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Patočka and Hegel's philosophy of the history of philosophy

Abstract: Hegel's *history of philosophy* has a special place within his philosophical thought, and this fact is evidence of its *philosophical importance*. It has become the organ of the self-knowing mind in time as an integral component of the philosophy of the objective spirit. Patočka very precisely defines four main dimensions of Hegel's *philosophy of the history of philosophy*:

ophy: 1. The development of philosophy is organic.

Different philosophies are different developmental stages of the same organism. 2. The role of an individual is subordinate; it does not belong to philosophical *content*. 3. Time is but a mere external milieu, a mirror of the inner development in the organism of spirit. Philosophy and other aspects of spirit in different periods of time are manifestations of the very same stage in the development of spiritual substance. Each historical period can be expressed rationally. Time thus does not have a positive content-related meaning. 4. The advance of philosophical systems corresponds with the logical development of thought. The core of Hegel's *philosophy of the history of philosophy* as Patočka identified it could not be put forward in a better way. According to Patočka, Hegel is right in thinking that the history of philosophy lives a life of systematic philosophy; it reflects our systematic nature, our tendency towards a system. The history of philosophy and philosophy itself for Patočka, as well as for Hegel, create *unity* — a kind of *organic totality*.

Keywords: Patočka, Hegel, history of philosophy, philosophy of history, philosophy of the history of philosophy

1. Introduction

The philosophical work of Jan Patočka offers a unique intellectual synthesis of historical-philosophical reflections on the basis of *asubjective phenomenology*. His philosophical message has become one of the most important ones within the phenomenological movement. Patočka was the first philosopher of the 20th century to delve into the philosophical decoding of the problem of *philosophy of the history of philosophy* in straightforward critical encounter with Hegel's *strong model*. Like Fink, he reflected, in a critical way, Husserl's transcendental phenomenology and Heidegger's philosophy, and reconsidered them from his own original philosophical position.

Patočka's overall philosophical message is evidently dominated by the *unity of the history of philosophy and the philosophy of history*, which is unprecedented within the broad theoretical space of the phenomenological movement — perhaps with the exception of Fink. Patočka accepted many of Fink's constructive philosophical views. However, it should be emphasised that he did not remain in the shadow of this remarkable German philosopher, who introduced him into the mysteries of Husserl's and Heidegger's philosophy.¹ The philosophical interaction between Fink and Patočka extended throughout their lives. Both of them — from the inception of their theoretical work — sought their own topics and dealt with issues of an up-to-date method of philosophising. Patočka approached the problems of the history of philosophy and the philosophy of history in an original way which even surpassed Fink and other representatives of the phenomenological philosophy in the 20th century.

2. Hegel — history of philosophy

Patočka's philosophical thought was from the very beginning very closely connected to Husserl's philosophy. A case in point is the ques-

¹ I. BLECHA: *Edmund Husserl a česká filosofie*. Olomouc 2003, pp. 36—69; I. BLECHA: *Jan Patočka*. Olomouc 1997, pp. 26—30.

tion of *natural world* as it clearly follows from Patočka's early work *Přirozený svět jako filosofický problém* [Natural world as a philosophical problem] (1936).² This important fact, however, seems to conceal other, equally important, philosophical inspirations which appear to be backgrounded to negligible impulses by current research into Patočka's work.

Apart from the question of natural world, the beginnings of Patočka's philosophical search are intrinsically connected with another great philosophical topic, in particular, the *philosophy of history* and the *history of philosophy* (Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Cusanus, Descartes, Comenius, Herder, Hegel, Marx, Comte, Rádl, Masaryk and others), which cannot be ignored. Of crucial importance is primarily Patočka's early reflection of Hegel's philosophy, laying emphasis on the problem of *philosophy of the history of philosophy*. Importantly, this reflection came to be an integral part of his subsequent philosophical development, to reach its peak in his later works. Its most elaborated form can be found in Patočka's late works, including "Kacířské eseje o filosofii dějin" (1975) [Heretic essays on the philosophy of history]³ and "Evropa a doba poevropská" [Europe and the post-European period],⁴ and mainly in his private lectures dating from 1973, "Platón a Evropa" [Plato and Europe].⁵

In contrast to Husserl, Patočka never reduced history to the mere history of knowledge. By implication, the philosophical answer to the question of where to seek the way out of the *crisis of European mankind* is intellectually deeper and more significant than that provided by Husserl. Patočka, like Fink, was not satisfied with Husserl's way of philosophising as *transcendental phenomenology*. Patočka's variant of *asubjective phenomenology* — *the phenomenology of existential motion*⁶ — is intrinsically connected with a different comprehension of the history of philosophical thought, of the philosophy of history in its critical synthetic-theoretical reflection of the most relevant problems of phenomenology after Husserl's death.

A substantial theoretical difference between Patočka's and Husserl's phenomenological conceptions concerns their respective re-

² J. PATOČKA: *Přirozený svět jako filosofický problém*. Praha 1992.

³ J. PATOČKA: "Kacířské eseje o filosofii dějin." In: J. PATOČKA: *Péče o duši III*. Praha 2002, pp. 13–144.

⁴ J. PATOČKA: "Evropa a doba poevropská." In: J. PATOČKA: *Péče o duši II*. Praha 1999, pp. 80–148.

⁵ J. PATOČKA: "Platón a Evropa." In: J. PATOČKA: *Péče o duši II*. Praha 1999, pp. 149–355.

⁶ I. BLECHA: *Jan Patočka*, pp. 131–150.

ception of *philosophy of the history of philosophy* and lies in the way of philosophising and the identification of the dominant problems through the history of philosophy and the philosophy of history. While philosophy of the history of philosophy is present in Husserl's later works (mainly in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*), it does not constitute any *foundations* for his phenomenological conception. It is rather an example of a historical paradox, showing that thinking in terms of philosophical reception of the history of philosophy necessarily leads to the failure of the phenomenological ideal of *philosophy as a rigorous — apodictically rigorous science*.⁷

From the inception of his philosophical writing, Patočka paid much attention to the problems of *the philosophy of the history of philosophy*. *The history of philosophy* and *the philosophy of history* were viewed in parallel unity to phenomenological activities. This enabled Patočka to make progress on his way of seeking his own model of *phenomenological philosophy*. As early as 1936, that is, at the time of publishing his first great work inspired by Husserl's philosophy, *Přirozený svět jako filosofický problém* [Natural world as a philosophical problem], Patočka notes in his essay "Kapitoly ze současné filosofie" [Chapters from contemporary philosophy] the following: "A great German thinker was the first to announce one hundred years ago a seemingly paradoxical fact — that true philosophy must, in a way, encompass all historical philosophemes, and that philosophy cannot be separated from philosophies."⁸

Inseparability of philosophy from philosophies — this is the central motif of Hegel's *philosophy of the history of philosophy*. It accurately expresses the unity of the history of philosophy, without which Hegel's philosophy is unthinkable. Patočka's early essays "O filosofii dějin" [On the philosophy of history] (1940)⁹ and "Dějepis filosofie a její jednota" [History of philosophy and its unity] (1942)¹⁰ clearly manifest *philosophical foundations* that are much broader compared to those offered by Husserl or Heidegger in their philosophical doctrines.

⁷ E. HUSSERL: *Krize evropských věd a transcendentální fenomenologie*. Praha 1972, p. 549.

⁸ J. PATOČKA: "Kapitoly ze současné filosofie." In: J. PATOČKA: *Péče o duši I*. Praha 1996, p. 91.

⁹ J. PATOČKA: "O filosofii dějin." In: J. PATOČKA: *Péče o duši I*. Praha 1996, pp. 107—115.

¹⁰ J. PATOČKA: "Dějepis filosofie a její jednota." *Česká mysl* 36/ 2 (1942), pp. 58—72, 36/3, pp. 97—114.

In accordance with Hegel, Patočka outlines his own methodological-theoretical principles of research into the history of philosophy. While the first to come up with the idea of *the unity of philosophy in history* was, in Patočka's view, Leibniz, it was not before Hegel that this idea was implemented in a philosophically unique form — *the history of philosophy became to Hegel a true philosophical science*. Only in this sense can it be viewed as an *introduction to philosophy*. Patočka believes that “contemporary philosophy encompasses all intellectual work of the past millennia, and observation of the evolution of the spirit from historical perspective is the history of philosophy.”¹¹

Patočka accepted Hegel's view that the *history of philosophy is a true philosophical science*: “The history of philosophy can be perceived as an introduction to philosophy (that is, directly as an introductory part of philosophy rather than its mere part), because it accounts for the origins of philosophy ... The history of philosophy deals with the acts of thought. These acts pertain to pure thought, that is, the history of philosophy demonstrates the self-creation of thought. In principle, the history of philosophy represents only *one* idea, but the forms of its elaboration represent various developments of the same.”¹²

Hegel's conception of the history of philosophical thought is based on an indisputable postulate that *there is only one philosophy*. The forms of its historical development are multifarious. Thus, *intellectual evolution* resembles an inevitable organic process. The history of philosophy forms *a single system* with various historical stages and individual manifestations. Most importantly, the concept of *evolution* has become a central concept of philosophy and, consequently, the basis of the history of philosophy. “Philosophy as the evolution of ideas constitutes a whole, a system ... The history of philosophy consists simply in observation of the evolution of idea in time and is therefore identical to the system of philosophy. This can be proved by two arguments: a speculative argument and an empirical one. The speculative argument follows from the nature of reason; the empirical argument is offered by history.”¹³

Patočka understands Hegel's position that the evolution of spirit is absolute. It is an eternal motion and peace at the same time. Therefore, *time* comes to be a mere *external moment* in the history

¹¹ J. PATOČKA: “Problém dějin filosofie.” In: J. PATOČKA: *Nejstarší řecká filosofie*. Praha 1992, p. 307.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 306.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 307.

of philosophy. Time establishes the *environment* (externality, activity) rather than an internal dimension of possible modifications in the evolution of the spirit in its essential principles. “The forms of the evolution of an idea seem to be accidental in this externality. We should, however, realise the necessity of mutual evolution of one from the other. The situation is that the system of philosophy, especially its logical part, and history reflect each other and develop from each other. By implication, historical progress is as necessary as systematic evolution. No philosophy can emerge before its right time, and resurrection of old philosophies means resurrection of mummies.”¹⁴

Hegel’s *history of philosophy* has its inalienable place within his overall philosophy, which shows its *philosophical significance*. It came to be an organ of self-cognition of the spirit in time as an integral part of the philosophy of the objective spirit. Patočka identifies four main motifs of Hegel’s *philosophy of the history of philosophy*:

1. The development of philosophy is organic. *Various philosophies* represent various evolutionary stages of the same organism.
2. An individual has a subordinate role rather than being *content* of philosophy.
3. Time is only an external milieu, a mirror of the inner evolution of the organism of spirit. Philosophy and other aspects of spirit are, in various periods of time, manifestations of the same stage of spiritual substance. Each period can be expressed in a rational way. Therefore, time has no content-related, positive meaning.
4. The succession of philosophical systems corresponds with the logical evolution of an idea.¹⁵

In Patočka’s view, the core of Hegel’s *philosophy of the history of philosophy* can hardly be expressed in a more accurate way. The most important point is, however, that Patočka does not take a purely *external* perspective on Hegel’s philosophy, that is, his intent is not restricted to its objective description. He accepts it first of all *internally* because it expresses the basic relation between the history of philosophy and systematic philosophy. Patočka writes as follows: “When I came to understand Plato or Hegel and I accounted for a particular chapter in the history of the evolution of philosophical spirit, I performed some historical work, but this had to be preceded

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 308.

by my independent philosophising. Unlike a historian of mathematics, I could not seek the key to these phenomena in any compendium. A poor mathematician may be a good historian of mathematics, which, however, is not true of philosophy. *Hegel is right in assuming that history of philosophy lives only the life of systematic philosophy and reflects our systematic ability, our system*" (emphasis V.L.).¹⁶

Patočka was inspired by critical evaluation of Hegel's conception of the history of philosophy throughout his life. What could not be obvious to Patočka himself or his readers in 1942, when his first essay on these philosophical problems was presented to the public, may be safely stated now: this philosophical position *determines* all of his works. He explores the history of philosophy not only "*because of his interest in history, or primarily in it, but mainly because of his interest in his own most essential spiritual striving*" (emphasis V.L.).¹⁷

Both Patočka and Hegel conceive the history of philosophy and philosophy itself as a *unity — an organic totality*. Patočka is aware of the fact that the history of philosophy may be viewed from two fundamental positions — from *purely historical* and from *purely philological*. While a number of reasons may be put forward for this assumption, the most important one bears on fulfilling the most substantial sense of the science of philosophy — the ability to penetrate to the ideational position of the spirit.¹⁸

Although Hegel's philosophical conception of the history of philosophy is *speculative*, Patočka appreciates his unusual view of the problems, which is close to *sociology*. The history of philosophy is intrinsically an inevitable *objective process*. Therefore, human wilfulness cannot play any significant role in it. The history of philosophy is a natural, irreversible and supra-individual process. As aptly noted by Patočka, an individual is to Hegel "a mere instrument used by this process. Consequently, neither Hegel nor the history of philosophy influenced by Hegel refer to individuals. Instead, they speak about ideas, epochs and processes. All other things being different, this is where Hegel's approach coincides with that of the founder of French positivism, Auguste Comte."¹⁹

What is common to Hegel and Comte is, according to Patočka, the view that *intellectual development is natural and represents, at the same time, social development*. From this it follows that no science

¹⁶ J. PATOČKA: "Dějepis filosofie a její jednota," p. 100.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ J. PATOČKA: "Problém dějin filosofie," p. 308.

can be understood without reflection on its own history, which is “inseparable from the history of mankind.”²⁰ Under its influence, historians of philosophy overcome a *non-historical empiricism* in their effort to comprehend the diversity of philosophical systems without neglecting the empirical view itself. However, Patočka maintains that Hegel’s and Comte’s objective sociological approaches are not radical enough, because “the law of social development or the law of historical progress is identified by both of them in the inner area, that is, in the idea.”²¹

In this connection, Patočka refers to Marx, who finds the laws of history in the *economic structure of society*, from which the whole superstructure of legal and social institutions as well as religious, philosophical and other spiritual products of each historical epoch should be derived. A characteristic feature of Patočka’s work is a permanent critical dialogue with this position. This critical dialogue is more extensive and much more significant than admitted in the most important contemporary analyses of Patočka’s work.

Patočka does not accept Hegel, Marx, positivism, and the sociological approach to spiritual reality uncritically. He neither wants nor is able to arrive at a strictly *objective view* of the history of philosophy as an integral part of the cultural history in general. He realises that the history of philosophy is a spiritual space for inwardly engaged individuals. Therefore, the history of philosophy cannot function as an absolute reference system, as assumed by Hegel. Patočka believes the history of philosophy to be for each of us a unique spiritual struggle for *our own meditation* and *contemplation*, through which the history of philosophy can be *elucidated*. We cannot get rid of our own spiritual genealogy: “For a philosophising, actively contemplating and problem-raising person, the history of the idea makes sense; it is characterised by a sort of unity. There is no unambiguous formulation of this unity; the unity cannot be simply identified as a logical sum of all positive determinations or as a dialectic evolution that develops and reconciles oppositions.”²²

No doubt, the problem is much more intricate. In contrast to Hegel, Patočka conceives philosophy as an *adventure of knights errant*. Consequently, the history of philosophy, too, is a philosophical doctrine that consists in an *intellectual struggle for the contact with the thought of others*, where *the unique — the individual* is no

²⁰ Ibid., p. 309.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., p. 311.

more negligible. The other way round — in some respects, it even becomes the decisive factor. The history of philosophy is and will be a *philosophical discipline*, no matter whether it is or not based on sociological-historical and/or objective-philological principles. These namely form a mere *substrate*. What is crucial is original philosophical work. The substrate “*must be formed by a philosophical idea in order to penetrate where it is necessary to, because an idea cannot be pictured, depicted, or transposed — it can only be reproduced, re-created, that is, restored*” (emphasis V.L.).²³

The attempt to understand *the unity* of philosophy and the history of philosophy independently of Husserl and Heidegger is obvious as early as in the first stage of Patočka's philosophical development. It is formulated under the dominant influence of his effort to come to grips with Hegel's *philosophy of the history of philosophy*. This self-imposed task marks all his work as a *crucial*, that is, theoretically unique dimension of his philosophical doctrine. *The unity* of philosophy and the history of philosophy is aptly articulated as follows: “*Philosophy is not the ultimate abstraction; rather it is the work of living beings, living minds on their hard and lonely way of search. The philosophising minds are not indifferent to meeting other minds, sometimes across centuries or even millennia; many a time, it is the ultimate, or even the only thing. And the particular environment in which it happens is the history of philosophy*” (emphasis V.L.).²⁴

Philosophy as the *work of living beings — living minds* is an intellectual as well as human space of Patočkean way of phenomenological philosophising. It is here that we should seek Patočka's independent and extraordinary contribution to the history of philosophical thought of the 20th century, no matter how strong the influence of Husserl and Heidegger might have been. Patočka's emphasis on *the unity of philosophy and the history of philosophy* is developed into the conception of a *weak model of philosophy of the history of philosophy*, uniquely combining the position of a creative *philosopher* and an excellent *historian of philosophy*, who conceives the history of philosophy as the *preoccupation with the care for the soul*.

All this is closely related to his approach to the *philosophy of history*. Patočka *believes* unwaveringly, and is even *obsessed* with the idea, that the philosophy of history is an *inevitable task of the human mind*, and that *historical construction is the central task of*

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid. Also cf. P. THOLT: “J. Patočka ako historik filozofie.” In: *Filozofia dejín filozofie*. Ed. V. LEŠKO. AFPhUP Prešov 1999, pp. 195—218.

*philosophy, with all the other tasks being reduced to accompanying prolegomena.*²⁵ In this way, he clearly subscribes to the great German philosophical tradition, the beginnings of which can be traced back to the first half of the 19th century and which is unambiguously connected first and foremost with Hegel's conception. In Patočka's view, Hegel's philosophy in general, and his account of history in particular, represent "an immense power not only in the life of philosophers but also in the life of all of us."²⁶

In contrast to *objective historiography*, the task of which is to *identify facts and provide their causal account*, the essential task of the *philosophy of history* is to interpret the *meaning of events*.²⁷ Patočka maintains that while the philosophy of history is unthinkable without the knowledge of the facts to be accounted for, it concentrates on reasons that can never be completely reduced to facts. By implication, while the philosophy of history pays attention to facts, the facts themselves cannot provide us with interpretation of events. This raises the question of what is actually meant by philosophical interpretation of history.²⁸ *Historical-philosophical interpretation* means, as assumed by Patočka, "the identification of the essence and meaning of the specific human life from the historical perspective. *It is a sort of evaluation of work performed by man*" (emphasis V. L.).²⁹

What *criterion* can be used to evaluate one's achievements? Patočka arrives at the *paradox* of the philosophy of history: "*The philosophy of history aims to evaluate man on the basis of what man in fact is*. However, to understand what man is is neither the only thing nor is it uniform in itself — in contrast to other areas of *a priori* comprehension (for example, mathematics). It depends on time and on the individual. It is a process — a history; this process cannot be properly understood without explaining it with maximum possible sincerity and courage" (emphasis V.L.).³⁰ Patočka believes that the philosophy of history must be *subjective* to a certain extent, because this dimension is an inherent part of *philosophy*.

More importantly, Patočka assumes that the philosophy of history must also be *metaphysical*, and vice versa, each metaphysics has its historical-philosophical implications. Metaphysics exerts influence on the philosophy of history, which is not viewed as a mere philosophi-

²⁵ J. Patočka: "Filosofie dějin." In: J. Patočka: *Péče o duši I.*, p. 339.

²⁶ J. Patočka: "Filosofie výchovy." In: J. Patočka: *Péče o duši I.*, p. 369.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 340.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 340—341.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 342.

cal science. Rather, it is mainly conceived as “*an integral part of human life, as a part of our existence, which is unavoidable when we ourselves become a part of history*” (emphasis V.L.).³¹ Historical-philosophical thinking becomes a kind of *fatal thinking* applied to social events. Consequently, *fatal thinking* is related to a special, personal, subjective way of thinking, “which engages our way of judgment, our hopes, and our place in life, a way fairly different from a strictly objective thinking on which *ira et studio* may have disturbing rather than beneficial effects.”³²

3. Hegel's philosophy of history

Patočka notes that while historical-philosophical thinking has a long tradition (Hesiodos, Homer, Old Testament — three historical perspectives — three deep perceptions of history), the philosophy of history as a philosophical discipline came to existence in the modern age. Germany of the first half of the 19th century witnessed extraordinary blossom of historical-philosophical thinking — *true orgy of the philosophy of history*. Schiller, Fichte, Schelling, and especially Hegel represent the peak of German philosophy of history, with disciples and adherents throughout Europe, mainly Eastern Europe.³³ This kind of philosophical thinking gradually weakens in the first third of the 20th century, primarily under the influence of *positivist thinking*. Nevertheless, Patočka is thoroughly confident about the necessity to continuously deal with the philosophy of history, mainly with its central issue — *the construction of history*.

Thus, an attempt at a philosophical construction of history is considered by Patočka to be a courageous theoretical act, the implementation of which is far from being simple. Patočka encountered this problem all through his life. Rather than political events or the overall external complexity of the historical scene, he purposefully chooses the *period of history* that appears to be rather neglected in historical constructions.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., pp. 342—343.

³³ Ibid., p. 111.

Patočka perceives history as a play in which its actors are not its authors. The “performance” itself is of minor importance. What matters is the content of the play: “The content of the play is grounded in intellectual tendencies, in their multifarious interaction, in their tension and problems which stimulate motion; frequently, these are remote dreams of abstract thinkers which hit the bottom of everydayness.”³⁴ Dreams of each era are of great importance. Specific performances are to Patočka only peculiar psalms used to *phrase our interpretation*. From this it follows that, from the very beginning, Patočka’s philosophy of history was in its substance a philosophy of intellectual history.

Patočka aptly notes that “intellectual tendencies and trends have never in history been isolated threads; instead, they constitute wholes viewed generally as unified in their nature.”³⁵ His fundamental philosophical belief in the field of the philosophy of history has never changed: *autonomy and the primacy of the intellectual impulse in history*.

“Isn’t it the case that history is an appeal to reason to get to know itself and to recognise its own limits? Does not this appeal simply mean waking up from the *dogmatic sleep of reason* that is not aware of its own history?” (emphasis V.L.)³⁶ Why are we interested in history and why do we study history? Patočka is most irritated by our indifference to history. He firmly believes that *indifference and history contradict each other*.³⁷ After all, the human being is all that matters in history. Therefore, there is no place for indifference under these circumstances. “If we are indifferent to something in history, it is dead to history. By implication, rather than a *clear picture*, history is an object of passionate contact; however, it is not a contact with anything what is alive, what can be affected or changed. It is not anything like active help either; it is comprehended by *us* within the range of our current struggles and tendencies.”³⁸

The interaction between *history* and *us* is perceived by Patočka with utmost consistency: “History thus determines us; it is an objective power which defies us. On the other hand, it is us who keep it alive; reality, that is, an act, a true work of history consists in our life. If we are determined by history, it may be claimed that we de-

³⁴ Ibid., p. 349.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ J. PATOČKA: “Několik poznámek k pojmům dějin a dějepisu.” In: J. PATOČKA: *Péče o duši I*, p. 36.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 39.

³⁸ Ibid.

termine history, and that by growing out of a stem that no more exists, we supply with our blood only those shadows of our underworld from which we expect a reply."³⁹

Patočka's question of the *nature of history* is unambiguously directed towards the question of the *nature of man*. Still, he does not reduce the self-understanding of the human being to the problem of reflection: "The question is, however, whether the capturing of self-understanding referred to by philosophers ... can be reached other than by reflection ... how do we know that we are human beings; without knowing that we are human beings there is no humanity. Knowledge of one's humanity is a part of human nature."⁴⁰ Consequently, "our being in the world is being in the world of humans."⁴¹ Therefore, *philosophising* itself means to Patočka an opportunity awarded to the human being by the act of his or her freedom. "Thrown freedom means: all the opportunities of freedom stem from what human past has brought to us, they are co-determined by the past. The past is therefore an urgent appeal to our freedom to revive to its own question."⁴²

This is where Patočka finds the meaning of history. History is the mode in which our freedom, by understanding its decisions, separates itself from the dangers that threaten it and identifies its own models and objects of respect. "History aims to know the past in order to evaluate it, that is, to clarify our own attitude to the wave that bears us in the light of truth which is us and which is implemented by us. The truth of a historian's history depends on whether or not he or she has understood human freedom. Freedom can be understood by capturing it in a particular historical situation, by being true to ourselves, firm, stronger than the world. Through their decisions, humans progress in the world without leaving it."⁴³

A historian explains history from the position of his or her *determination*, which provides him or her a measure for a vivid view of history. Patočka argues that "by understanding history we identify its meaning when we repeat the substantial; the original possibilities revealed in the past thrown-free determinations. *The meaning of history is nothing ready-made or general, an idea possibly implemented in the history of a particular nation. Rather, it is a repeatable hap-*

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 39—40.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 41.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 42.

⁴² Ibid., p. 43.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 44.

pening and struggling opportunity for free being which somehow or other concerns us in a substantial way" (emphasis V.L.).⁴⁴

This concept of the *meaning of history* entails the *necessity of historiography*. In Patočka's system, it is related to the fact of *human freedom* so that our life may find itself. To become free means to accept "the thrownness in criticising the dead traditions and the life-strangling lies as residues from outdated decisions, and in courageous repetition of once outlined possibilities. That is why, history cannot be separated from respect, love, hatred, and aversion; that is why, historiography can be one of the most powerful factors of historical life itself ... historiography itself, through the peculiarities of its structure, substantiates human freedom; to put it in Heidegger's words, a historian must want, must argue, and must respect."⁴⁵ However, Patočka goes on to say: "In principle, there is only one history: the history of a specific life in the fullness of its determination."⁴⁶

On the other hand, Patočka is aware of the fact that philosophy cannot be *prescriptive* in relation to the world. Its position is exclusively confined to *appeal*. What actually should it appeal for? The answer can be found in his essay "Několko poznámok o mimosvetskej a svetskej pozícii filozofie" (1934) [A few notes on the other-worldly and worldly positions of philosophy]. The appeal of philosophy bears on "the *heroic man*. This is a human word of philosophy."⁴⁷ By implication, heroism is not a blind passion, love, revenge, ambition, or will to power. It is, first of all, *peaceful clarity of the life as whole*, it is "the awareness of the fact that this way of conduct is inevitable *for me*, the only possible way of my existence in the world. The hero's being here, at the very moment, does not expect any acknowledgment or continuation in some other world. Heroism accepts its own transience. There is nothing but an irreversible manifestation of one's substance, irreducible to mere circumstances and intersections of the world."⁴⁸

As a result, the task of philosophy is very specific. "It consists of *redeeming* the self-understanding of the heroic man and of an opportunity to *understand* his belief as 'a free human act' rather than revelation of the transcendent" (emphasis V.L.). What is revealed in

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 45.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 53.

⁴⁷ J. PATOČKA: "Několik poznámek o mimosvětské a světské pozici filosofie." In: J. PATOČKA: *Péče o duši I*, p. 67.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

this belief is not a transcendent divine command but “the *principle of man* in a particular historical situation. The understanding of Being, which is achieved by philosophy by progressing in the world intellectually, is thus related to the true human being that represents a free act; by implication, the ideal of sovereign philosophy may be expressed as *the philosophy of heroism and the heroism of philosophy*” (emphasis V.L.).⁴⁹

Patočka avows Hegel's heritage especially in his conception of *historicism*. In his essay “O filosofii dějin” [On the philosophy of history] (1940), Patočka maintains that historicism, including its impact on humanities, is a thorny and not yet resolved problem that cannot be ignored.⁵⁰ The philosophy of history, as conceived by Patočka, presents itself in its constructive part as a *theoretical doctrine* striving to interpret human history “in terms of the unified law of its determination; it determines the meaning of the individual stages of development and thus teaches us to understand the intrinsic necessity inherent in the fate of individuals and social wholes.”⁵¹ Such a conception of the function of the philosophy of history may imply an idea of an objective theory primarily pursuing definite facts. However, its crucial point pertains to *the programme of life and to the orientation in making decisions on life's directions*. “It is in the nature of life that it has its history, its significant and insignificant periods, its ups and downs; it copes with them, it struggles with them, explores itself in the course of the struggle, and takes pains to reach the clarity.”⁵²

Patočka conjectures that each significant life has its own inherent history, its inherent meaning. Most importantly, this meaning cannot be conceived as something external, objectively recognisable, or even ordered. The meaning of life can only be achieved through *one's struggle*. The meaning of life “does not exist as *factum a fatum* but is implemented: life itself, that realising oneself, is continuous self-experiencing, experiencing the meaning we put in us ourselves.”⁵³ This position has evident consequences for the comprehension of humanities, including philosophy: “A man can find the truth in its *object* if he finds it ... in his subjective world. Only through his subjective truth can a man avoid obsession due to the problem of

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ J. PATOČKA: “O filosofii dějin,” p. 109.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 113.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

conditioning by Heraclitean stream of history.”⁵⁴ *Truth* can never be an objective rule. Truth is a requirement *unconditionally* binding us to the *imperative of our own inner life*. Patočka’s life corresponds to these ideas which, in a sense, represent the culmination of his early theoretical work.

It should be noted, however, that the reception of Hegel’s philosophy has an incontestable place also in the subsequent periods of Patočka’s work. In the academic year of 1948—1949, Patočka gives two lectures: on *Aristotle* and *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

In his in-depth analysis, Sobotka points out that Patočka characterises his own approach as an *anthropological approach* inspired by Hegelean examination of Kojève and Hyppolit: “Patočka realises that this approach is biased to Hegel; nevertheless, he believes that anthropology (including philosophy of history) can be singled out from Hegel’s work, *although Hegel might protest on the grounds of the wholeness of philosophy* ... Through singling out the anthropological core of Hegel’s philosophy, Hegel becomes a philosopher denying the absolute meaning of the world and relegating ... it to history, ... not in the sense of *premundane being and existence* from time immemorial until its implementation, but rather as the meaning *created in the course of history, created in the most eminent sense of the word*.”⁵⁵

4. *Unity of the philosophy of history and the history of philosophy*

The philosophical value of Hegel’s work can perhaps be best seen in Patočka’s brilliant translation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, including his extensive and profound notes.⁵⁶ This translation significantly contributed to the *philosophical understanding* of this masterpiece of German philosophy of the 19th century in Czecho-Slovakia. Patočka’s essays — “Descartes a Hegel” [Descartes and Hegel],⁵⁷

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁵⁵ M. SOBOTKA: “Patočkova přednáška z r. 1949 o Hegelově *Fenomenologii ducha*.” *Filosofický časopis*, 45/5 (1997), pp. 849—850.

⁵⁶ J. PATOČKA: “Poznámky.” In: G. W. F. HEGEL: *Fenomenologie ducha*. Praha 1960, pp. 489—517.

⁵⁷ J. PATOČKA: *Aristoteles, jeho předchůdci a dědicové*. Praha 1964, pp. 311—325.

“Hegelův filosofický a estetický vývoj” [Hegel's philosophical and aesthetic development],⁵⁸ and “Estetika hudby doby Hegelovy” [Aesthetics of music in Hegel's time]⁵⁹ — witness to his permanent interest in the philosophy of this outstanding representative of German classical philosophy and show his ability to unconventionally approach and comprehend the up-to-date relevance of his unique theoretical message. Therefore, it is understandable that Patočka paid considerable attention to Hegel's philosophy, in particular, to his philosophy of history, also in his late works: “Kacířské eseje o filosofii dějin” [Heretic essays on the philosophy of history], “Evropa a doba poevropská” [Europe and the post-European period], and mainly “Platón a Evropa” [Plato and Europe].

Patočka's later works pay much attention to the idea of Hegelian provenance of philosophy and its relation to the particular period (“*Philosophy as thought and as conception of the Mind of a particular time*”).⁶⁰ This idea is most explicitly articulated as follows: “*Plato's philosophy reflects the life in Greece of his time and the life in Greece in general; the quintessence of Greek life is to him — rightly — Athens*” (emphasis V.L.).⁶¹ In his private lectures *Plato and Europe* (1973), he puts it as follows: “*Metaphysics itself grows out of a particular historical situation, the decline of polis, the decline of Athens, and it itself creates heritage that can survive the declining polis and the declining Hellenism, and will contribute to the fact that the downfall of the Roman Empire will be followed by another formation, the so-called Europe in its own sense*” (emphasis V.L.).⁶²

In the second lecture of the 1974 series of lectures, preceding his “Kacířské eseje o filosofii dějin” [Heretic essays on the philosophy of history], Patočka's attitude to Hegel's philosophy of history is articulated in a compelling way. In his view, Hegel ranks among those thinkers who related the task of history to the *evolution of reason*.

While he accepts Hegel's assumption that *historical progress is the progress in the awareness of freedom*, he notes the following: “Hegel conceives the word freedom in a slightly different way. Hegel's free man is not a man as such, a man with his finality; it is rather the spirit, and the spirit is, in its substance, the reason. Therefore, Hegel's conception is — even if our views may later seem to be close

⁵⁸ G. W. F. HEGEL: *Estetika I*. Praha 1966, pp. 9—56.

⁵⁹ Acta Universitatis Carolinae. Philosophica et historica. Praha 1971, pp. 29—42.

⁶⁰ G. W. F. HEGEL: *Lectures on the History of Philosophy. Greek Philosophy to Plato*. Vol. I. Trans. E. S. HALDANE. Lincoln and London 1995, p. 51.

⁶¹ J. PATOČKA: “Platón a Evropa,” p. 220.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 263—264.

or even coincident — profoundly different from what we have in mind.”⁶³ Patočka rejects Hegel’s great historical-philosophical *speculation* due to his completely different approach to history. “History should not be speculated of, history should be accounted for from *human historicity* and from how — under certain circumstances and on the basis and by making use of human historicity — a particular task emerges, a task which may be objectively traced in history, including its possibilities and modifications” (emphasis V.L.).⁶⁴

The comprehension and account of history from *human historicity* is vital to Patočka’s philosophical reflection. The rejection of Hegel’s great philosophical *speculations* means that history is not perceived as something closed, and that the meaning of history is not sought in any rule of history. “History is not any law of human evolution; history stems from human freedom as a task related to human freedom in so far as history formulates the task of protecting the most inherent human chance, raising it as a problem and as an opportunity for its future repetition — under the ever-changing circumstances.”⁶⁵ This is where Patočka identifies the most appropriate concept and problem of history.

Unlike Hegel, Patočka does not construct historical development by means of the *dialectic method*. He maintains that this method was used mainly by Marxists, who concentrated on the contradictory relation between production conditions and labour. Patočka raises the question of why this is not possible. The answer is unambiguous: “Because dialectic is an individual law — it is a law, but it is an individual law. While there are dialectic structures which are recurrent, they recur at different levels and, by implication, they are not identical. Thus, for example, Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* includes structures which almost plagiarise each other: master and slave, unhappy consciousness, mean consciousness and noble consciousness — these are identical structures at various levels, and what matters are these various levels. One might claim that a form of dialectic is thesis — antithesis — synthesis, but this means nothing because the form and the content are separable in it. Dialectic means law in which the form is inseparable from the content, and vice versa... While dialectic means a certain comprehension of Being. It is not — in contrast to what it pretends to be — the very essential law of Being. Dialectic pretends to be an absolute universal system,

⁶³ J. Patočka: “Problém počátku a místa dějin.” In: J. Patočka: *Pěče o duši III.*, p. 289.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 297.

but in fact it is a necessary way of approaching certain phenomena. Its pretension to totality and absoluteness is something that would destroy the historicity of Being, its actual inherent infinity and inexhaustibility.”⁶⁶

The foregoing reasons lead Patočka to a conviction that there is no universal thread in the philosophy of history (such as dialectic structure and dialectic method), enabling us to understand history. He relies on *phenomenology*, that is, he attempts to identify key phenomena “enabling him to find in the particular case the key to those crucial decisions on an intersection where it is decided on the future direction of development.”⁶⁷ It goes without saying that Patočka’s search for answers to relevant issues of the philosophy of history was inspired, or instigated, by his critical reflection on Hegel’s philosophy of history. Therefore, it is not accidental that the original Hegelian philosophy of the history of philosophy (unity of philosophy and the history of philosophy) is turned by Patočka into a new, philosophically unique, *unity* of the philosophy of history and *the history of philosophy*, with its focus on the central philosophical problem — *the care for the soul*.

This article has been prepared and published with support of Project APVVV-0480-11

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⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 407.

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