

## Introduction

The Czech philosopher Jan Patočka died in a Prague hospital on March 13, 1977, at age sixty-nine. The cause of death was a brain hemorrhage, brought on by a series of exhausting interrogations at the hands of the StB, the Czechoslovak secret police. Patočka had been under interrogation for his involvement in a protest, in the name of human rights, against the deceitful rule of the communist government in Czechoslovakia. This protest took the form of a document called Charter 77. Its purpose was, in Socratic style, to inform the regime publicly of its own hypocrisy, of its failure to abide by the international Helsinki agreement to which it was a signatory. The Charter admirably accomplished this task, gaining in the process worldwide respect and launching the dissident career of the young playwright Václav Havel who, just over a decade later, would assume the presidency of the newly democratic Czechoslovak republic. Without Patočka's involvement as a spokesman, it is doubtful whether the Charter would have been as effective. The philosopher was explicit in stating, shortly before his death, that there are things worth suffering for.<sup>1</sup> In choosing to speak for the Charter, he chose to speak the truth, not merely in private, but in the public realm. In acting politically, in speaking truthfully before his own Athenian Senate knowing full well the cost involved, Jan Patočka, like his model Socrates, signaled that there was an unbreakable relationship between politics and philosophy, between truth and the realm of our social being. Through his actions and words, Patočka declared that we should not be content with a passive awareness of this relationship; we must act according to it. In the work that follows I will pursue the nature of this relationship as it is uniquely developed in the work of the late Czech philosopher Jan Patočka.

Jan Patočka spoke in one moment as a dedicated classicist, in another as a thorough postmodernist. It is conceivable, depending on the texts on which you choose to focus, to defend his work from either perspective. This is a temptation for the contemporary reader. One might read him, for example, as a moral Platonist who is enough of a contemporary to pay attention to postmodern theory or, alternately, as a committed postmodern

who is willing to pay lip service to the classics. Such readings should be avoided, however. With this study I will show that the voice of Jan Patočka is a distinctive one in contemporary philosophy, that his work deserves recognition not merely as an alternative reading of already established bodies of work, but as a unique contribution to philosophy and to political theory.

A Czech in the midst of the twentieth century, Patočka was literally surrounded by German influence, in politics as well as in education. It is not surprising, therefore, that the context of his work is largely determined by German philosophy. Patočka naturally came under the influence of the towering philosophical figures of the time and place, Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. It is Husserl and Heidegger, above all others, who account for the specific direction of his work. Yet as a doctoral student in the twenties and thirties, Patočka was also well read in the works of, among others, Brentano, Bergson, Scheler, Koyré, Radl, and Ingarden.<sup>2</sup>

Although of the age when political developments forced many of his contemporaries to emigrate, Patočka chose to remain in Czechoslovakia for the duration of the periods of National Socialist and Communist rule. Among those Central European philosophical contemporaries who did emigrate, the names of Arendt, Strauss, and Voegelin come to mind. Patočka shares a great deal with these thinkers and can be properly situated in the broad context of the themes that they pursue. He speaks directly, in addition, to contemporary thinkers such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Paul Ricoeur, as well as Richard Rorty and Jacques Derrida. Methodologically, what ties Patočka to these thinkers is his engagement with phenomenology and ontology, with philosophy pursued through direct, experiential evidence illuminated by analysis of the structures inherent to the human being. Thematically, he shares with many of these individuals an interest in the classical philosophy and politics of ancient Athens combined with a postmodern interest in the problem of metaphysics and the source, the foundation, of the shared sense of meaningfulness that underlies Western civilization. Yet Patočka's work belongs to the context of these other thinkers not only from the perspective of method and theme; he belongs with them as well because of the significance and relevance of what he has to say. This is a point to be established in the course of this study, however.

Patočka's work is inspired by the goal expressed by Edmund Husserl in his last major work, the *Crisis of European Sciences*. As a reaction to this "crisis," the crisis of rationality accompanying the rise of positivism and its subordination of the question of relevance to one of method or objectivity, Husserl sought a renewal of the spirit that was at the heart of Western culture, the spirit of reason.<sup>3</sup> As Husserl's student during the period when this theme was formulated, Patočka took on himself the task of pursuing and

clarifying this strand of Husserl's thought—a strand that fully occupied the German phenomenologist only at the end of his life. What Patočka realized was that Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, while it proceeded from unimpeachable insight about the importance of the direct experience of phenomena (as opposed to the more indirect experience of phenomena perceived through the anticipatory lenses of theory or ideology), was in many ways inappropriate to the task. Husserl's understanding of reason was still anchored in Enlightenment thinking, while Patočka wished to renew an ancient understanding of reason by subjecting it to a contemporary critique that was critical of Enlightenment thought.

Patočka chose, therefore, not to pursue the problem along Husserlian lines, as a search for a universal philosophy in the Cartesian tradition. He felt that rationality primarily indicated a mode of living, of examining reality, modeled on the dialectical activity of Socrates. His was a concrete question, a question of the being of man in the world and in history. For the development of this insight Patočka looked to the work of Martin Heidegger, who was particularly important in two ways: first, he brought to Patočka a thematic exploration of human being, and second, he stressed the importance of history, of understanding humanity as situated temporally, or historically.

Husserl had pointed to rationality, the Greek "insight," as the underlying principle of European civilization. Patočka wanted to renew it as a principle not by disregarding the contemporary and returning to the ancient, but by reexamining the ancient with the help of contemporary thought. Reason had to be re-understood phenomenologically and ontologically, and this meant understanding it—following Heidegger's critique of metaphysics—in a nonmetaphysical sense.<sup>4</sup>

Husserl and Heidegger, then, profoundly influenced the political thought of Jan Patočka. The importance of their work to contemporary thought leads many political theorists to attempt to locate a coherent theory of politics in their work directly. It is generally true, however, that these attempts have not had great success. The fact is that neither Husserl nor Heidegger lends himself readily to political theory. Yet their work is crucial to the contemporary critique of the Western theory that political theorists look to as justification for their normative political stances. What is perhaps needed, then, is not an attempt to read Husserl or Heidegger as political thought, but an attempt to write political thought in light of their work. This is an appropriate description of Patočka's task; while true that he tries to remain faithful to the insight of his German teachers, he nevertheless moves to develop a politically relevant philosophy that draws on them yet is independent of their particular frameworks.

German philosophy was not the only influence that made a decisive impression. Patočka lived in a time and place of great upheaval and conflict.

Czechoslovak hopes for political freedom were crushed repeatedly during the course of his life: first at Munich in 1938 and the resulting occupation by the Third Reich, once again with the Communist takeover after World War II, and finally in 1968 with the Soviet-led invasion in the wake of the Prague Spring. It is no exaggeration, then, to remark as Josef Novák did that “Patočka’s bibliography is inseparable from his biography.”<sup>5</sup> To note and take account of the influence of history, however, is something substantially different from drawing the conclusion that Patočka’s work is determined by that history, that he is essentially, for example, a “dissident” philosopher. To make such a charge is to imply that it is the dissident experience that is substantive, and not the philosophy. Patočka is not, in this sense, a dissident philosopher. His work does not depend on his historical experience with dissidence; instead, it is the dissident experience that is made additionally meaningful through his political philosophy.

Rather than a simple response to external events, Patočka’s political theory is philosophy in the truest sense of the term. It realizes first of all that philosophy, like all human achievements, is a historical one, and second, that new philosophies do not simply replace older ones but are continuous with them. To take these principles seriously is to accept the challenge offered by Patočka—the challenge to reveal the dialogue and the continuity between the ancient and the new, between the classical and the postmodern.

Before approaching the question of the significance of this material a few more words need to be said about the disparate nature of much of Patočka’s work. As a result of the reality of communism, Jan Patočka was only for very short periods able to work and conduct research as a university professor. He was also unable to publish much of what he did produce. Though he wrote a vast amount in his lifetime, relatively little of it is in the form of significant texts to which one can authoritatively point as reflecting a center of the philosopher’s canon. As Josef Moural put it in a short essay on this topic, “[t]here is too little of finished big works, and too much of sketches, fragments, lectures for various levels of listeners.”<sup>6</sup> Even among works that can be called major, a great variety of topics are considered. In addition to his attention to phenomenology, Patočka was also a philosopher of history and, some would also say, a historian of philosophy.<sup>7</sup>

There is a question, therefore, about the existence of a genuine center in the philosopher’s work. At least one Czech commentator, Moural notes, has argued that there is no “core” to Patočka’s work, no “project” in any systematic sense. In this view, Patočka’s greatness lies in his ability to interpret other philosophers.<sup>8</sup> In defense of this position, a former student, the Czech philosopher Ladislav Hejránek, maintains that Patočka did not genuinely pursue phenomenology as the centerpiece of his philosophizing. There are others, though, who make the opposite claim. Moural also points

to a perspective that holds that phenomenology—particularly the unfinished projects of an “asubjective” phenomenology and the theory of three movements of human existence—was in fact the “center of gravity” that determined a basic unity in this work.<sup>9</sup>

While both viewpoints can be adequately defended, Moural appropriately notes a third element, “one that is more difficult to identify and describe.”<sup>10</sup> This is the theme that the editors of Patočka’s *Collected Works* have chosen to title “Care for the Soul.” As those editors, Ivan Chvatik and Pavel Kouba, put it, this title indicates “the works that concern the position of human beings in the world and in history: from the moral and religious questions of the individual through the attitudes towards current social and political events up to general reflections on the philosophy of history.”<sup>11</sup> These texts, which contain political as well as historical reflections, are highlighted by the one work that most would agree to call a *magnum opus*: the *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*. In pointing toward these works, Moural correctly implies that here, in this as yet fully unexplored theme in Patočka’s work, may be the core, the most significant project, of a lifetime of philosophy. It is Moural’s contention, indeed, that the theme of “care for the soul,” which “emphasizes the necessity of radical self-clarification to be achieved through historical enquiry,”<sup>12</sup> may be viewed as encompassing, and not standing in contrast to, the interest in phenomenology.

Moural places the question of care for the soul within the broader confines of an inquiry into historicity, and in this he is at least partly correct. In addition to history, I maintain that Patočka is also inquiring into the nature of politics and the political model conducive to human freedom. Philosophy, he argued, is the care for the soul that takes place within the “care for the *polis*, for the optimal state.”<sup>13</sup> In his brief essay, Moural leaves the reader with a challenge to undertake an examination of Patočka’s work in light of the theme of history; this is a challenge that leads to what I consider the “core” of Patočka’s work: the question of the “*social being* of humans.”<sup>14</sup> With this interest, not solely in *being* but in *social being*, the Czech philosopher incorporates into his study of Husserl and Heidegger a Platonically inspired devotion to the reality of human beings in community—in other words, to politics.

It is this part of Patočka’s work that belongs under the heading of “care for the soul,” and it is the central focus of this study. It leads, not inward into the methodological questions of phenomenology, but outward into the world of human social life, the world of political and historical activity. Yet phenomenology remains a crucial part of the equation, for Patočka argued that “the question of human social being is also in the first place a *phenomenological* question.”<sup>15</sup> Thus to get at the philosophy of history and politics that is at the center of Patočka’s work, one must first work through the implications of the phenomenology and ontology of Husserl

and Heidegger. Only when this is done is the question of history, that “domain of changing social being of humans,” fully illuminated. It is only in history, Patočka concludes, that the “*social being* of humans can manifest itself as *essentially free*.”<sup>16</sup>

Care for the soul thus implies care for the social being of humans; it is the political theme at the center of the philosophy of Jan Patočka. Directed toward the social reality of human beings, this work is naturally relevant to the sciences that study that reality. Thus it is, in his series of phenomenological lectures entitled *Body, Community, Language, World* that Patočka stresses the need of a philosophical justification for the social sciences. “[F]or all social sciences,” he writes, “the point at which they become genuine sciences is penetration through self-illusions, self-deceptions, our idols of ourselves. Providing a philosophical foundation for actual human scientific disciplines demands that we find access to this situation, not an empirical, but a foundational, justifying one.”<sup>17</sup>

Thus setting out his own goal, Patočka brings us to the question of the significance of his achievement. As a student of Heidegger, it is correct to assume that when Patočka speaks about a philosophical “foundation,” he is not referring to the type of “metaphysical” foundation of which Heidegger was so critical.<sup>18</sup> Since the critique offered by Heidegger and, before him, Nietzsche, the question of the foundation has been at the center of contemporary thought. It is a fundamental question, and in many ways a dilemma, of postmodernism. The notion that theory and philosophy should be pursued on the basis of an objectively transcendental foundation has been discredited. It is in light of this that Patočka maintains, along Heideggerean lines, that we are in a “postmetaphysical” era or, as others would say, an age of postmodernism.

The contours of the postmodern dilemma take form as the question is raised of a justification for political and ethical values or norms. Without a solid foundation on which to construct arguments and base conclusions, questions as fundamental as those of morality and justice lose their anchor. It is a loss that cannot be replaced through scientific method; the most elaborate arguments of utilitarianism notwithstanding, social problems inevitably require answers from the realm of morality. The “postmetaphysical” world, Patočka argues, is grounded in nihilism, in a fundamental meaninglessness; its apparent options are to commit to a stance of ethical relativism, the relativism of all meaning, or to seek a renewal of metaphysics through anthropocentric substitutes for transcendental certainty, such as are offered by teleological philosophies of history or eschatological political movements.

This postmodern dilemma is centered, then, in the question of meaning. If one rejects objective, metaphysical meaning, there seems to be no

recourse but to commit to meaning that is merely relative, meaning as a function of the will of humans. Jan Patočka is a postmodern philosopher in the sense that he denies the “simply given meaning” of grand narratives and metaphysical systems. Meaning or knowledge taken from an objectively transcendent source, disconnected from human reality in the world, is meaning naively received. It is meaning that seeks to end the need for questioning, not to encourage it. Patočka is not satisfied merely to critique metaphysics, however. He sees human life as absolutely meaningful, and in a nonrelativistic way.

His work seeks to respond to this problem of meaning, of the foundation of meaningfulness in human life. Because he does not conceive of the individual as an independent, disconnected being, but as one integrated into historical relationships with the world and with other beings in a social setting, it is a question that cannot be abstracted from its political or historical context. Meaning, and the sense of a ground on which humans can build continuity, is a factor of our living truthfully in the world and of our relating to the world, not as a collection of objects, but as a whole. What Patočka describes under the rubric of care for the soul is a foundation for politics and ethics in the contemporary world—a foundation that is itself nonmetaphysical.

In terms of its value for political philosophy, Patočka’s work is outstanding in its attempt to develop an approach to philosophy and politics that is nonfoundational in the traditional sense, yet does not abandon ethical insight, such as that offered in classical thought by Plato and Aristotle and, in the modern period, by philosophical politicians such as the first Czech president T. G. Masaryk. It is this region between the two poles of a rejection of a simply given, absolute reality on one hand, and the refusal to descend into an amoral nihilism on the other, that must be explored by political theory. An evaluation of Patočka’s work is therefore crucial to contemporary political thought.

What Patočka offers, though, is not a “solution” to the problem of meaning or to history. To the contrary, he demands recognition that meaning is not an objective constant in human life, that it is problematic. What is constant, what is “absolute,” is the “possibility” inherent in human being. By virtue of an ontological reality noted by Heidegger—that as humans we take an interest in our own being—we have the possibility to pursue this interest toward an intensification, a growth of that being. For Patočka, this can best be done through an understanding of our social being and the possibilities available to it—the possibilities of freedom and of historical action. Here, then, are the concepts that emerge from Patočka’s philosophy of history and politics. It is through active freedom in a social and political setting inspired by the model of the Greek polis—that is, a model grounded in



the fragile consistency of a community that accepts the conflict and uncertainty natural to free and equal beings—that human life is most fully open to a nonrelativistic meaningfulness.

With this study of the political thought in the philosophy of Jan Patočka, I intend to illuminate and evaluate this argument for a retheorization of the ground, of the foundations, of Western thought. What is at stake is more than an intellectual exercise, for as Patočka clearly points out, the contemporary world, particularly in regard to its political realities, is mired in a crisis. We exist in an age, with all the characteristics of a technological “supercivilization,” that is unable to break its search for meaning free from entanglement with the metaphysical remnants of past theoretical endeavors. Modern civilization searches for meaning by seeking a solution to the problem of history. It seeks to solve history by mastering it—through a political or a philosophical system so perfect as to preclude the possibility of an insoluble problem. To do so is to seek to end history. “Yet the problem of history,” Patočka is adamant, “may not be resolved, it must be preserved as a problem.”<sup>19</sup>

In order to illuminate the problematic conception of history and politics that makes sense of this enigmatic statement, to illuminate the sense of caring for the soul as a primary function of the polis, I present five substantive chapters of analysis, appended to which is a brief review of the literature on Patočka. Chapter 2, immediately following this introduction, focuses on reading Patočka as an interpreter of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. Here I discuss the way in which phenomenology, Husserl’s methodology for studying reality “as it appears to the ordinary observer or as we encounter it in direct, immediate experience,”<sup>20</sup> forms a basis for Patočka’s approach to philosophy. I also trace the influence of the later Husserl, and particularly his *Crisis of European Sciences*, on the young Patočka’s view of history and the spirit of the European world. Husserl, however, is only a part of the story. Patočka is not a follower of phenomenology so much as an interpreter of it, and this interpretation is primarily indebted to the ontological insight of Martin Heidegger. Heidegger’s influence is also considered, then, as well as the way in which Patočka takes a consciously different path from Heidegger, a path that leads directly to the realm of politics, and not away from it. Last, in chapter 2, I discuss Patočka’s own phenomenological contribution: a phenomenology of three movements in human life that becomes the theoretical basis for his work in philosophy of history.

The influence of Husserl and Heidegger is crucial, but it is not in contemporary theory that Patočka finds his greatest inspiration. Consciously departing from Heidegger in this regard, Patočka looks to Plato or, more particularly, to Socrates as epitomizing the approach to philosophy he



wishes to emulate. This Socratic approach, however, is viewed through Heideggerean eyes. In chapter 3 I consider the philosopher's relation to Greek philosophy. Here a number of important texts stand out. First is the series of lectures entitled *Plato and Europe*, which present the thesis that the care for the soul, as Patočka understands it, is the "spirit" of European life, a spirit that has been made progressively opaque in the course of Western history. In the same vein is the important essay "Negative Platonism," which gives a clear account of Patočka's reading of Socratic activity as nonmetaphysical and develops a distinction between the figure of Socrates and the later work of Plato. This chapter is important, therefore, for establishing the feasibility of the attempt to, in effect, combine classical theory and symbolism with contemporary critique.

The fourth chapter shifts to the philosophy of history that, as Josef Moural pointed out, belongs within the context of the theme of caring for the soul. Patočka's philosophy of history is presented in the first three of his *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*. I discuss these chapters with the aim of uncovering both the controversial nature and the intent of the contention that history can be said to have a particular beginning, coinciding with the origin of philosophy and politics in Greek antiquity. This review of the meaning of history in Patočka's work leads naturally to a discussion of the site of historical activity (the polis) and its characteristics (freedom and a recognition of problematicity). This chapter concludes, then, with an introduction of the theme of politics.

I turn, in the fifth chapter, directly to a consideration of politics, starting with a review of some of Patočka's other political texts and concluding with an examination of the final two of the *Heretical Essays*, in which the social and political reality of the contemporary world is subject to critique. The aim of chapter 5, entitled "Politics and Ethics in the Twentieth Century," is threefold. First, it is to bring out the details of Patočka's analysis of contemporary civilization and its technological character. This analysis culminates in the striking and controversial essay "Wars of the Twentieth Century and the Twentieth Century as War," with which Patočka concludes his *Heretical Essays*. I try to demonstrate, with a look at not only this essay but also a number of lesser-known essays written at the same time, that there is a fundamental consistency in Patočka's writings, even as those writings are marked by drastic shifts in tone and metaphor. The point to be stressed is that, even as Patočka shifts from a Platonic stress on care for the soul to a more Nietzschean idiom in his discussion of war and conflict, no major change in philosophy is taking place. The challenge for readers, as I noted earlier, is not to read this thinker as you wish him to be, as, for example, a Platonic moralist whose talk of conflict is inexplicable. Patočka occupies a nontraditional space in philosophy.

His understanding of care for the soul does not lead to a transcendental harmony; care for the soul is, rather, a difficult process that involves conflict and requires a willingness to sacrifice.

The second aim of this chapter is to illuminate the attributes of the individual who is genuinely able to care for his soul, the individual who exemplifies the self-understanding characteristic of a historical and political actor. This individual, or “spiritual person,”<sup>21</sup> is neither a typical politician nor a “Guardian” in the sense of Plato’s *Republic*. He or she may be a member of any profession. What is important is the person’s willingness to accept a “problematic” life and to speak truthfully in the public realm. In this way, Patočka emphasizes, the “spiritual person” of whatever profession is nonetheless political.

My third aim, in chapter 5, is to introduce an essential element of Patočka’s politics: the element of ethics and morality. Patočka’s final writings, which came in defense of Charter 77, stress the “moral attitude” of the spiritual person and of the political state to which he belongs. Moral sentiment, it is argued, is sovereign over both the individual and the state. Patočka’s political thought thus culminates in a commitment to a certain unconditionality of ethical comportment. Yet this position leads to a potential objection. How is it possible to require an unconditional ethics if one is committed to a critique of metaphysics? Can postmodern critique be applied to political theory without dissolving into ethical relativism?

With these questions I return to the central theme of this study and of Patočka’s political theory, the problem of the foundation. I conclude with a sixth chapter that explores this theme. It is, in Patočka’s terms, a problem of the meaningfulness of human reality. The world as a whole is the meaningful context of our lives, yet it is not an abstract, metaphysical objectification. To the degree that this can be demonstrated persuasively, and Patočka attempts to do so using phenomenological analysis, then the ground of politics and ethics takes on an alternate form, one that contrasts distinctly with the variety of forms given to it in the technological, as well as the pretechnological, eras.

Patočka’s philosophy, I contend, is an internally consistent and convincing alternative to political theory that styles itself as either “postmodern” or “classical.” It most certainly belongs in the canon of contemporary theory. It is not, however, without its shortcomings, and I discuss the project in chapter 6 with a critical eye, noting the limits of its perspective and the opposition it may provoke. As an appendix to this study, I also include a review of the primary literature on Jan Patočka in English. As a scholar whose ability to work and publish was suppressed by an authoritarian state, Patočka has not been the subject of a significant literature outside his native land. This has begun to change in the last decade but, as I note in the

appendix, the literature is still limited and inconsistent. I hope to address this deficiency with this study.

In concluding this introduction, it will be pertinent to note a few of the biographical details of Jan Patočka's life.<sup>22</sup> Patočka was born in 1907 in the town of Turnov, in what was then the Czech part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He was the third of four boys in a family of modest means but superior education. Patočka's father was a well-known classical philologist with a wide-ranging interest in the literary arts, and his mother was trained in opera. Although the family was forced to live modestly due to the elder Patočka's ill health, it is certain that the children were not at a loss for education.

The young Patočka began a course of study in philosophy at Prague's ancient Charles University in 1925 and was able to gain a stipend, four years later, to study in Paris. It was here, at the Sorbonne, that Patočka attended a series of lectures given by Edmund Husserl, the *Paris Lectures*, which were to develop into the *Cartesian Meditations*. This exposure undoubtedly influenced the Czech philosophy student, although it would be several more years before he would work directly with the German phenomenologist.

After completing his degree from Charles University, Patočka again sought an international fellowship, this time ending up in Freiburg to study directly under Husserl and his assistant Eugen Fink, and also to attend the lectures of Martin Heidegger. It was in fact Fink with whom Patočka worked most closely in Freiburg, and it was arguably Fink's direct influence that was most important in determining the course that Patočka's interest in phenomenology would take.<sup>23</sup> Fink's influence was particularly important in his encouragement of the critical perspective toward Husserl's methodology that would come to be central to Patočka's work.

Patočka also pursued a relationship with Husserl, however, and he was to some degree rewarded. Back in Prague in the mid-1930s, Patočka was instrumental in bringing the renowned phenomenologist to the Czech capital to lecture. These "Prague lectures," from November of 1935, became the basis for Husserl's last major work, the *Crisis of European Sciences*, which had an inordinate influence on the direction of Patočka's career.

In the years that followed, Patočka's world was to fall apart. Following the Munich Diktat and the Nazi invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1938, non-German universities were closed and life became extraordinarily trying. As a result of the occupation, however, Czechoslovakia was spared major battles or destruction during the war. Patočka was thus able to continue to write occasional articles; this despite being forced to work, as he was in 1944, as a tunneler. This last job, for which his academic inclinations did not well prepare him, fortunately did not last long. By 1945 the war came

to an end and the philosopher was able to take up a position at Charles University as a full professor.

Once again, however, international political forces were to intrude decisively on his career. His return to the university, where he immediately began to fill the needs of a student population starved for instruction, was only short-lived. By 1948 the Communist Party was in control of the government and the forty years of Czechoslovak communism had begun. Patočka was again dismissed from the university, and this time effectively barred from print. For the next fifteen years—when he was in his prime—Patočka could only manage to find work in archives. While his years in the Komenský (Comenius) archive were extraordinarily productive—he wrote extensively on Komenský and the history of ideas—he was forced to set aside most of his own philosophical research.<sup>24</sup> He was, however, able to avoid all involvement with the political regime and remain faithful to his convictions.

It was not until the late 1960s that the regime began to liberalize and Patočka was able to return to the university. His career took on a second wind and a number of his most significant lecture series, such as the *Body, Community, Language, World* lectures, were delivered to appreciative students during this period. The liberalization of the Prague Spring was also short-lived, however; the Soviet-led invasion of 1968 crushed the hopes and dreams of open-minded Czechs in a devastating fashion. The blow to the psyche of Czech intellectuals was unimaginable. Many had genuinely believed they were entering a period that would be truly free and just. Their bitterness and inner conflict was intense, and some of it is reflected in the tone of the underground “apartment seminars” that Patočka held during the 1970s.

The invasion eventually meant the end of Patočka’s career at the university. He was retired against his will in 1972 and again barred from print. But this did not stop him, now that he was a retiree, from pursuing his philosophical and pedagogic ambitions. Patočka continued to lecture to students in the 1970s, but this time illegally in underground seminars held surreptitiously in the private apartments of willing individuals. The *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History* were written during this period and published privately as *samizdat*, with carefully guarded copies typed, retyped, and circulated for eager students.

For Patočka, these activities meant that he was engaged in the two activities that mattered most to him: philosophy and education. For the authorities, however, it meant dissidence. Many of Patočka’s students or admirers during this time, such as the young playwright Václav Havel, were willing to voice opposition to the regime and take the consequences for it. Thus it was in 1977 that Havel, along with a number of other dissident intellectuals, decided to issue a protest under the name of Charter 77. For

the document to carry weight, however, they needed the support of a recognized and respected figure. Although he was hesitant, Jan Patočka, at the age of 69, accepted that role. It was to be the role that brought him international fame, and cost him his life. It was, however, a role entirely in keeping with his political philosophy.