

Introduction

The relation between philosophy and politics is a perennial problem, dating back to Socrates and Plato. Can philosophy be applied to influence politics? Should philosophers and philosophy attempt to influence politics in the first place? How can politicians conduct themselves morally? The communities of philosophers and the communities of politicians tend to remain sufficiently far apart to avoid confronting these questions. Philosophers tend to lack political influence or the will to attempt to influence politics, while politicians tend to have little interest in either philosophical wisdom or morality. As Levinas put it: “Politics is opposed to morality, as philosophy to naivete” (1969, 21). Only during rare periods of historical crisis can we observe the merging of philosophy and politics, when politics requires the intellectual resources of the philosophical pre-political and pressing political problems force philosophers to attempt to find practical yet moral answers to these problems. During such periods of crisis, philosophy and politics tend to converge. Czechoslovakia’s Charter 77 dissident movement was a rare historical moment when philosophy and politics united.

The Charter 77 Declaration was written at the end of 1976. This petition used legal arguments to demand that the Czechoslovak government honor its signature on the Final Act of the 1975 Helsinki Covenant on Human Rights (Keane 1985, 217–21; cf. Skilling 1981). The signing of Charter 77 constituted the first organized act of civil protest against the Communist “normalization” regime that followed the Soviet-led invasion in 1968. The document stated its nonpolitical nature, possibly to

remain within the bounds of Czechoslovak law—which prohibited the establishment of political organizations outside the Communist-led National Front—and possibly because the petition had to unite signatories who, apart from their opposition to the Communist regime, had little in common as far as positive political prescriptions were concerned. Consequently, the signatories searched for a pre-political philosophy as a radical alternative to communism. The first documents of the Charter 77 movement to follow the original petition were philosophical texts written by Jan Patočka, a member of the first Charter 77 triumvirate of leader-spokespersons (Prečan 1990, 31–34, 38–42).

Jan Patočka (1907–77) was Czechoslovakia’s greatest philosopher at that time. The other two spokespersons for Charter 77 were Václav Havel, the dissident playwright and philosopher, and Jiří Hájek, Czechoslovakia’s foreign minister during the Prague Spring, who was expelled from the Communist Party in 1969 following the Soviet-led invasion. In his post-1968 writings, Patočka established philosophical foundations for dissidence and the struggle for human rights. After his death in March 1977, the Charter 77 movement continued the struggle for the philosophical positions and principles of human rights outlined in the original 1977 documents until the Velvet Revolution of November 1989. Since the Charter 77 movement was the main dissident organization before 1989, many of its leaders led the Velvet Revolution as well. Some of them had an extensive formal or informal philosophical education that influenced their thought and actions. During its thirteen-year history, the Charter 77 movement had thirty-eight spokespersons who can be designated as its leadership. Of these, twelve were either active philosophers (Patočka, Havel, Václav Benda, Ladislav Hejdránek, Bohumír Janát, Martin Palouš, Radim Palouš) or had studied philosophy at university (Anna Šabatová, Jan Štern, Petruška Šustrová, Zdena Tominová, Miroslav Tyl) (Prečan 1990, 477–85). Other prominent signatories of Charter 77 (Daniel Kroupa, Milan Machovec, Zdeněk Pinc, Jan Sokol, Jakub Trojan) were active philosophers as well.

Most of these philosophers were strongly influenced by Patočka’s

phenomenology, either in the strict sense of being students and expositors (Kroupa, Radim Palouš, Martin Palouš, Pinc, Sokol) or in a looser sense in combination with other influences such as evangelical Christianity (Hejdánek, Trojan) or Roman Catholicism (Janát). Patočka's influence lasted well after his "Socratic" death following a police interrogation. Like many Central European intellectuals, Patočka contributed to most of the humanities. In the Czech context, his contributions are outstanding in their quality. His eventual political involvement and manner of death bestowed a special moral authority on his intellectual legacy. Most Czech philosophers who were not Communist Party hacks were influenced by him to some extent and, except for the youngest generation, came into some personal contact with him in Prague. Patočka's pre-political philosophy and his status as a founding father united and shaped the Czechoslovak dissident movement. Jan Patočka and, through him, phenomenology exerted an influence on the Velvet Revolution of 1989 similar to that of Voltaire and Rousseau on the French Revolution or that of Marx and Plekhanov on the Russian one. Attempting to understand the Charter 77 movement and the Velvet Revolution without being familiar with the philosophy of Patočka resembles an attempt to comprehend the American Revolution without reading *The Federalist*.

Charter 77 is the fulcrum of this book. I discuss only those aspects of Patočka's philosophy that form the philosophical foundation for dissidence and political action. Since Patočka's phenomenology went through a social and political turn after the 1968 Soviet-led invasion, I discuss mostly his later texts. The reader who is interested in his significance as a pure phenomenologist may consult the introductions by Kohák (1989), Rezek (1993), Dubský (1997), or Němec ([1989] 1998).

After Patočka's death, Václav Havel, whose application to study philosophy at Prague's Charles University was rejected for political reasons, became a principal leader of the Charter 77 movement. His "alter ego" as depicted in his play *Largo Desolato* is a phenomenologist philosopher. Havel has written extensively on philosophical matters. His greatest contributions to the world of letters are probably in the field of

playwriting. Yet I concentrate on his philosophical essays, speeches, and political actions that flow from the philosophy of Patočka and the two men's common involvement with Charter 77. Accordingly, in my interpretation, the emphasis and degree of detail in the critical reconstruction of the philosophies of Patočka and Havel are commensurable with their connection with Charter 77.

The book moves from the interpretation of the metaphysical foundations that Patočka laid for Charter 77 to the political analysis of Havel's presidency. Since I am interested in the *political* implications of philosophy, I discuss, apart from the seminal works of Patočka and Havel, only those works of dissident philosophers such as Petr Rezek and Václav Benda that had political implications and that furthermore were substantially different from Patočka's phenomenology or had philosophic merit in terms of the quality of discussion and argumentation.

There have been a number of mutually inconsistent interpretations of the texts of Patočka and Havel. John Keane interpreted Charter 77 as expressing the ideals of democratic socialism (1985, 7–9). Jan Pavlík (1993) and Barry Smith (1993) interpreted Patočka and Havel as continuing the Austrian libertarian tradition of von Mises and Hayek. Martin Matušík (1993) interpreted Václav Havel's philosophy as expressing a postnationalist synthesis of Habermas's critical theory and Kierkegaard's existentialism. Radhakrishnan (1992) suggested that Havel's ideology is eclectic but tends toward liberal democracy. Bethke-Elshtein (1993) suggested that Havel's politics transcend the obsolete ideological categories of right and left, which are just self-referring clichés; Havel favored, according to her, concrete reality over holy ideological platitudes. Rorty (1991) and Derrida (1995; cf. Tucker 1998) interpreted Patočka as a postmodernist, as Bayard (1990) and Hammer (1995) interpreted Havel. Rowland and Rowland (1995) interpreted the politics of East European intellectuals such as Havel as reacting against the Machiavellian separation of politics from morality and supporting a p r e - Enlightenment, anti-postmodernist politics founded on an ontology of

the person and universal morality. Anderson (1996) and Kuczynski (1996), who, in contrast to postmodernists, uphold the existence of universal values, interpreted Havel as a universalist. Hunt (1994) interpreted Havel as overcoming postmodernist dilemmas of culture. Churchill (1991) interpreted Havel's "The Power of the Powerless" as a pacifist text outlining a nonviolent strategy of resistance in the tradition of Gandhi.

Keane and Matušík disagree with Pavlík and Smith, who disagree with Radhakrishnan, who disagrees with Bethke-Elshtein about the political roots and implications of the philosophies of Patočka and Havel. Rorty's, Bayard's, and Hammer's postmodernist interpretations are at odds with the personalist and universalist interpretations of the Rowlands, Anderson, and Kuczynski and with Hunt's interpretation of Havel as overcoming postmodernist dilemmas. It is also interesting that all of these philosophers "found themselves" in the classic texts of Patočka and Havel (with the exception of Radhakrishnan). The socialists found socialism; the libertarians discovered libertarianism; the post-ideological did not find left or right ideology; the postmodernists constructed postmodernism; the universalists universalized their values; and the pacifist found peace. Only Berman (1996, 195–339) attempted to understand Havel by locating his thought in the context of political interpretations of Heidegger from the 1960s, such as those of Marcuse. Still, Berman's popular book does not offer a thorough philosophic analysis of Havel's philosophy in relation to Patočka, as I introduce here. I attempt to understand the texts of Patočka and Havel in the context of the philosophic tradition from which they emerged, namely, phenomenology.

This book contributes to the continuing debate about the relations between philosophy and politics in general and phenomenology and its moral and political implications in particular. The Platonic tradition in philosophy holds that philosophy has a deposit of socially relevant information that can and should be applied by politicians. There have been many interpretations of and variations on this Platonic theme, for example, Kant's contention in his *Perpetual Peace* that politicians should consult philosophers but keep it a secret to preserve their respectability.

Yet, since Aristotle, there has been another tradition that considers philosophy to be essentially irrelevant for politics. Hegel held that philosophy always comes too late. Marx thought that philosophy is ideology and that only a science can direct political action. Wittgenstein regarded philosophy as a therapy of language, not of the soul or the state. Following the scandal surrounding Heidegger's Nazism, his staunch defenders have been claiming that *because* he was a philosopher, Heidegger had a comparative disadvantage in understanding the real world outside the mind and the library (Rockmore 1995, 64, 153).

If philosophy is irrelevant for political and social life, philosophers are not in a more privileged position to talk of politics than are hairdressers and cabdrivers. To a great extent, this is the prevailing sentiment in traditional democracies that have persisted uninterrupted for centuries. Richard Bellamy (1995) echoed this approach when he asserted that the political involvements of many philosophers before the eighteenth century had an economic motivation. The academic professionalization of philosophy blissfully eliminated the financial need, though as Sluga (1993) demonstrates very convincingly and Bellamy fails to mention, it created a dependence of philosophers on the state for their salaries, and accepting this "Danegeld" has had obvious political implications for the ability of philosophers to be anti-statists. In Bellamy's opinion, when philosophers from Plato through Bentham to Gentile, Heidegger, and Hospers attempted to influence politics and politicians, they were naive and failed. He endorsed the attempts of philosophers from Machiavelli to Russell to use their *technical* philosophical skills in the service of preexisting political goals or parties. Bellamy suggested that good philosophers make ineffective politicians because they lack the political virtue of compromise. Yet, as Rockmore (1992, 66) suggested, the failures of philosophers such as Heidegger and Lukács came exactly because they lent their philosophic skills to the service of preexisting political goals, instead of fulfilling their philosophic responsibility to criticize them. Bellamy further ignored the successful political contributions of state-founding philosophers such as the founding fathers of the

United States; Wilhelm Snellman, the most important Finnish statesman of the nineteenth century; and Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, the founder and first president of Czechoslovakia, who was a professor of philosophy at the University of Vienna, a student of Brentano, and a teacher of Husserl.

Bellamy's position reflects the implicit broad agreement on most fundamental political issues in mature democracies. As the recent writings of Rawls (1996) recognize, liberal democracy is founded on a broad consensus over values and ends. In a political environment dominated by broad consensus, most political questions are technical, questions of means rather than ends, and philosophy has little or nothing to contribute. Philosophers are politically marginal when the preferred educational background for politicians becomes technical: in law, economics, and political science.

From a mature democratic perspective, the consequences of mixing philosophy with politics may seem to resemble those of involving religion in politics: uncompromising, utopian, or even fanatical politics that can result in bloody civic strife (Baskerville 1993; Sluga 1993, ix–x). The experience of religious politics and wars in the seventeenth century resulted in the separation of the church from a secular state, the confinement of religion to the private rather than public realm. It is tempting to infer simplistically that a similar separation of politics from philosophy would be equally beneficial. It would have been better for philosophy and politics had Lukács, Gentile, and Heidegger kept out of politics. Though Sartre and Merleau-Ponty had temporary bouts of Stalinism, nobody suffered from them directly. This approach would advise philosophers to stay out of politics and keep their political opinions to the private realm. Three hundred years after England's Glorious Revolution and two hundred years after the American Revolution, it is easy to forget the great contributions of philosophy to the founding of liberal democracy based on respect for human rights, to the establishment of what Rawls called an "overlapping consensus" that is necessary for the stability of liberal democracy. In established liberal democracies,

most contemporary democratic political thinkers and politicians share basic philosophical assumptions. Therefore, this overlapping consensus is unquestioned, undiscussed, and sometimes even unconscious.

As Patočka suggested, it is not a coincidence that philosophy emerged in the free political environment of the Greek polis. Purely technocratic politics, truly devoid of all philosophy, would be an enlightened tyranny, serving the long-term interests of a political class; it would be a government without concern for human rights, a vision of the public good, or justice. The close connection between philosophy and politics is taken for granted in the Czech tradition, since the intellectuals who founded the Czech national movement felt the need to justify their national aspirations on philosophic grounds in the face of the universalist Habsburg Empire, which was not clearly evil and only mildly authoritarian. President Václav Havel and others like to place everything that is good in the Czech lands in the tradition of Jan Hus, Jan Ámos Komenský, Karel Havlíček, František Palacký, Tomáš G. Masaryk, and Jan Patočka. To the extent that such a tradition exists, it is in the conviction that philosophy, politics, and history form a unity, and that ethics should guide nontechnocratic politics. “Political reality and philosophical understanding of existence in its entirety must be in mutual agreement—because they are basically identical” (Patočka 1981, 4; cf. *HE*; Kohák 1992b; Bednář 1994). This means that a political critique is formulated in philosophical terms, while philosophy is expected to have political implications. Developments in both philosophy and politics are considered historical, while historical changes are interpreted as philosophical and political.

For forty years of cold war, all political philosophies had to be located, or rather dislocated, into a unidimensional universe of ideas, between two poles. One pole stood for “us,” for those who felt comfortable with liberal politics; and the other for “them”—those who identified themselves with bureaucratic socialism. From the opposite perspective, one pole stood for “us” as supporters of the Soviet system, and the other for “them” as supporters of the American order of things.

Each political philosophy, ideology, or system of government had to be located in this unidimensional universe. While this has never been a correct representation of the pluralist, multifarious modern universe of political ideas, in the case of the philosophy of most East-Central European dissidents, it prevented comprehension of the true multidimensional universe of ideas in which we live. Unidimensional thinking would deduce from the fact that dissident Czechs were ardent “anticommunists” their adherence to the other, “liberal” pole. Yet this would be a mistake. This book introduces multidimensional thinking into the analysis of East-Central European thought through the critical explication of Charter 77’s philosophy of human rights. Understanding the philosophy of Charter 77 signatories requires a philosophically oriented study. As yet, no such study exists, partly because the political scientists and historians who have written about Charter 77 lacked the necessary background in philosophy and, in particular, phenomenology to understand the movement’s philosophic dimension, and partly because non-Czech philosophers did not pay sufficient attention to the writings of the Czechs. Though there are a number of Czech-language studies of the philosophy of Patočka, they rarely touch on the relation between his philosophy and his politics. For Czech academic philosophers who collaborated during the Communist era, this would have been an embarrassing task even had they had the critical skills and the education to attempt it. Former dissidents take the political implications of Patočka’s philosophy for granted and rarely attempt to explicate it *critically*. With a single exception (Rezek 1991), there are no critical studies of Havel’s philosophy in Czech.

Why did Czech dissidents choose phenomenology as their founding philosophy? An easy answer could be: simply because it was there, part of the Central European culture of the Moravian-born Husserl. But phenomenology became the dominant philosophical school in Czechoslovakia only during the 1960s (Rezek 1992; Schuhmann 1992). There are deeper reasons for the relevance of phenomenology to the kind of problems dissidents were facing in the Communist context. The

purpose of Husserl's phenomenology is the rigorous study of consciousness. The phenomenological method of exploring consciousness is *epoché*, the suspension of belief in an objective world. Once phenomenologists bracket off our ordinary distracting division of the world into subjective and objective, consciousness should appear in its pristine, pre-objective/subjective purity. In Husserl's opinion, the investigation of the structure of consciousness reveals the *life-world*, the primordial way the world appears to us, full of meaning and purpose, before it goes through objectivization—for example, in science—and loses its immanent meaning.

Phenomenology consists to a large extent of an individual examination of consciousness. Its method for discovering the prescientific and preobjective consciousness is idealist; phenomenologists seeks to intuit pure ideas. Since the phenomenological theory of knowledge holds that the scientific worldview has to presuppose preobjective consciousness (Husserl 1970, 213–15), phenomenology seems to pull the rug out from under a host of doctrines that were associated with the version of Marxism promulgated by Soviet-dominated Communist regimes: materialism; the Marxist pseudo-scientific worldview; the objectivization of the person; the reduction of the person to a means of production, *homo faber*; the myth of historical progress; and the technological manipulation of “human resources.” Phenomenology appeared as a radical method of inquiry that constitutes a revolt of individual consciousness against an alienating ideology and system. The phenomenological method of honest self-consciousness without prejudices and presuppositions embodies an individualistic mentality, holding on to one's personal convictions against enforced ideologies. As Cataldi (1997) noted, the life-world seemed a home lost to totalitarian oppression. Yet, unlike the premodern world or a free social environment, the life-world seemed obtainable through the phenomenological method, without a political revolution, because it is always there irrespective of external circumstances, pre-given, common to all of us, waiting to be discovered through intuition. Husserl promised that those who followed his method would go through a per-

sonal transformation resembling religious conversion (Husserl 1970, 48–53, 121–37). This promise of personal transformation, even of philosophic salvation, must have appeared most enticing to a group of people who lived in a totalitarian state in which they had little control over their “external” life. As one Polish phenomenologist put it:

For those who were concerned with phenomenology before the collapse of communism, it was an antidote to Marxism in its Soviet version. Its popularity was due to the perhaps naive striving for a true philosophy: true in the sense of a philosophy not manipulated by politics. Its idealism was interpreted as a protest against the materialistic degradation of man, and Husserl’s striving for an absolute truth provided arguments against the cynicism of the conformists and the pragmatism of those who were resigned to accepting the situation. At the same time it appeared attractive because of its exhortation to study concrete reality and to return to the *Lebenswelt*, veiled this time not by constructs of science, but by constructs originating from party ideologues, mendacious statisticians and servile sociologists. Those who pursued the study of phenomenology felt themselves to be representatives of a truly European culture in its protest against primitivism, sterility and mendacity. Their apolitical occupation, consisting of studying, commenting on and discussing phenomenological works, was thus intentionally a political act. (Krasnodebski 1993, 339–40)

Despite these features of phenomenology, the unfortunate, at least temporary, political convictions and associations of some of the greatest phenomenologically oriented German and French philosophers, such as Scheler, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre, led to a questioning of the ethical and political implications of phenomenology. Perhaps there is something deeply solipsistic, inconsiderate of others and their rights, in the phenomenological method. The deeply personal and individual nature of the search for truth in phenomenology and idealism may lead to intolerant hostility toward alternative versions of truth and toward ordinary people who do not live in the presence of the ideas but nevertheless have equal suffrage in democratic elections. The vagueness and uncertainty of the phenomenological method, the difficulty in choosing

on independent grounds from among conflicting intuitions of the life-world, allow phenomenologists to “smuggle” into the immediacy of the life-world contingent elements of their culture or their value system as essential and universal. Perhaps much of the antimodernism that some phenomenologists are notorious for is the result of a conflict or inconsistency not between the life-world and modernity, but within the culture of the social milieu of Central European phenomenologists in the twentieth century, which they projected on the life-world.

The debate on the relation between phenomenology and politics has focused on the relation between Heidegger’s philosophy and his Nazism. Patočka’s and Havel’s political dissidence has many prospective philosophical parents queuing at the maternity ward. Heidegger’s Nazism is an orphan; though it has many suspected philosophical parents, none agree to acknowledge their responsibility. This book is about the relations between the philosophy and politics of Patočka and Havel, not about Heidegger and the relations between his philosophy and politics. Still, some aspects of the debate about Heidegger’s philosophy and Nazism are relevant for the themes of this book. Though the philosophies of Patočka and Havel incorporated distinctly Heideggerian themes, their dissident practice in support of human rights is radically different from Heidegger’s practice. I examine the possibility that what Patočka and Havel revised and changed, added or subtracted, from Heidegger’s philosophy led to their different ethical and political convictions and engagements. If Patočka or Havel interpreted a certain Heideggerian doctrine in a way that assisted them in their dissident practice, or rejected another Heideggerian tenet to fit their struggle for human rights, it does not prove decisively that what was accepted is beyond reproach or that what was rejected is beneath contempt. Still, I think that the differences and similarities between the philosophies of Heidegger on the one hand and Patočka and Havel on the other present strong circumstantial evidence for what did and did not go wrong with Heidegger’s phenomenology. To borrow Rockmore’s formula of the relations between Heidegger’s basic ontology and his Nazi politics, they are “neither contingent nor

necessary, but hardly surprising” (1992, 42).

I show that Patočka was far more humanistic than Heidegger in the sense of assuming a concept of the essence of being human and supporting rights that defend the actualization of that essence. In arguing that Patočka rescued humanism from the jaws of Heideggerian ontology, I will refer to the debate on whether Heidegger became a Nazi because his philosophy was too humanistic, or because it was insufficiently humanistic.¹

I will demonstrate that Charter 77 philosopher-dissidents ignored Heidegger’s discussions of destiny and historicity, a task made easy by the differences between German and Czech nationalism. Ferry and Renaut (1990), Rockmore (1992), and Lang (1996) argued that the *völkisch* interpretation of human existence that was characteristic of Heidegger’s explicit Nazi stage is already adumbrated in the later parts of *Being and Time* that are inconsistent with its earlier individualistic parts. Patočka and Havel reacted romantically to modernity, as did Heidegger, but their romanticism was individualistic; at most, it was generalized to the community of dissidents. Nevertheless, Patočka and Havel adopted Heidegger’s unidimensional understanding of modernity, ignoring the plurality and variety of forms of modernism. The dissidents’ misunderstanding of liberal-democratic modernity did not lead them to authoritarianism or to a wish to impose a premodern model on society. But when they assumed political responsibility, their shallow understanding of modernity led to political confusion and lethargy in the process of reform.

After Heidegger and Husserl, the greatest influence on Patočka’s philosophy came from Plato. This appears to be no less problematic. Plato’s political philosophy has been associated frequently with totalitarianism. Patočka adopted from Plato two of the most controversial doctrines of ancient political philosophy: perfectionism and communitarianism. Perfectionism, the view that takes virtue to be the essence of the person, in combination with communitarianism, the view that the political organization of society should aim to foster virtue, has often been blamed for promoting antidemocratic elitism. The position that

takes the virtues to be “those characteristics which most fully develop our essential properties as human beings” (Oakley 1996, 134) has often been criticized for being even more elitist and undemocratic than other versions of virtue ethics. Especially in its Greek and Nietzschean formulations, virtue ethics has been interpreted as offering ethical legitimization for aristocratic government by and for the “virtuous” at the expense of what “lower” individuals may regard as their interests (Slote 1993). Czech dissidents advocated the establishment of a community that aimed to further what they perceived as perfectionist virtue. Therefore, it is necessary to examine how Patočka and his students were able not just to avoid the alleged political pitfalls of perfectionism and communitarianism, but also to base a universal ethics and political philosophy of human rights on perfectionism.

The importance of the philosophy and politics of Charter 77 goes far beyond the borders of the former Czechoslovakia. As Václav Havel put it, life under totalitarian rule had given the Czechs and the Slovaks something positive:

a special capacity to look, from time to time, somewhat further than someone who has not undergone this bitter experience. A person who cannot move and live a somewhat normal life because he is pinned under a boulder has more time to think about his hopes than someone who has nothing and therefore has nothing to offer in return.

What I am trying to say is this: we must all learn many things from you, from how to educate our offspring, how to elect our representatives, all the way to how to organize our economic life so that it will lead to prosperity and not to poverty. But it doesn't have to be merely assistance from the well-educated, the powerful and the wealthy to someone who has nothing and therefore has nothing to offer in return.

We too can offer something to you: our experience and the knowledge that has come from it.

This is a subject for books, many of which have already been written and many of which have yet to be written. (Havel 1990e, 330)

I concentrate in this book on the philosophical-political problems

discussed by Patočka and Havel and raised by the actions of President Havel that have universal and timeless importance transcending these two authors and their particular historical and personal circumstances.

The foundations of human rights have been debated vehemently recently. Liberals base justice on rights. Communitarians promote the good above rights. Postmodernists deny that any particular concept of the good or human rights can be shown philosophically to be superior to another, apart from our prejudice in favor of our own particular political tradition. Charter 77 dissidents founded their political struggle for human rights on a concept of the good life as life in truth that should be promoted by the political community. Thus, they founded liberal politics on communitarian assumptions and posed a challenge to postmodernism.

Patočka and Havel asked the most seminal philosophical question, the meaning of human existence. They assumed that something has gone terribly wrong with the human condition, that human authenticity is lost. Their quest for human authenticity was twofold: On the one hand, they sought to clarify and eliminate—or, if that was impossible, somehow find a way to escape—what they perceived as self-alienating conditions. At the same time, there was a positive search for the meaning of being human and the social conditions that promote such positive human authenticity. The conclusions of the first quest are far less restrictive than, and at times inconsistent with, those of the second. Yet Patočka and Havel perceived dissidence as the defense of authenticity in the face of totalitarian alienation. I correlate the Czech discussion of the essence of dissidence with the ancient discussion of *arete*, Heidegger's characterization of *authenticity*, and discussions of *perfectionism* in contemporary ethics and political philosophy.

Patočka found the meaning of being human in the relationship of the soul with truth. The meaning of “truth” for Patočka varied between the Heideggerian and Platonic poles of his philosophy. In his more Heideggerian moments, he was antimodernist, regarding the history of Western civilization as devolutionary, obscuring truth. In those moments,

he adopted Heidegger's unidimensional understanding of the modern world, as a manifestation of technological metaphysics. Accordingly, Patočka and Havel identified the totalitarian Communist regime in Czechoslovakia with modernity, science, rationality, and Western-style democracy. In his more Platonic moments, Patočka was a humanist, who developed an absolute and universal ethical system as a basis for political philosophy and action. His unity of ethical thought and action will be shown to be essentially Socratic. Patočka regarded Plato as the sole founder of Western civilization. By returning to Socrates and Plato, Patočka, like Husserl and unlike Heidegger, sought to restore European civilization to its former virtue, based on "care for the soul"—the rational search for truth and justice.

Patočka's philosophy of history is an applied philosophical interpretation of universal and Czech history, discussing the meaning of these histories and asking where and why they went wrong. Patočka sought a way to transcend modern alienation and reach human authenticity. In a modern world obsessed with production, reproduction, and consumption, he observed the experience of sacrifice as a possible route of escape that may lead to human authenticity. I examine Patočka's discussion of sacrifice, and attempt to revise and interpret it to fit with his ethical system—and his actual sacrifice and subsequent death—by differentiating just from unjust sacrifice. This inspiring part of his philosophy is comparable to Plato's *Phaedo*. Patočka, in effect, steps into the shoes of Socrates, repeating the conclusions of Socrates' philosophy, his way of life, and his destiny.

Havel implemented Heidegger's and Patočka's philosophies to analyze the concrete human condition in the Soviet bloc, as well as suggest an alternative as a basis for dissident action. Havel's interpretation of "really existing socialism" is perceptive, though he accepted uncritically the modernist self-image of Communist state ideology. Havel's alternatives are mostly Heidegger-inspired antitheses of what he perceived as his social environment.

Plato held that philosophers can never be popular leaders in a dem-

ocratic regime. In his opinion, the kind of emotional manipulation that successful democratic leaders have to use to gain the support of the ignorant, emotional, unwashed masses requires sophistic education, which is inconsistent with the philosophic search for truth. Plato likened the state to a ship whose direction should be determined by those who know how to read the stars (philosophers), not by a vote among all the sailors, who are not competent to judge. He did not consider that democratic voters can learn from experience which are the better captains and that philosophers do not necessarily agree among themselves on the right direction. His conclusion was that philosophers should rule undemocratically (*Republic*, book 6).

The challenge of democratically elected philosophers such as T. G. Masaryk and Havel is to keep steering the ship of state to the satisfaction of its sailors. Since becoming president, Havel has continued Masaryk's tradition of philosopher-presidents in Czechoslovakia. If Patočka's philosophy, life, and fate parallel those of Socrates, Havel's presidency is reminiscent of the problems faced by Plato when he attempted to influence the government of Syracuse. President Havel has had to contend with the problematic relation between political power and philosophy. The perfectionist virtue ethics of conviction that guided Havel as a dissident did not fit his new responsibilities. The Heideggerian elements of his philosophy that remained dormant while he was a dissident caused him to fail as a politician acting in a parliamentary democratic context. In particular, the dissident emphasis on personal authenticity, antimodernism, and dismissal of institutions as inherently alienating and corrupt prevented Havel and his fellow dissidents from understanding the significance of reconstructing the institutions of the state, especially those that should enforce the rule of law. This basic lack of understanding of the significance of institutions and the rule of law caused the devolution of the Velvet Revolution to the corrupt and corrupting dominance of the old nomenklatura elite in cooperation with the new opportunistic political elite.

Every book is written from a point of view. This book is no excep-

tion. I am not Czech. I do not write from the point of view of an involved or engaged signatory of Charter 77, but also certainly not from the point of view of someone who objected to the Charter. Further, I do not have any loyalty to any particular group within the Charter 77 movement or in the political developments that followed it. My point of view is *theoretical* in the Greek sense of the word. I am a detached critical observer. This point of view has its advantages and disadvantages. I do not discuss the personal virtues and courage, or the communal solidarity, of Charter 77 signatories. My discussion is far more detached, rational, and theoretical than the engaged books that should yet be written about Charter 77 and the Velvet Revolution. Still, a detached and theoretical analysis is likely to be more critical of the subject matter, and to discover structures and relations that a more passionate and engaged study may overlook. My critique of the philosophy and political practice of Patočka and Havel should not be read *ad hominem*. I have the greatest respect and admiration for the courage, self-sacrifice, and personal integrity of the dissidents. My criticism is of ideas and deeds, not of people. Hegel wrote that the owl of Minerva flies at dusk. Kierkegaard noted that we live our lives forward, but understand them backward. Now, after all is said and done and the struggle of Charter 77 is over, it is time to look back critically and to understand what happened and what it means.