather based on individuals upholding their sense of duty, their 'obligation to speak out of himself – which is his obligation to his society as well'."[29] Their message was not based on any specific political ideological framework, but rather was rooted in a revitalisation of everyday human experience. The main aim of Charter 77 could, in this sense, be understood as a regaining of an understanding of subjective agency in the post-totalitarian order.

The pivotal question here is: what are the characteristics of the kind of blindness towards one's own agency that authoritarianism generates in the subject? This is a complicated question, since it has to be addressed on many levels. It is a matter for political history and philosophy, for sociology and even for anthropology and psychology. However, as Havel shows, the reason why subjects, and institutions, easily become blind to their own agency resides within subjective psychology and affectivity. There is something within our desires that drives us towards this self-blindness. It is easy to think of our moral and political life as constituted by a certain given order, which is established by a certain set of rules. But, as I will show by establishing a dialogue between Weil and Havel, there is something that gets lost in this perspective. When political life becomes a task of heeding a certain given order, the potential outcome is that we lose our sense of agency. What is common to both Weil and Havel is that they acknowledge this threat.

Weil on belonging and roots (without identity)

A warning concerning the loss of meaning and agency, can be found in Simone Weil's essay *The Need for Roots*, written in 1943 during Weil's wartime exile in London. As Rush Rhees points out, the text is not a description of the war but a warning about its potential aftermath. He describes Weil's concern as: "How France can be brought alive again – How it can start a new life after the German occupation."[30] Weil writes:

> Don't let us imagine that being worn out, all they will ask for is a comfortable existence. Nervous exhaustion caused by some recent misfortune makes it impossible for those concerned to settle down to enjoy a comfortable existence. It forces people to seek forgetfulness, sometimes in

29 Manton, E., "The Political Philosophy of a Non-Political Philosopher", in Patočka, J., *Living in Problematicity*, p. 77.

30 Rhees, R., *Discussions of Simone Weil*. Albany, SUNY Press 2000, p. 40.

> a dizzy round of exhausted enjoyment – as was the case in 1918 – at other times in some dark and dismal fanaticism. When misfortune bites too deeply, it creates a disposition towards misfortune, which makes people plunge headlong into themselves dragging others along with them.[31]

Weil is concerned that the hardships of the war will create a vicious circle, fed by our desire for authoritarianism in a situation in which we are at a loss concerning our sense of meaning. Like Havel, she sees a danger in the loss of our sense of rootedness, since this kind of emotional distress may lead people to grasp onto illusory remedies and a false sense of belonging. Weil's emphasis is, however, different from Havel's, in that she does not believe that a comfortable existence will appeal to the generations that have lost their rootedness. Rather, the uprooted will be attracted either by hedonistic desires, which help the subject to forget the past, or by political fanaticism and authoritarianism.

The important point of agreement here is that neither Havel nor Weil advocate any return to a strong sense of identity, or unity in ideology, as a way out of the loss of a sense of meaning and rootedness. Rather, they both appeal to a sense of meaning and rootedness that does not depend on the unity and identity of ideology and life form. The remedy for uprootedness, for them, is not a certain set political and societal order, but rather a moral sensibility, the ability to cultivate an understanding for what a dignified life entails, beyond a set order with distinguishable criteria.

There is one detail here that still needs articulation. When we talk about rootedness, as an important existential value for society, it does seem to appeal to some sense of stability and order. On the one hand, we have a human need for freedom, ambiguity and an open society. On the other hand, we also need guidelines, common values and a sense of a shared foundational understanding. How do these two human needs meet without conflict? One of the elucidating articulations of this tension can be found in Weil's essay "Human Personality":

> Relations between the collectivity and the person should be arranged with the sole purpose of removing whatever is detrimental to the growth and mysterious germination of the impersonal element of the soul.
> – This, means, on the one hand, that for every person there should be enough room, enough freedom to plan the use of one's time, the opportu-

31 Weil, S., *The Need for Roots*. London, Routledge 2002, pp. 92–93.

> nity to reach ever higher levels of attention, some solitude, some silence. At the same time the person needs warmth, lest it be driven by distress to submerge itself in the collective.[32]

In Weil's sentiment, an important distinction runs between the personal and impersonal aspects of the subject. A society that permits the subject to cultivate the impersonal – the modality in us that does not need to appeal to identity, common ideology or collectivity in order to thrive – could perhaps withstand the desire for authoritarianism. In order to understand what Weil means by "impersonal", it is important to note that the term does refer to something foundational in our moral psychology that is not reducible to empirical characteristics or qualities that are *identifiable* or comparable with other qualities.[33] Emmanuel Levinas writes about the "human face" in a similar manner:

> Ordinarily one is a "character": a professor at the Sorbonne, a Supreme Court justice, son so-and-so, everything that is in one's passport, the manner of dressing, of presenting oneself. […] Here, to the contrary, the face is meaning all by itself. […] It is what cannot become content, which your thought would embrace; it is uncontainable, it leads you beyond.[34]

What both Weil and Levinas are getting at, in their different ways, is that our moral relations rely on something beyond that which can be identified as certain qualities or characteristics, the ways in which a certain person can be identified and compared to other persons. Christopher Hamilton describes this as the propensity for goodness in the subject, "which bypasses all interest in the empirical characteristics of a human being".[35] The impersonal is, in this sense, something that grants the subject a relation with the other, despite one's own preconceptions, expectations and interests.

This reverberates with Patočka's notion of the "inner core" that was mentioned earlier. In Weil and Patočka we find an emphasis on the human *spirit* that is hard to reconcile with political language. And in Havel we find a similar emphasis when he talks about human dignity as a core value for a healthy society. Although the term "spirit" easily leads to mystical connotations,

32 Weil, S., "Human Personality" [1943], in *Simone Weil: An Anthology*, ed. S. Miles. London, Penguin Books 2005, p. 79.

33 Hamilton, C., "Simone Weil's 'Human Personality': Between the Personal and the Impersonal". *The Harvard Theological Review*, 98, 2005, No. 2, p. 192.

34 Levinas, E., *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*. Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Press 1985, pp. 86–87.

35 Hamilton, C., "Simone Weil's 'Human Personality'", p. 193.

I think we can find a quite ordinary use of the term that emphasises the quality of the agency by which an act is performed. Dignity and dissidence are terms that aim to describe *the spirit in which* certain acts are performed. Havel notes: "They may be teachers who privately teach young people things that are kept from them in the state schools; clergymen who either in office or, if they are deprived of their charges, outside it, try to carry on a free religious life; painters, musicians and singers who practice their work regardless of how it is looked upon by official institutions."[36] These actions, which are performed despite the friction they will cause with the regime, and despite potential persecution by the community, have to stem from aims of life that are manifest beyond the repressive societal order. To talk about spirit here, simply alludes to a certain vitality: not acting out of conformity, not being an automaton.

Conversely, the part of the self that strives to be engulfed by the ideological order – due to the security and predictability that it offers – is prone to the attraction and pull of post-totalitarianism. Havel describes this tension beautifully in his parable of the greengrocer who every morning puts up a sign bearing the slogan "Workers of the world, unite!" in his shop window. This act of putting up the sign, as a marker of support for the governing communist regime in Czechoslovakia, is, perhaps at first, an act of self-preservation. Not putting it up might lead to repercussions and sanctions. But, as time goes by, the act becomes automatised. It lacks any significant meaning and it lacks agency from the greengrocer; it is simply an act that everybody performs. The actual significance of the slogan also becomes lost. It does not signal any unity between workers. It does, however, communicate a common complacency and conformity. It is a shared act void of meaning, except for its uncanny message of subjugation. This blindness can be developed into a shared form of blindness: "The woman who ignored the greengrocer's slogan may well have hung a similar slogan an hour ago in the corridor of the office where she works. […] When the greengrocer visits her office, he will not notice her slogan either."[37] When the reflection – the dialogue within the subject concerning the meaning of his act and the significance of the signs – stops, order prevails and servitude becomes automatic.[38] The consequence of not putting up the sign is not, at this later stage, only potential repression from the government but, more crucially, a falling-out with the way of life that is habitual for the rest of society.[39]

36 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", p. 66.
37 Ibid., p. 36.
38 Ibid., pp. 34–35.
39 Ibid., p. 36.

Havel's greengrocer exemplifies the pull towards authoritarianism that in Weil's understanding stems from being submerged into the collective. This movement entails a diminishing of the freedom and room to pursue acts beyond collective expectations that promote the growth of intellectual and moral understanding. This introduces another question: how can we have communities without a collective? Or, to put it differently: is there a benevolent form of collectivity that lacks this notion of conformity and subjugation? Weil speaks of the "warmth" that is required in order for us not to fall into the vicious form of collectivity. At first glance, it does not seem to be a political concept. It does, however, stand in contrast to the feeling of being outside – of alienation. It appeals to our sense of belonging. Whereas the desire for conformity exemplified in the greengrocer's way of thoughtlessly putting up the propaganda sign in his window speaks of something else, of fear, of a sense of belonging that is illusory.

Moral agency versus rule following

For Weil, belonging is not based on shared ideology or laws and regulations, but rather prevails through the subject's understanding of herself as a being that can be oppressed, hurt and violated: "If you say to someone who has ears to hear: 'What you are doing to me is not just', you may touch and awaken at its source the spirit of attention and love."[40] Through this acknowledgement of one's own and, by extension, the other's vulnerability, a communion is established. Belonging is in this sense based on a direct moral perception – by "someone who has ears to hear" – rather than through identifying with an ideological order or common values. When our sense of belonging is breached, we understand, if our self-understanding is acute enough, that something has been violated. A society can be more or less prone to acknowledging this vulnerability of the subject. Our sense of community is founded on our common (i.e. impersonal) acknowledgement of our propensity to be violated and our power to violate others. In this context, impersonality refers to the moral sensibility that is prone to detecting the vulnerability of the other. This recognition, which builds on moral perception, rather than ideology, identity and rule following, resides beyond the discourses of political power. However, without this foundation, which enables us to sense the vulnerability of the other, belongingness cannot gain a foothold in a community.

The connection with the part of oneself that is vulnerable leads to an understanding of the other's being vulnerable as well. Weil distinguishes between the juridical concept of rights and the moral concept of justice. The ex-

40 Weil, S., *Simone Weil: An Anthology*, p. 83.

pectation of being treated justly runs deeper than appeals to personal rights, since severe injustice does not require any set of rules as a comparison for us to understand its unjustness: "If a young girl is being forced into a brothel she will not talk about her rights. In such a situation the word would sound ludicrously inadequate."[41] That which is breached in this case is not merely the rights of the girl but rather her spirit. This violation cannot properly be described in juridical language, since the concept of rights externalises the act, as if that which would have been breached is a violation of the social order, whereas in fact the violation reaches the human spirit: "The profound and childlike and unchanging expectation of good in the heart."[42] This does not mean that societies would be better off without notions of rights, law and order; rather, it means that these concepts do not give us the whole story. In case we do not have the means to understand a violation as something that wounds the human spirit, then rights, law and order will not necessarily help us to perceive more clearly. In Weil's view, this vocabulary obscures: "Thanks to this word [rights], what should have been a cry of protest from the depths of the heart has been turned into a shrill nagging of claims and counter-claims."[43] That is, if we conceive rule following as more important than our acute perception of violations of the other's expectations of being treated justly, then we have lost our true sense of belongingness.

Havel makes a similar distinction when he writes about a dignified life for each and every citizen, which is required in a legitimate political system: "The key to a humane, dignified, rich and happy life does not lie either in the constitution or in the criminal code."[44] Dignity is not a matter of establishing some set of rights and obligations that should not be breached; it is attained by a structure that permits the individual a certain freedom to establish his or her way of life that sustains the basic needs required. Of course, establishing certain common rights and obligations might be helpful for enabling this kind of freedom. On the other hand, the notion of rights does not guarantee a dignified life; something more is required. Heeding a certain rule of law can even result in the opposite. The successive development towards a blind way of rule following, portrayed in the parable of the greengrocer, will obstruct our direct and very human understanding of dignity.

Havel notes that opposition to totalitarianism can only be successful when it has "the existential backing of every member of the community".[45] He envisions an existential revolution in which "a newfound inner relation-

41 Ibid., p. 83.
42 Ibid., p. 72.
43 Ibid., p. 84.
44 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", p. 77.
45 Ibid., p. 93.

ship to other people and to the human community" entails a renewed rootedness and a higher sense of responsibility.[46] Although these ideas might seem radical, and both Havel and Weil seem to have little of a proper political philosophy to offer, the appeal to dignity, freedom and justice, as concepts that reside in the moral subject, has some merit. They help us in acknowledging how, regardless of what the current political system of the government might be, there is a potential sense of dignity and justice in each and every citizen. Weil's point is that even when this dignity is breached, it becomes apparent exactly because the breach is simultaneously a violation and an acknowledgement of the vulnerability of the subject.

A sense of rootedness, community and belonging is then achieved through acknowledging this moral propensity, which is not set by any given rules applied by jurisdiction and force.

Conclusion

> Democracy offers no defense against dictatorship. By the nature of things, the person is subdued to the collectivity, and rights are dependent upon force. The lies and misconceptions which obscure this truth are extremely dangerous because they prevent us from appealing to the only thing which is immune to force and can preserve us from it: namely, the other force which is the radiance of the spirit.[47]

If we return to the example of Viktor Orbán and Hungary's conflict with the EU, I think there is something to be learned about the nature of authoritarianism through this reading of Weil and Havel. When Orbán sees his authoritarian goals threatened, he appeals to the democratic rights of Hungary as a member of the EU. At the same time he turns a blind eye to his own government's suppression of the rights of minorities and those with dissenting views in Hungary. His blindness is not solely one of double standards: appealing to democracy and plurality in one case while simultaneously turning a blind eye to these values in another. His blindness runs deeper than that, and in this sense he is not unique. If there is nothing that evokes our sense of dignity and justice, beyond a set ideological order with its notions of rights, obligations and rules, then we will be stuck in the dynamics of power. The dynamics of power means that belongingness in a community always takes the form of submersion, i.e. the compromising of one's subjective agency for the gain of conformity. Both Weil and Havel show how this involves an ail-

46 Ibid., p. 92.
47 Weil, S., *Simone Weil: An Anthology*, p. 81.

ing form of belongingness. For them, true belonging implies an acceptance of the open-endedness, vulnerability and contingency of human experience. By not fleeing into ideological orders and conformity, we gain a vital agency in our actions. This form of agency is required in order for us to orientate ourselves in the plurality of forms of life, to acknowledge them as engaged in variations of our common open-ended project.[48]

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48 Nicholls, T., *An Ethics of Improvisation: Aesthetic Possibilities for a Political Future*. Lanham, Lexington Books 2012, p. 5. This publication was supported within the project of Operational Programme Research, Development and Education (OP VVV/OP RDE), "Centre for Ethics as Study in Human Value", registration No. CZ.02.1.01/0.0/0.0/15_003/0000425, co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund and the state budget of the Czech Republic.

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Orcid: 0000-0001-8107-0083

The Dissident and the Spectre

Reading Havel with Derrida[1]

Ulrika Björk
Södertörn University
ulrika.bjork@sh.se

Abstract:
In this paper I argue that there is an affinity between the 'dissident' in Havel's essay "The Power of the Powerless" and the 'spectre' in Derrida's readings of Marx. Both are manifestations of a specific modern temporality that Derrida calls "disjointed", because it is haunted by a revolutionary force and claim for justice. Both also evoke the weak messianic power inherent in Walter Benjamin's historiography and the spectral responsibility recognised by this power, that is, our responsibility for past and future generations. In post-totalitarian Czechoslovakia, the "nonpolitical" dissident community prefigured the renewal of moral experiences of responsibility and solidarity. In contemporary discussions of democracy, the figure of the spectre is a reminder of the significance of the Marxist legacy beyond its ideological doctrine.

Keywords: Havel, Derrida, dissident, spectre, ideology, post-democracy, messianism

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Introduction

Václav Havel opens "The Power of the Powerless" with an indirect reference to *Manifesto of the Communist Party*: "A specter is haunting Eastern Europe: the specter of what in the West is called 'dissent'."[2] The dissident, we learn from the first paragraphs of the essay, is a historically specific category of powerless citizens. They are sub-citizens living within the post-totalitarian system, yet outside the power establishment. When characterising normalised Communist Czechoslovakia after the invasion that ended the politi-

1 I would like to thank the participants at the Havel Symposium at Södertörn University, my co-editor Niklas Forsberg, Martin Gustafsson, Hans Ruin and the blind reviewer of this paper for insightful questions and advice that improved the original paper.

2 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*, 32, 2018, No. 2, p. 355.

cal liberalisation of the Prague Spring in 1968, Havel distances himself from the term "dictatorship", even in its bureaucratical form. In the essay, "post-totalitarian" indicates that this society is totalitarian in a manner different from the former. The dissident manifests this difference, in the sense that it appeared the moment the system could "no longer base itself on the unadulterated, brutal, and arbitrary application of power" but allowed for some, if only limited, expressions of nonconformity.[3] The most explicit expression of nonconformity at the time of Havel's essay was the Charter 77 human rights movement, alongside *samizdat* editions of books and magazines, underground seminars, concerts and exhibitions. Yet the Charter and the dissident movements are only intelligible against an "anonymous hinterland" of dissidents, by which Havel understands an existential form of resistance on the level of "human consciousness and conscience".[4] This resistance does not have the force of an identifiable opposition but "the strength of a potential" that can at any moment become actual in political acts and events.[5]

After the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, Jacques Derrida quotes Karl Marx, and Friedrich Engel's original passage for a lecture in 1993: "A spectre is haunting Europe. The spectre of communism."[6] *Manifesto of the Communist Party* was written for the Second Congress of the Communist League in London in the autumn of 1847. The proletariat had not yet gathered into a unified political power, let alone a party. Even in Germany, it still formed "an incoherent mass" scattered over the country, Marx and Engels write in the opening paragraphs. Whereas the powers of "old Europe" tried to exorcise the ghostly presence of communism, they claim, the *Manifesto* announces its arrival.

Derrida's lecture, published as *Specters of Marx* in 1994, is at once a critical intervention in the debate on American political scientist Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992) and a systematic elaboration of a "disjointed" temporality Derrida understands as defining modern Europe. If, as Marx and Engels claim, modern bourgeois society established the bourgeoisie and the proletariat as two antagonistic classes, and the latter was even "called into existence" by the former, the experience of the spectre and its revolutionary force, Derrida argues, "marks the very exis-

3 Ibid., p. 356. It remains unclear in Havel's essay how post-totalitarianism differs from dictatorships more precisely, but it is beyond the scope of this paper to go into more detail on that issue.

4 Ibid., p. 369.

5 Ibid., p. 370.

6 Derrida, J., *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. London – New York, Routledge 1994, 4; Marx, K. – Engels, F., *Selected Works, Vol. 1, Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Moscow, Progress Publishers 1969, pp. 98–137.

tence" of capitalist, and indeed neo-capitalist, Europe.[7] Against Fukuyama's claim that parliamentary liberal democracy will prevail, and his empirical evidence in support of a global decline of violence at the end of the Cold War, Derrida not only reminds us that wars and injustices are still devastating "so-called democratic Europe".[8] He also argues that these injustices call for a return to Marxism – not, however, to its ideological doctrine but to the many "spirits" of Marx, that is, to the heterogeneity of the Marxist inheritance. Since an inheritance, in Derrida's view, "is never one with itself", the readability of the legacy of Marxism both calls for and defies interpretation; it is one by dividing, differing and deferring itself. The question guiding his lecture is not where Marxism in its present or past historical realisations can lead us, but "where to lead it by interpreting it".[9] The legacy thus presupposes its own transformation, and the spectre "returns" not only from the past but also from the future possibilities of this transformation.

The question guiding the present paper concerns not the future of Marxism but Havel's indirect reference to the spectre. What are the implications of this opening scene in Havel's essay? Keeping in mind that Havel is, after all, a playwright, it makes sense to ask what sort of dramaturgy his reference to the haunting presence of communism suggests for his conception of the dissident. In what sense is the dissident a ghost and why is it important that we recognise it as such? The more precise focus of my interpretation is the particular temporality actualised by the dissident. The figure of the dissident questions the ideological temporality upheld by the post-totalitarian system. In conformity with what Havel considers the pseudo-reality created by the system, this temporality is described in terms of an empty "present" removed from what phenomenologists have called the "living present", which is an intertwined past, present and future. Having lost contact with the origin that inspired it – the political movements of the nineteenth century – post-totalitarianism is not even utopian. On the most fundamental level, I will show that the life of the dissident reconnects citizens to reality as experientially lived. However, Havel's indirect reference to the *Manifesto* points beyond the phenomenological ramification. As I will suggest, there is an affinity between what Havel calls "post-democracy", towards which he gestures at the end of his essay, and the spectral temporality elaborated in Derrida's reading of Marx. This affinity becomes even more apparent if one

7 Derrida, J., *Specters*, pp. 4–5.

8 According to Derrida, these injustices range from economic, national and ethnic wars to the unleashing of racisms and xenophobias, underemployment, homelessness and deportations, a ruthless global market, the spread of nuclear weapons and the power of "phantom states" such as the mafia and drug cartels.

9 Derrida, J., *Specters*, p. 59.

considers the heterogeneity of spectrality itself. In Derrida's reflections on his first trip to Moscow in 1990, the notion of a messianic promise takes shape that, akin to the dissident resistance, is voiced as a radical responsibility for those presently living, as well as for past and future generations.

In the first part of the paper, I will explicate the role of the dissident in post-totalitarian society and, on the basis of this reading, make a case for a spectral interpretation of Havel's essay that draws on the tradition of phenomenological thought.[10] I then turn to Derrida's imperative to interpret Marx, and the specific temporality suggested by the figure of the spectre. The "nonpolitical politics" of the dissident motivates my final discussion of the undecidability of the future in Havel's essay.

The life of the dissident

The term "dissident" appears within quotation marks throughout Havel's essay. The word was chosen by Western journalists as the label of "a phenomenon peculiar to the post-totalitarian system", he claims, but hardly ever occurring in democratic societies.[11] While from a Western perspective it applies to "citizens of the Soviet bloc", often intellectuals, who express their nonconformist views publicly and yet are protected from the most severe forms of persecution, Havel stresses that dissidents are "ordinary people with ordinary cares", expressing aloud what many either cannot or would be afraid to say.[12] Dissidents, he goes on to say, do not first of all deny or reject anything on the political scene, but are unified by the decision to "live within the truth", a potentially political ideal of freedom that draws on phenomenological conceptions of responsibility, justice and solidarity.[13] To institutionalise a select category of dissidents, therefore, would amount to denying those ethical aspects of resistance.

According to Havel, a full appreciation of the dissident requires a conception of the post-totalitarian system and its nature of power in distinction

10 Cf. Derrida's own remarks on the possibility of a Husserlian "phenomenology of spectrality" in *Specters of Marx*, 189n6. I share Hans Ruin's claim in response to this footnote, that the "spectral", as one name for the "indeterminate space between the dead and the living" and for "a difference within time itself", radicalises the phenomenological enterprise by problematising fundamental phenomenological themes, such as ideality, intentionality and the idea of the intentional object. Ruin, H., *Being with the Dead: Burial, Ancestral Politics, and the Roots of Historical Consciousness*. Stanford, Stanford University Press 2018, p. 23.

11 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", p. 380.

12 Ibid., p. 382.

13 Ibid., e.g., p. 285. For an excellent overview of Havel's relation to phenomenology, in particular to Jan Patočka's work, see Gubser, M., *The Far Reaches: Phenomenology, Ethics, and Social Renewal in Eastern Europe*. Stanford, Stanford University Press 2014.

from classical, totalitarian dictatorships. Whereas the latter are bound up with a limited group of people taking power by force, and thus with the lives of those who establish it, the post-totalitarian system of Czechoslovakia is part of "a power bloc controlled by one of the superpowers".[14] This condition also has temporal implications. While classical dictatorships are viewed as contingent in the sense that they lack historical roots, the post-totalitarian system owes its historicity to the "authenticity" of the nineteenth-century proletarian and socialist movements from which it originated, however much it has alienated itself from these movements.[15]

Although Havel explicitly rejects Marxism and distances himself from Soviet state communism, it would be a simplification to view him as merely a liberal advocate of individual rights. As Robert Pirro points out, it is difficult to classify Havel on a traditional political scale.[16] For instance, in the essay the communist post-totalitarian society is discerned as just "another form of the [Western] consumer and industrial society" and the Chartists as giving voice to "thousands and millions" of unorganised anonymous people struggling for freedom.[17] A full appreciation of Havel's political thought depends rather on an awareness of its roots in phenomenological philosophy.[18] Not only did the East European literati in the 1970s see phenomenology as a "philosophical diagnosis of the modern crisis facing both Soviet and Western Bloc countries", Michael Gubser convincingly argues; it also offered a "vision of personal freedom and transcendence" in sharp contrast to the realities of late communism.[19] And while professional philosophers were committed to the task of developing a social phenomenology, he notes, the Czech and Polish dissident communities of the 1970s and 1980s looked to phenomenology "to reinforce and articulate… an everyday 'practice of dissent'" and were attracted by the "emancipatory promise it contained".[20]

Havel confirms this historiography, writing in his *Letters to Olga* (1979–82) that "most dissidents were drawn to the 'atmosphere' of phenomenology rather than to its 'particular theses, concepts, conclusions'."[21] His essay on

14 Ibid., p. 356.
15 Ibid., p. 357.
16 Pirro, R., "Václav Havel and the Political Uses of Tragedy". *Political Theory* 20, 2002, No. 2, p. 228.
17 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", p. 358.
18 See, e.g., Findlay, E. F., "Classical Ethics and Postmodern Critique: Political Philosophy in Václav Havel and Jan Patočka". *The Review of Politics*, 61, 1999, No. 3, p. 403–438; Tucker, A., *The Philosophy and Politics of Czech Dissidence from Patočka to Havel*. Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh University Press 2000; Gubser, M., *The Far Reaches.*
19 Gubser, M., *The Far Reaches*, p. 133.
20 Ibid., p. 136.
21 Havel, V., cited in Gubser, M., *The Far Reaches*, p. 136.

the dissident movements is also evidence of a positive engagement in phenomenological social critique. Dedicated to the memory of Jan Patočka, the essay thematises the question of technology, as well as the political meaning of responsibility and authenticity. References to Husserl are more implicit, but the idea of a crisis of modern Europe underlies his argument, as does the notion of spiritual "renewal", both of which evoke Husserl's phenomenology of culture and ethics. With particular relevance for the topic of this paper, Havel's description of post-totalitarianism evokes Hannah Arendt's analysis of ideology in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951).

As the "logic of an idea" applied to history, ideology, according to Arendt's analysis, is assumed to explain every historical occurrence by "deducing it from a single premise".[22] This premise could be the "class struggle" (as in Stalinism) or the "natural selection of races" (as in National Socialism). Ideologies, in other words, treat the course of events as though it follows the same "law" as the logical exposition of its idea, pretending to know "the secrets of the past, the intricacies of the present, the uncertainties of the future".[23] As historical, ideologies are not concerned with what Arendt calls "the miracle of being" – the event or sudden happening that "dislocates time" and "changes its direction", to quote the contemporary phenomenologist Françoise Dastur.[24] Rather, history is viewed as a continuous movement to which the logic of the idea is supposed to correspond.

As an instance of this general conception of ideology, Havel understands the "logically structured" and yet essentially flexible ideology of the post-totalitarian system as one legacy of the socialist origin, articulated as the correct understanding of social conflicts at the time when the original movements appeared.[25] Ideology in the post-totalitarian Soviet system provides citizens with an "immediately available home" in an era when metaphysical and existential certainties are in crisis, and when people are made superfluous and alienated. The price for this "low-rent home", however, is that one hands over one's judgement and responsibility to a higher authority, so that the centre of power and the centre of truth become identical. In Havel's analysis, the Czechoslovak post-totalitarian system represents a "radically new" form of power base and has resulted in intricate mechanisms for direct and indirect manipulation of the population. In order to describe these mechanisms, he introduces the fictive example of the manager of a fruit-and-vegetable shop, "the greengrocer". A slogan is displayed on a poster in the green-

22 Arendt, H., *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. San Diego, Harcourt Brace 1976, p. 468.
23 Ibid., p. 469.
24 Ibid.; Dastur, F., "Phenomenology of the Event: Waiting and Surprise", *Hypatia*, 15, 2000, No. 4, pp. 178–189.
25 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", p. 357.

grocer's shop window: "Workers of the world, unite!"[26] If ideology in Arendt's analysis reinforces a notion of history as a continuous movement, ideology in Havel's example essentially repeats an empty present that has lost contact with historical reality and change.

Havel distinguishes the semantic content of the slogan (the ideal it expresses) from the slogan as sign and argues that the "real" meaning of the slogan is to be found in the hidden message the poster conveys. He suggests the following translation of this message:

> I, the greengrocer XY, live here and I know what I must do. I behave in the manner expected of me. I can be depended upon and am beyond reproach. I am obedient and therefore I have the right to be left in peace.[27]

Although the greengrocer might be indifferent to the slogan's semantic content, the ideological surface of the poster ("Workers of the world, unite!") indicates a level of "disinterested conviction" that at once conceals the "low foundations" of the greengrocer's obedience, and those of the power exercised within the system. Driven by a "blind automatism" this power works against "life", which aims towards "plurality, diversity, independent self-constitution, and self-organization". Ideology thus conceals the abyss between the aims of the system and the aims of life and constitutes "a world of appearances" and lies "trying to pass for reality".[28]

The distinction between appearance and reality is virtually assimilated to that between lies and truth: as it is permeated with "hypocrisy and lies", post-totalitarianism "falsifies everything", according to Havel, including language, statistics, and temporality.[29] He does not further develop how time is falsified, and yet stresses this point: "[The regime] falsifies the past. It falsifies the present and it falsifies the future."[30] Two remarks on language, however, suggest a phenomenologically oriented interpretation. First, the ideologically formalised language that replaces reality with "pseudo-reality", Havel writes, is deprived of semantic contact with reality.[31] Formalisation indicates abstraction from the language in which we live, and hence from the reality we perceive, spatially as well as temporally. Second, this pseudo-reality is upheld by the mutual repetition of ideological slogans in shop windows and offices: "[W]ithout the greengrocer's slogan the office worker's slogan

26 Ibid., p. 359.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid., p. 361.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid., p. 362.

could not exist, and vice versa. Each proposes to the other that something be repeated, and each accepts the other's proposal."[32] In the essay, at least, living within a lie means to distance oneself from life's plurality and diversity, and, as a consequence, from its intrinsic unpredictability.

Hypocrisy is ultimately the perspective from which the "real meaning" of the slogan in the greengrocer's window should be interpreted, according to Havel. By placing the sign in the window, as the ritual prescribes, the greengrocer displays his loyalty to the system.[33] This should not be taken to mean evidence of loyalty, however, since there is no need for evidence: the greengrocer has "voted as he should" in trade union meetings and acted like a "good citizen" in national elections, "even signed the anti-Charter".[34] The function of the slogan in the greengrocer's window, and thousands of similar slogans exhibited in shop windows, on lampposts, bulletin boards, etc., is to contribute to the "panorama of everyday life". The citizens' mutual indifference to the slogans is therefore an illusion, inasmuch as through the slogans "each compels the other to accept the rules of the game" and to confirm the system.[35]

An entire district town covered with slogans that no one will read illustrates what Havel calls the "social auto-totality" that draws everyone into the system and turns every individual into both a victim and a supporter of the system. This idea relates to what Arendt, and before her Alexandre Koyré, termed "the modern lie".[36] In contrast to the traditional lie, which concerned particulars, involved the hiding of secrets and stood out against a background of truth, the modern lie implies both deception and self-deception and requires a "rearrangement of the whole factual texture".[37]

Post-totalitarianism and post-democracy

The conflict between "the aims of life" and "the aims of the system" is not one between two socially separate communities and only on a generalised level between the ruler and the ruled.[38] In comparison to oppositions in Western democratic societies with parliamentary systems of government, the dissident movement is not "a political force on the level of actual power".[39] Rather,

32 Ibid., p. 365.
33 Ibid., pp. 361–362.
34 Ibid., p. 364.
35 Ibid., p. 365.
36 Arendt, H., "Truth and Politics", in *Between Past and Future*. London, Penguin 1993, pp. 227–264; Koyré, A., "The Political Function of the Modern Lie". *October*, 160, 2017, pp. 143–151.
37 Arendt, H., "Truth and Politics", p. 252.
38 Havel, V., "The Power of the Powerless", p. 366.
39 Ibid., p. 377.

since ideological manipulation implies self-deception, the conflict between life and the system "runs de facto through each person", Havel claims. To the extent that the post-totalitarian society is upheld by such "universal" suppression of the aims of life to a hidden existential sphere, resistance to the system must originate in this "semidarkness", on the inward level of consciousness and conscience, and anyone may at any moment be struck "by the force of truth".[40] The potential resistance can become actual in political acts and sudden explosions of civil unrest, events that are not restricted to protests by intellectuals, for example a worker's strike, a rock concert or any revolt against manipulation.

Hence the Prague Spring, Havel argues, which appeared to be a clash between two opposing groups, was really "the final act and the inevitable consequence of a long drama originally played out chiefly in the theatre of the spirit and the conscience of society".[41] At the beginning of this drama was no organised resistance, but rather individual poets, painters, musicians or ordinary citizens called by their conscience. Indeed, Charter 77 and other movements can be properly understood only against this hidden "hinterland" of dissidents. And while the "second culture" created through *samizdat* editions of books, magazines, private performances and concerts is the most articulated form of resistance, this "parallel polis" is not an aim in itself, according to Havel, but "points beyond itself and makes sense only as an act of deepening one's responsibility to and for the whole".[42] The aim of the dissident movements, he even claims, is not primarily to affect the power structure but to address "the hidden spheres of reality" and demonstrate "living within the truth" as a human and social alternative. His reflections at the very end of the essay not only reinforce this claim but also, as we will see, resonate with the spectral temporality articulated by Derrida ten years later.

Havel asks rhetorically whether "certain elements" of the concrete post-totalitarian experience do not "point somewhere further, beyond their apparent limits", and whether they are indeed "quietly waiting for the moment when they will be read and grasped", like a non-distant future, having been here "for a long time".[43] In this context he introduces the term "post-democracy" in order to describe the hope for a "moral reconstitution" of the post-totalitarian society.[44] Post-democracy should not be taken as an alternative political model but as "a radical renewal" of experiences of rooted-

40 Ibid., p. 369.
41 Ibid., p. 370.
42 Ibid., p. 397.
43 Ibid., p. 408.
44 Ibid., p. 407.

ness, responsibility and solidarity, prefigured by the dissident communities. Havel's reflections on the "nonpolitical politics" of the dissidents indicate a political transformation that is emancipatory but not politically utopian, revolutionary and yet unpredictable. In distinction from the empty present of ideological time, and from a linear conception of time, post-democracy recognises a historical order where the past lives on in the present and the future is already "around us and within us". The figure of the dissident manifests this different historical order. While Havel insists that the dissident community does not "assume a messianic role" or lead anyone, the post-democratic promise nevertheless evokes the "weak" messianic power Walter Benjamin thematises in "Theses on the Philosophy of History".[45] This power admits a hidden historicity, articulated in the second thesis as "a secret agreement between past generations and the present one". From this perspective, history is not a "progression", understood as the "causal connection between various moments in history", but a fact becomes historical posthumously in a "constellation" between the present and the past, or in a specific "time of now" [*Jetztzeit*].[46] When Benjamin acknowledges the unpredictability of historical events, he relates to a tradition within modern Jewish philosophy according to which the "light of Messiah" is a flash of lightning that breaks through the temporal order of events without any foreseeable outcome.[47] I will show in the final part of this paper that there is a correspondence between Havel's "dissident" and Derrida's "spectre" on the level of the messianic historical order. Derrida's reflections on Marxism at the time of perestroika testify to a heterogeneous origin of the spectre and, like Havel, evoke Benjamin's philosophy of history.

Spectral temporality

Derrida thematised Marx for the first time during a visit in Moscow in February 1990, but it was only a few years later that he became seriously involved in Marxist philosophy. The focus of his concern was the "ghosts" Marx left behind, that is, the inheritance of Marxist thought. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida distinguishes this inheritance, a heterogeneity demanding interpretation and selection, from "the Marxist dogmatics linked to the apparatuses

45 Benjamin, W., "Theses on the Philosophy of History", in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. H. Arendt. New York, Schocken Books 1968, pp. 253–264.

46 Ibid., p. 261, 263.

47 Bouretz, P., "Messianism and Jewish Modern Philosophy", in Morgan, M. L. – Gordon, P. E. (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Jewish Philosophy*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2007, p. 174.

of orthodoxy".[48] Although Derrida has been criticised for his nonpolitical angle, stressing the philosophical inheritance of Marxism does not, according to him, erase its revolutionary and emancipatory dimensions. Spectrality ultimately concerns a responsibility for "the ghosts of those others who are no longer or for those others who are not yet", a responsibility that disjoins the living present, not as its negative reversal but as reaching "*beyond [therefore] the living present in general*".[49] As literary theorist Colin Davies puts it, the spectre addresses "the living by the voices of the past or the not yet formulated possibilities of the future".[50] In contrast to the traditional notion of "ontology", where being is conceptualised in terms of self-identical presence, the dramatisation of the ghost that opens *Manifesto of the Communist Party* suggests to Derrida a "hauntology" that he elaborates in terms of such disjointed temporality. The presence of Shakespeare is unmistakable, and one central question in Derrida's lecture concerns the meaning of Hamlet's curse in the first act of the play. What does it mean that "time is out of joint" and to "set it right"?

In his reflection on the many French translations of Hamlet's phrase, Derrida observes that André Gide's translation from 1945 gives the expression an ethical and political meaning: "this age is dishonored" (*cette époque est déshonorée*) adds a quality of "decadence or corruption of the city" and of "dissolution or perversion of customs".[51] On Derrida's reading, Hamlet's curse opens a space that, on the one hand, concerns Hamlet's destiny to set a disjointed time right, "by making of rectitude and right (*'to set it right'*) a movement of *correction*, reparation, restitution, vengeance, revenge, punishment."[52] On the other hand, Derrida tentatively proposes, the curse also concerns a "disadjustment" that opens up an "infinite asymmetry of the relation to the other", and thus transcends vengeance:

> [C]an one not yearn for a justice that one day, a day belonging no longer to history, a quasi-messianic day, would finally be removed from the fatality of vengeance? Better than removed: infinitely foreign, heterogenous at its source? And is this day before us, to come, or more ancient than memory itself?[53]

48 Derrida, J., *Specters*, p. 64.
49 Ibid., p. xx (italics in original).
50 Davies, C., "État présent: Hauntology, Spectres and Phantoms". *French Studies*, 59, 2005, No. 3, p. 378f.
51 Derrida, J., *Specters*, p. 18. As he observes, "time" could mean time as temporality, history or even world.
52 Ibid., p. 21 (italics in original).
53 Ibid.

Rather than repeating the circle of revenge, Derrida writes in a related passage, the principle of this justice would be to recognise the respect for "those others who are no longer or … who are not yet *there*, presently living".[54] In a footnote, he identifies the "logic" of such spectral justice with the messianic force Benjamin associates with historical materialism in "Theses on the Philosophy of History".[55] Whereas Havel's indirect reference to Marx, as I have suggested, indicates a spectral dimension of the dissident, Derrida's direct reference to Benjamin draws attention to the heterogeneity of spectrality itself. The crucial passage is, again, Benjamin's second thesis on the history of philosophy:

> The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a weak Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim. Historical materialism is aware of that.[56]

Derrida comments briefly on this passage in *Specters of Marx*. The messianic inheritance is "turned toward the future no less than the past", he writes, "in a heterogenous and disjointed time".[57] The idea of a spectral temporality, however, is outlined already in the "phantom narrative" from his trip to Moscow in 1990, written as a commentary on Benjamin's *Moscow Diary* (1926–1927), Gide's travelogue *Return from the USSR* (1936–1937) and René Étiemble's autobiographical travel notes from the 1930s.[58] These texts are all bound to the October Revolution and to the progress of the USSR. In Gide's words, "[w]hat we dreamed, what we scarcely dared to hope but toward which all our will, our force tended, took place over there. And so it was a land in which utopia had a good chance of becoming reality."[59] As such, Derrida comments, this tradition of texts is linked with a "unique, finished, irreversible, and nonrepeatable sequence of political history" that has come to an end at the time of perestroika. Yet whereas USSR as construction, "chosen fatherland" and

54 Ibid., p. xix (italics in original).
55 Ibid., p. 180n2.
56 Benjamin, W., "Theses on the Philosophy of History", p. 254.
57 Derrida, J., *Specters*, p. 181n2.
58 Derrida, J., "Back from Moscow, in the USSR", in Poster, M. (ed.), *Politics, Theory, and Contemporary Culture*. New York, Columbia University Press 1993, p. 211. For a discussion on the relation between Derrida's Moscow narrative and his philosophical interpretation of Marxism in *Specters of Marx*, see Ousmanova, A., "Derrida on the Territory of Ghosts". *Athena*, 13, 2018, p. 100.
59 Derrida, J., "Back from Moscow", p. 220.

promise has failed, he claims, this failure has opened the era of reconstruction – "construction that begins or rebegins after a new departure".[60]

Derrida's narrative reveals that the two historical moments – that of the revolution and that of perestroika – are unified by a particular undecidability or "paradox of *anticipation*". His crucial point is that the experience "in progress" of the USSR, as well as the experience of the utopian travelogue that is being written, is a "construction" that is suspended, which means that "it remains as undecided and undecidable".[61] On the one hand, Derrida notes, these texts are talking about a "time to come", or an "anticipation of the future: will the promise be kept?"[62] The epigraph of Gide's travelogue, which is a Homeric hymn to Demeter, illustrates this anticipation in suspense: Demeter is "'leaning forward, as if over a future humanity, above a radiant nursling' in whom something 'superhuman is being prepared'".[63] Gide's continued text is "myth, religion, pilgrimage, and hope", Derrida suggests when he interprets this passage, but also – since hope is projected on a political construction – the "end of myth" and the beginning of history. This structure corresponds to the structure of messianism, but the undecidability of the future is thematised already in Benjamin's reflections on Moscow.

Among the possibilities the city reveals, Benjamin writes in a letter to Martin Buber after his return from Moscow in February 1927, is "the possibility that the Revolution might fail or succeed".[64] And he continues: "[S]omething unforeseeable will be the result and its picture will be far different from any programmatic sketch one might draw of the future." Gide's and Benjamin's "supposed taking into account" of the failure of the construction, Derrida notes in retrospect, anticipates perestroika as the origin of a new political construction. Although the meaning and result of perestroika remain as undecidable as the first construction, there is clearly a "reversal of direction" in comparison to the utopian travelogues: "[T]oday there could not possibly be any back from the USSRs," he writes in 1990. To the contrary "one claims to go see 'over there' … whether perestroika is 'working,' if the delivery went well, if the travail is happening as it should".[65] As if in response to Havel's essay, Derrida confirms that the presumption in the West is that perestroika is to "forge a society … on the model of Western parliamentary democracies, liberal in the political and economic sense".[66] The discourse

60 Ibid., p. 222.
61 Ibid., p. 221.
62 Ibid., p. 222.
63 Ibid., p. 219.
64 Ibid., p. 225.
65 Ibid., p. 223.
66 Ibid.

dominating the West, he claims in the same passage, is articulated as a question: "Are these people going to succeed … in resembling us by entering the now more than ever assured space of democracies and their market (whether it is called capitalist, neocapitalist, or mixed …)?" Here, as in *Specters of Marx*, this political question translates into a question concerning time: "Are they finally going to enter history?"[67]

Concluding remarks

Derrida was far from unfamiliar with Charter 77 when he wrote his lecture on Marx. In his extensive biography of Derrida, Benoît Peeters narrates the events around Derrida's arrestment in Prague on New Year's Eve 1981.[68] As vice-president of the French branch of the Jan Hus Educational Foundation, he lectured on the evening of 27 December to a group of students and colleagues at the home of Ladislav Hejdánek, professor at Charles University. The content of the secret lecture was not political but based on a seminar Derrida had given at the Sorbonne in the same year on Descartes's relation to language. He nevertheless had the sense of already being followed at Orly airport, according to Peeters. Just before his return flight to Paris, four days later, Derrida was arrested at Prague airport and accused of "producing, trafficking and transferring drugs".[69] News of the arrest was soon made public, however, and Czech president Gustáv Husák, facing a potential diplomatic crisis, released him on the evening of 31 December.

The relation between Derrida and Havel that I have drawn attention to here is not biographical but systematic. I have argued that there is an affinity between the dissident as articulated in Havel's essay on the "power of the powerless" from 1979, and the spectre that Derrida elaborates in his reading of Marx in 1993. Both are manifestations of a specific modern temporality that Derrida (with Hamlet) calls "disjointed", because it is haunted by a revolutionary force and claim for justice. Derrida argues that spectral resistance or hauntology (the return and persistence of past injustices in the present) is intrinsic to or defines capitalist and neo-capitalist Europe, and hence also Western democracy. My more modest suggestion along the same lines is that dissident resistance (a hidden, potential resistance that can "at any time" become actual) is intrinsic to post-totalitarian Eastern Europe. The dissident is a "ghost" in the sense that it haunts the empty ideological temporality that Havel claims characterises normalised Czechoslovakia in the 1970s. The

67 Ibid.
68 Peeters, B., *Derrida: A Biography*, trans. A. Brown. Cambridge, Polity Press 2015, pp. 332–341.
69 Ibid., p. 334.

promise of this resistance is certainly not a "return" to the ideological doctrine of Marxism. Yet the existential revolt of the dissident community restores space for reality and truth that evokes something of Marx's original rebellion against a system that constrains human self-constitution and diversity. The dissident, like Derrida's spectre, is a "ghost" in the sense that it radicalises the Marxist legacy, and attending to its forgotten message is first of all an ethical injunction.

The emphasis in Havel's essay, furthermore, is not so much on the past as on the future: the dissident movements anticipate a "renewal" of experiences of responsibility and solidarity, and these experiences are already "around us and within us". In other words, while Havel's opening allusion to *Manifesto of the Communist Party* is more than a rhetorical, perhaps ironic, gesture, the stronger evidence for a "spectral" reading of his text is his original conception of post-democracy, which he understands not in terms of Western parliamentary democracy but precisely as an "inward" future that will express itself in nonconformist actions and manifestations. According to the interpretation suggested here, this non-oppositional, "nonpolitical politics" (remember Havel's reference to experiences "quietly waiting for the moment when they will be read and grasped") evokes the weak messianic power Benjamin articulates in "Theses on the Philosophy of History" from 1940. The "secret agreement" between generations that this power recognises translates into a responsibility not only for the presently living, as Derrida puts it, but also for those others who are no longer there, and for those who are not yet there. In addition, the dissident prefiguration of the future recalls Benjamin's experience of the "progress" and "unforeseeable result" of the October Revolution in his reflections on Moscow. In spectral terms, post-democracy remains to come in the way the failure or success of the revolution is held in suspense at the time of writing.

Derrida's interpretation of Benjamin's *Moscow Diary*, alongside Gide's *Return from the USSR* and Étiemble's autobiographical travel notes from the same period, reinforces the critical link or "generational agreement" between Havel, Benjamin and himself. When Benjamin takes into account the failure of the October Revolution and of the USSR as a political construction, Derrida claims, he in fact anticipates perestroika as a *new* political construction, as undecided and undecidable as the first. What Derrida says about democracy in 1990, Havel (in a reversed direction) could have said ten years earlier:

> To say, for example, that "democratization" is in progress and to mean by that all the movements in progress in the East is not perhaps false but it is surely very confused. Especially when this supposes that we have a rig-

orous model of democracy, an assured experience, a frozen concept, at home, *chez nous* in the West and especially, therefore when a naïve euphoria or a very calculated strategy tries to credit the idea that what they ought to want in any case, is to rejoin us and resemble us by taking part in the great space of liberalism, both political and economic.[70]

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70 Derrida, J., "Back from Moscow", p. 206.

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Orcid: 0000-0002-7469-9382

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The Dissident

Six Readings of "The Power of the Powerless" by Václav Havel

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In 1978 Václav Havel wrote his now legendary underground essay on the "power of the powerless". Dedicated to the memory of Jan Patočka (1907–1977) – like Havel, a member of the Charter 77 human rights movement – the text examines a constellation of concepts that remain crucial for understanding the nature of political power.

This special issue is devoted to rereading and reassessing Havel's essay in the light of the present day culture and ethico-political scene. The Chartist efforts to pursue a non-political politics that evidently calls for, or aims to make room for, some rather drastic political changes, lead us to reflect upon power relations and pre-political textures, where existential, political and ethical concerns are allowed to come forth as intermingled, not only with each other but also with questions about language, symbolism and truth. The papers collected here are investigations into how these forms of interconnection and intertwining between ethics, existential concerns, authenticity, language, meaning and truth look.

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