Patočka on Techno-Power and the Sacrificial Victim (Oběť)

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Abstract

The Czech philosopher Jan Patočka, one of the last students of Edmund Husserl, is not widely known in the Anglo-American philosophy. If known at all, he is mostly regarded as the interpreter of Husserl. In 1995, publication of the English translation of Jacques Derrida's book *Gift of Death* brought Patočka a broader philosophical audience. Although Derrida's work has brought attention to Patočka's work, the idiosyncrasy of Derrida's exposition has masked the true nature and importance of Patočka's philosophy.
In this paper, I present a reading of Patočka's work which deals with the existential crisis of today's society. For Patočka, the existential crisis of today's society and the recurrence of wars disguised as peace are two sides of the same problem.
They are the outcome of the transformation of nature into a standing reserve of energy for humans to use as they see fit. Stripped of unpredictable and contingent elements, nature is transformed into a formal system written in mathematical symbols that can be potentially understood by everyone, everywhere and every time. If the book of nature is written in the characters of geometry, as Galileo thought, then the idea of responsibility for the nature in which we live is not clear. How is one to think about responsibility for triangles and circles? To think of nature in such a manner seems to absolve humans from any responsibility for it. Yet not everything in the world is open to such calculative transfiguration. For Patočka, the phenomenon of the sacrificial victim and our own death are examples of the impossibility of calculation, and therefore also of prediction, which is the *sine qua non* of the modern scientific knowledge. Patočka's exposition offers a way to confront an understanding that is based on calculation alone. The phenomenon of sacrifice can initiate a challenge to our techno-scientific understanding of the world by showing the futility of attempts to simply use objective – in the sense of formal – knowledge to account for the world we live in – the natural world.

Patočka on Techno-Power and the Sacrificial Victim (Oběť)

> Man is a mere reed, the weakest thing in nature; but he is a thinking reed. The entire universe need not arm itself to crush him; a vapour, a drop of water, is sufficient to cause his death. But if the whole universe were to crush him, man would still be nobler than his destroyer, because he knows that he dies, and also the advantage that the universe has over him; but the universe knows nothing of this.
> Our whole dignity, therefore, consists in thought. From *this* we must rise, not from space and time which we cannot fill. Let us endeavour then to think aright, this is the principle of morality.[1]

The Czech philosopher Jan Patočka, one of the last students of Edmund Husserl, is not widely known in the Anglo-American philosophy. If known at all, he is mostly regarded as the interpreter of Husserl. Prevented from teaching and writing for the most of his life, his writings are only now being published in the Czech Republic and – thanks to Erazim Kohák's dedication to preserve the

[1] Pascal, 1960, no. 391, italics in original.

memory of Patočka – some of Patočka's papers, lecture notes and his last book *Heretical Essays* are available in English translation.[2]

In 1995, the translation of Jacques Derrida's book *Gift of Death* was published, thereby bringing Patočka to the notice of a broader philosophical audience. Derrida's work was one of the very rare engagements with philosophy of Jan Patočka. Regrettably, Derrida's exposition of Patočka – although presented as a reading of "Is Technological Civilization Decadent, and Why?" from the book *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History* – does not do justice to Patočka's thinking. Although Derrida's work has acted as a conduit for those unfamiliar with Patočka's work, the idiosyncrasy of Derrida's exposition has masked the true nature and importance of Patočka's philosophy, resulting in many misunderstandings of Patočka by those who have taken Derrida's work as their introduction to Patočka.

There is nothing surprising about Derrida's mis-reading of Patočka. If one wants to learn about Nietzsche, then one should not start initially with Heidegger's or Deleuze's works, for example, on Nietzsche. To begin one's study of Nietzsche with Heidegger might lead one to learn about Heidegger's thinking; but to claim that Heidegger's exposition is close reading of Nietzsche would be foolish.

Derrida would agree with this assessment. After proclaiming Patočka to be "an essentially Christian" thinker, he provides a typical Derridean caveat, stating that "it matters little in the end"[3], since, "the alternative between…two hypotheses (Christian text or not, Patočka as a Christian thinker or not) is of limited pertinence."[4] Edward Findlay, for example, has stated that "Derrida's portrait of Patočka is somewhat myopic".[5]

As I have suggested in my comparison with the reading of Nietzsche, it is important to realise that Derrida's reading imputes to Patočka an aim and intention that is Derrida's, not Patočka's. For Patočka, history is not primarily a history of responsibility, as Derrida maintains, but a confrontation with the old disintegrating tradition. Yet Derrida suggests otherwise when he states that for the Czech philosopher, "separating orgiastic mystery from Christian mystery…announces the origin of responsibility,"[6] whereby "the history of responsibility is tied to a history of religion."[7]

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[2] See Kohák, 1996, p. 155. Translations are: *Body, Community, Language, World*, (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1996); *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1996); *An Introduction to Husserl's Phenomenology*, (Chicago and La Salle: Open Court, 1996); and the collection of essays: Kohák, Erazim, *Jan Patočka: Philosophy and Selected Writings*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989). In 2002, Peter Lom translated Patočka's lectures *Plato and Europe* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2002).
[3] Derrida, 1995, p. 48.
[4] Ibid, p. 49.
[5] Findlay, 2002b, p. 17. See Findlay's critique of Derrida's misrepresentation of Patočka as a Christian thinker.
[6] Derrida, 1995, p. 4.
[7] Ibid, p. 5.

However, for Patočka, prior to a history of responsibility or Christianity, history begins when the space for questioning opens up. It is the time when myths had ceased to provide viable explanations of the world and nature revealed itself anew. The question: 'what is all of this?' was for the first time answered without recourse to myths or Gods. As he writes, "the discovery of the cosmos reached the form of a philosophical ideal of a life in truth that can be expressed in the words of the last great *diadochos* of this lineage, Edmund Husserl:[8] to subordinate opinion to observation and not vice versa."[9] For Patočka, philosophy and history, as he understands it, began at the same time. "Philosophy is unthinkable without questions. But to develop or pose a question means precisely to find an explicitly empty space, to find something that in a certain sense is not here."[10] Thus, for Patočka, "history is nothing other than the shaken certitude of pre-given meaning. It has no other meaning or goal."[11] It is in this context that he asserts:

> Modern civilization suffers not only from its own flaws and myopia but also from the failure to resolve the entire problem of history. Yet the problem of history may not be resolved, it must be preserved as a problem. Today the danger is that knowing so many particulars we are losing the ability to see the questions and that which is their foundation.[12]

The central issue for Patočka is "whether historical humans are still willing to embrace history,"[13] whether we are still willing to question what is given to us unreflectively. For Patočka, following Husserl, the question of reflection is crucial. It means to live in truth.[14] Therefore, if one wants to address the history of responsibility, as Patočka does, then one must address the issue from the space of questioning. This act of questioning cannot rest on anything but the *will* to question.

To question, according to Patočka, means that we must renounce all prior metaphysical foundations, be these gods or Platonic Ideas. The pre-eminent figure for Patočka is Socrates, the only thinker who was not afraid to admit that his knowledge consisted of not knowing,[15] that his wisdom was human only.[16]

In this paper, then, I will present that aspect of Patočka's thinking which deals with the existential crisis of today's society. However, it is important to keep in mind that Patočka, despite his Heideggerian vocabulary, attempts to think today's existential crisis by taking insights of both, Martin Heidegger *and* Edmund Husserl.

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[8] See also Husserl: "Prior to philosophy no one poses questions critical of knowledge, questions of evidence" (Husserl, (1935) 1970, p. 289).
[9] Patočka, 1996b, p. 82
[10] Patočka, 2002b, p. 51.
[11] Patočka, 1996b, p. 118.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Patočka, 2002b, p. 43.
[15] See, for example, Patočka's analysis of Plato's *Apology* in Patočka, 1977.
[16] Plato, 1997, 20d.

For Patočka, the existential crisis of today's society and the perpetual wars disguised as peace are two sides of the same problem. They are the outcome of the transformation of nature into a standing reserve of energy for humans to use as they see fit.[17] Stripped of unpredictable and contingent elements, nature is transformed into a formal system written in mathematical symbols that can be potentially understood by everyone, everywhere and every time. If the book of nature is written in the characters of geometry, as Galileo thought, then the idea of responsibility for the nature in which we live is not clear. How is one to think about responsibility for triangles and circles? To think of nature in such a manner seems to absolve humans from any responsibility for it. Yet not everything in the world is open to such calculative transfiguration. For Patočka, the phenomenon of the sacrificial victim is an example of the impossibility of calculation, and therefore also of prediction, which is the *sine qua non* of modern scientific knowledge. Patočka's exposition offers a way to confront an understanding that is based on calculation alone. The phenomenon of sacrifice can initiate a challenge to our techno-scientific understanding of the world by showing the futility of attempts to simply use objective – in the sense of formal – knowledge to account for the world we live in – the natural world.

The problem of presenting Patočka's ideas is complicated by the Czech word *obeť*. The Czech word *oběť* could be translated into English by the words: sacrifice, victim or casualty. Erazim Kohák translates it by the words sacrifice, or sacrificial victim. However, the etymology of *oběť* and the etymology of the English word sacrifice are distinctly different. These differences can lead to a crucial misunderstanding of Patočka's writing on this subject, as Derrida's reading of Patočka demonstrates. The etymology of 'sacrifice' can lead to the claim that Patočka is a Christian thinker, which is not the case in the Czech word *oběť*.

Although Kohák notes the problem in translating the word *oběť*, he does not consider the problem of etymology, when he explains:

> Patočka takes advantage of the fact that in both Czech and German the same word (*oběť*, *Opfer*) is used to speak of a victim (as of an earthquake) and of a sacrifice (as a religious sacrifice). This enables him to claim that technologicization claims many victims/sacrifices. I have tried to suggest this by resorting to the term *sacrificial victim*. However, Patočka's point does not depend on the pun but rather on the fact that even in the technological age so many people experience their own victimization as a sacrifice and the victimization of others as their 'being sacrificed on the altar of progress.' As long as that is so, nihilism has not prevailed.[18]

However, the Czech word *obeť* is not derived from the Latin word *sacra* with its ties to *res divinas*, as the English (or French) word sacrifice is. Thus the English (or French) word sacrifice have its origins in the etymological tradition that is Christian.

[17] See Patočka, 1996b. For Heidegger's discussion of *Gestell*, see Heidegger, 1977a.
[18] Kohák, 1989b, p. 339.

These differences in the etymology become crucial because the meaning of the word *oběť* also includes the idea of victim, as, in the expression: victims of war, and the idea of casualty, as in the expression: casualties in a car accident, for example. It is precisely this polysemy of the word *oběť* that Patočka brings into play. This polysemy is also at play in the German word *Opfer*.

So it is important to remember that when Patočka speaks of *oběť*, translated as sacrifice or sacrificial victim, especially in his discussion of the front experience, the translated word sacrifice or sacrificial victim includes not only the idea of a sacrifice, but also the idea of a victim and also of a casualty, as in victims of war or casualties of war, especially civilian casualties of whom he remarks that after the second World War the line of combat became blurred. As he notes, "aerial warfare [is] capable of striking anywhere with equal cruelty."[19] At present, victims (oběť) of war includes also civilian casualties (*oběť*).

The Natural World

> Can we live in this world, where historical occurrence is nothing but an unending concatenation of illusory progress and bitter disappointment?[20]

According to Patočka, "the problem of the 'natural' world" became prominent with the positivist movement and its crusade to end "traditional metaphysics both outside of and within the sciences".[21] Patočka notes that, in his critique of positivism, Husserl recognised that the natural world is not something obvious, given to us in all its integrity, but is a task that needs to be accomplished.[22] For "the humans of the industrial age",[23] the natural world is not unitary; rather, it is split. On the one hand, it is the objective world of natural science; on the other, it is the world in which we live.[24] One world is imprecise, changing and impossible to account for; the other is precise, defined by perfect causality and mathematisation. Science presupposes the natural world, the world of accidents, flux and change from which science paradoxically derives its system of the mathematical lawfulness of nature,[25] transforming it methodically through idealisation into the mathematised world of exact causality.[26] Forgetting its own methodological procedure, this new constructed nature purged of every particularism and contingency becomes the 'real' world, while the natural world becomes its inferior "subjective 'reflection'".[27] As Patočka observes:

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[19] Patočka, 1996b, p. 132.
[20] Husserl, (1954) 1970, §2 [p. 7].
[21] Patočka, (1967) 1989, p. 239. See, for example, Mach, (1897) 1959, especially Chapter One: "Introductory Remarks: Anti Metaphysical".
[22] Patočka, 1992a, p. 208.
[23] Patočka, (1975) 2002, p. 98; Patočka, 1996b, p. 95.
[24] Patočka, 1992a, p. 207.
[25] Patočka, 1992b, p. 9. See also Patočka, 1993, p. 75.
[26] Patočka, 1992a, p. 207. Husserl formulates the critique of this split in understanding nature in the form of a question. He asks, if "every psychological judgment involves the existential positing of physical nature, whether expressly or not," (p. 86) than, "how is natural science to be comprehensible in absolutely every case, to the extent that it pretends at every step to posit and to know a nature that is in itself – in itself in opposition to the subjective flow of consciousness?" (Husserl, (1911) 1965, p. 88.)
[27] Patočka, (1967) 1989, p. 240.

> nature, in mathematical natural science, is not something that presents itself spontaneously, it is…an object of construction and experimentation which presents nature within the limits of rigorously defined anticipations which cannot be realized as such but which make calculation possible. Nowhere in nature can we observe pure momentum in the strict sense, and yet the law of momentum holds, and rigorous kinematics would be unthinkable without it.[28]

This hypothetical formal structure leads "not so much to perceive nature as to calculate it",[29] by "penetrating into beings of this type". As Patočka sums up, "to construe and calculate means at the same time to predict".[30] This prediction leads to an ever improved application of science to every sphere of our lives. Modern science separates itself from philosophy, by forgetting that "being is [not] directly accessible and meaningful." It becomes "an effective knowledge," that is "a specialized mode of knowing, one which applies that tried and proven formal schema of objectivity to ever-new regions of being and new aspects of experience".[31] Yet, as Patočka also notes, this objectification of nature that leads to splitting of the world is not something negligible but is constitutive of human experience.[32]

For Patočka, this disunity in our understanding of nature, and therefore of our lives within nature, permeates every aspect of our living leading to an existential crisis.[33] This insight is already in Husserl:[34]

> The root of the crisis of the sciences [is] in the draining away of meaning in fully formalized natural science, a crisis that in the end endangers not only science itself but all of our spiritual life and with it even our life itself. From their initial constitution, science and scientific philosophy represented an instance of life in truth and responsibility. Once they found themselves in a state of crisis, humankind lost the basis of a life based on insight.[35]

On the one hand, due to techno-science, European societies are richer than ever before, work is not drudgery as it once was, and people feel freer than in the past; on the other, as Patočka explains, despite these advances that influence every aspect of our way of living, society displays symptoms of pathology, such as rising rates of suicide and mental disorders.[36] From the nineteenth century onwards, the incidence of suicide became so alarming that many studies were written in an attempt to understand this modern phenomenon.[37] At present, pathological symptoms also include "drug abuse, the revolt of the young, and the destruction of all social taboos, all of which manifest an evident tendency towards anarchy as their limit".[38] Patočka notes that although, "the humans of the

[28] Patočka, 1996b, p. 70.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Patočka, (1976) 1989, p. 292.
[31] Ibid, p. 286.
[32] Patočka, 1992a, p. 207.
[33] Patočka, 1992b, p. 9.
[34] "Science…excludes in principle precisely the questions which man, given over to our unhappy times to the most portentous upheavals, finds the most burning: questions of the meaning or meaninglessness of the whole of this human existence" (Husserl, (1954) 1970, §2 [p. 6]). See also Husserl, (1935) 1970.
[35] Patočka, (1973) 1989, p. 327.
[36] Patočka, 1996b, p. 96.
[37] See, for example, Durkheim, 1952; Masaryk, 1970.
[38] Patočka, 1996b, p. 97, translation modified.

industrial age are incomparably more powerful and have at their disposal a far greater reservoir of energy than humans of earlier ages";[39] they are not in charge of this techno-scientific venture. He clarifies further:

> It is a paradoxical fact that metaphysics of mechanism is closely linked with an unsuspected growth of human power but that this growth, instead of making man more content, more at peace, instead of becoming merely the means of a stronger life, has led to the most extensive historical and social cataclysms. Only a metaphysics of mechanism could make possible the typical social phenomena of modern times, a specifically modern capitalism growing out of an equally extreme objective stance towards human affairs, subjecting human conditions to an equally law-like calculus and working directly with a mechanical model of human relations.[40]

For Patočka, the problem is not the use of formal knowledge. The problem is that this sort of knowledge – essentially a hypothetical knowledge based on certain assumptions – is increasingly used to predict the functioning of society as well, as if human existence was also something unchanging, a type that can be used to predict a development of society as a whole. It is this model of understanding of humans that capitalism is based upon, with its drive for raising productivity, for incorporating everybody and everything in its drive for higher and higher profits. In this sense, "the 'human' assumes a form which may be capable of increasing productivity and its consequences but is not capable of understanding it".[41] Without understanding, humans are incorporated into this exclusively modern project of transformation of nature into a 'standing reserve' – or, as we say, human resources – to become a part of the calculated stockpile, as powers among other powers, as things among other things waiting 'on order' for a further assault on the world's resources.

Techno-Science as Historical Manifestation of the Truth

> The exclusiveness with which the total world-view of modern man, in the second half of the nineteenth century, let itself be determined by the positive sciences and be blinded by the 'prosperity' they produced, meant an indifferent turning-away from the questions which are decisive for a genuine humanity. Merely fact-minded sciences make merely fact-minded people.[42]

For Patočka, the natural world in which we live is historical. There is no hidden world that we can uncover beneath our modern one. Humans live in the world that was here before they were born and that will be here when they die.[43] As Patočka following Heidegger, would say, we were thrown into the world that preceded us and we can only understand it as such. However, as he also explains, it is not the destiny of being, as Heidegger would suggest,[44] rather it is the world of humans that is historical: "we do not even perceive in the same way as ancient Greeks even though, physiologically speaking, our sense organs are the same". In our world, it is techno-science that

[39] Patočka, (1975) 2002, p. 98; Patočka, 1996b, p. 95.
[40] Patočka, (1967) 1989, p. 245, translation modified.
[41] Patočka, (1973) 1989, pp. 337-8.
[42] Husserl, (1954) 1970, §2 [pp. 5-6].
[43] Patočka, 1996b, p. 152.
[44] See Martin Heidegger, "The term '*Geschick* of being' is not an answer but a question, among others the question of the essence of history, insofar as we think history as being and essence in terms of being" (Heidegger, 1996, p. 62).

determines our understanding. As Patočka notes, "humans in a secularized epoch see not only different things but see them differently than one…who invites a stranger to his kitchen because there, too, do gods dwell".[45] There can be no bigger gulf between Homer's Achilles – who listened to Athena, who "came from Heaven at the behest of Hera", to stop him from attacking Agamemnon by grabbing his hair – and Achilles in the Hollywood production who destroys Apollo's statue in the temple.[46] In the one world, "everything is full of gods",[47] in the other, "nothing but…the calculable resources that are 'on order' can penetrate the unitary network of technically uncovered reality…showing no lacunae".[48]

It would be a mistake to conclude that, for Patočka, techno-science needs to be stopped and we should return to some romantic pre-scientific time. Regardless of the 'technical' problems of such a solution, it would not solve the problem of our situation. It is not techno-science *per se* that is the problem. Similar to Heidegger's analysis, for Patočka, it is the essence of technology that we need to understand in order to change our way of thinking. As he would say, the essence of technology is not technological.[49] It is the way we understand nature, the world and ourselves that we need to confront; and we need to realise that the way we use up nature influences all ways of living. We must confront face to face the transformation of nature – and with it all aspects of life – into hypothetical models based on causality and mathematization.

The problem of freedom might highlight this dilemma. How do we understand human life? To somewhat simplify, there are two ways: understanding of human life as it is lived, and the scientific account of that very same life. A person experiences freedom, or sometimes a lack of it, as she *acts* in the world. From the point of view of techno-science, freedom is a chimera impossible to account for in the system ruled by precise causality.[50] However, life is not a "rock" or "lava on the moon"[51] that can be measured to determine its properties in order to formulate laws that would enable us to predict its future behaviour.

For Patočka "the 'natural man' in the modern sense is always merely a schema, a schema of the *problem* of humanity. A man does not have his being finished like a stone, an animal, or a god".[52] To claim, for example, that "life is largely a matter of chemistry"[53], is to turn one's own life into a

[45] Patočka, 1996b, p. 11.
[46] Homer, 1995, p. 24 [I, 190-200]; *Troy*. 2004.
[47] Patočka, 1996b, p. 11.
[48] Patočka, (1973) 1989, p. 331.
[49] Patočka, (1977) 1989, p. 340; Patočka, (1974) 2002. See also Patočka, 1996d; Patočka, 1996a; Patočka, 1996c; Patočka, 2002a; Patočka, (1969) 1987; Patočka, (1971) 1989; Patočka, (1973) 1989. For Heidegger's analysis, see, for example, Heidegger, 1977a; Heidegger, 1977c; Heidegger, 1977b.
[50] Patočka, 1992b, p. 18. The objection against the claim of causality being one of the cornerstones of modern techno-science might be that Quantum theory undermines causality and determinacy. Yet, for the purpose of techno-science, the indeterminism that Quantum theory describes holds only at the atomic level, while techno-science deals with objects where causality still holds.
[51] Patočka, 1992a, p. 249.
[52] Patočka, (1967) 1989, p. 250, italics in original.
[53] William J. Mayo, M.D. cited in Gittleman and Desgrey, 1989, p. 23.

thing that is indifferent to its own being.[54] It is to transform life into a thing that science can observe and measure, and then propose predictions to its future development. But to live is not something that can be described in the same way as the growth of a flower, or a cat. To live is to realise that life is finite, as is the life of a flower or a cat, but human life cannot be described by a simple developmental model. Human existence is not finished like a stone; it is always an open-ended possibility for each and every one of us. A stone, a flower or a cat are in the world but they have no understanding of it. As Blaise Pascal noted, a human being is a "thinking reed". She knows about her utmost possibility, which is her mortality. She knows also that the elements of nature can overpower her, "but the universe knows nothing of this".[55] Thus, humans are aware of their existence and care for their being. They know *that* they are finite, but they also know *about* it. By contrast, things are indifferent to their being: they simply *are* in the world, available for calculation through abstraction. The world of science is populated by such calculable, abstract objects that are '*outside* of time', to be found solely in the abstract geometrical space; that is, in thought only. This formal system is meaningless to people who live in a natural world of everyday life where they understand things according to their practical use, and use them "*in* time for …: time for work, time for rest, time for entertainment".[56]

It is characteristic for humans to know about their life, the world, their responsibility towards themselves and others. They usually think about their living in terms of certain aims, goals and intentions in order to make their life successful. Yet, the clarity that illuminates their understanding is not thematised. The goal of life is to live and to be, but what it means *to be* is not obvious. Human sciences, such as psychology, sociology, history, construct their systems by investigating the so-called 'human' interests.[57] As Adam Smith noted, "every man, as long as he does not violate the laws of justice, is left perfectly free to pursue his own interest his own way", and, although, "he intends only his own gain", he is "led by the invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention".[58] From the interests of individuals, human sciences build their understanding of society, as if interests were the key to human existence. By contrast, in the case of things, we can speak of their functionality. Things are in the world, we encounter them and use them, but life is not a chair. A chair shows itself to me according to *my* possibilities.[59] I am tired and I want to rest. A chair reveals its being to humans who know how to use it according to their possibilities, but a chair knows nothing of its being. Thus, to explain human life according to functions or interests is to pass over what it means *to be*.

[54] Patočka, 1992a, pp. 248-9.
[55] Pascal, 1960, no. 391.
[56] Patočka, 1992a, p. 170.
[57] Patočka, 1993, pp. 40-1.
[58] Smith, (1776) 1904, IV, ii, p. 33.
[59] Patočka, 1993, pp. 64-5.

Human existence and morality are impossible to transform into a formal system applicable to everyone, although there have been plenty of attempts to do so. Perhaps the most conspicuous effort was Jeremy Bentham's utilitarianism. In *The Principles of Morals and Legislation*, Bentham attempted to use calculation to anticipate human interactions.[60] The felicity calculus was supposed to measure human interests according to pleasure and pain, so that a government could determine the best possible policy for its citizens. But is it possible to understand human existence as something calculable? We might be tempted to dismiss this example, but there are others. We accumulate statistics to understand everything, as if numbers had the magical power to freeze all reality into a static system. Then, as if those numbers reveal some lawful manner in which society functions, we calculate to reveal solutions that can be applied in each instance.

The modern belief is that the world is positively known and there is nothing that cannot be explained by future knowledge; and that this will lead us toward the final mastery of nature. All we need is better equipment to disclose all of nature's secrets. Thus for a techno-scientific understanding of the world – combined with the economic reduction of all to the one common denominator, the free enterprise market place – nature stripped of mystery seems to be nothing more than a 'standing reserve' waiting for further pillaging in order to sustain this techno-scientific drive to master all.

Yet, if human understanding of the world is historical, if the world reveals itself to humans differently at different times, then in our time, it is modern techno-science that uncovers nature in this very specific formal manner, thus "making truth possible".[61] However, since for techno-science nature is a set of calculable resources, this "universal uncovering…has not even an indirect and objectified awareness and knowledge of the ground of the uncovering itself. For this uncovering, by its very conception of what is, closes itself up against all that claims to transcend its sphere".[62] Thus for humans living in this age of energy, techno-science reveals the world consisting of calculable 'beings' only. Everything that exceeds this domain of calculability is by definition outlawed from this rationally ordered universe. On a simple level, it is easy to recall how often weather prediction fails. In ancient times, nature's forces were explained by myths. Today, we simply ignore the failures or shortcomings of purported scientific mastery, assuming that some time in the near future better instruments will give us better predictions.

Modern science assumes that the world is rational; that the world is potentially described – and even explained – by the tools and methodologies of the sciences. There is a problem, however. The world

[60] See, for example, Bentham, 1987.
[61] Patočka, (1973) 1989, p. 331.
[62] Ibid.

simply is not rational despite what modern science wants us to believe. The elements [živly] of nature are neither manipulable nor their 'workings' fully understood, nor *can* they be fully understood.[63] The issue is not simply one of a lack of knowledge which will be eventually overcome; the issue is that knowledge is always partial. Already for Husserl, nature means "an objective science of nature which in deliberate one-sidedness excludes all extra-physical predications of reality."[64] Recalling Socrates' claim that human wisdom can only be partial and one-sided, Patočka maintains that we cannot know all that-is as if we were impartial, disinterested spectators standing somewhere above this world in which we live.[65] Scientific explanations of the world are limited. Science restricts "all understanding of being to one sole level of manifestation",[66] which is physicalism. "Physicalism" is nothing else but "the consistent holding of the idea that the sphere of the objects of physics" – in other words, nature – "is the sphere of efficacy, and specifically of exact causality, without which prediction is impossible".[67]

Wars of the Twentieth Century and the Twentieth Century as War[68]

> Behind all this was a brutal and ruthless use of intellect which basically recognized, mechanically increased, and accelerated production. But could they create an olive tree or a horse? …I had admired these super-philistines long enough – these servants of forces unknown to them. As long as such admiration lasts, destruction will increase and human standards decrease. A mind that endangers worlds cannot create a fly. The huge scaffolding reveals itself as a scaffold indeed. If knowledge is power, one must know first what knowledge really is.[69]

For Patočka, the problem of understanding nature only as a resource for humans to use became obvious during the First World War, which was fought in the name of force. It was in this war that the one-sided rationality of modern techno-science was played out for the first time. If God does not exist, then it is up to the strongest state to use its power to take what it assumes as its right.[70] As Patočka points out, in the First World War, it was Germany that assumed this role, but the logic behind it was the techno-scientific understanding of the world that continues to the present and in which the war continues under the guise of peace. As he says, "it is above all the ever-deepening technoscientific aspect of…life. It is the organizing will of [the strong state's] economic leaders, its technocratic representatives forging plans leading inevitably to a conflict with the existing global order".[71]

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[63] See, for example, Patočka, (1974) 2002, p. 207.
[64] Husserl, (1927) 1994, p. 49.
[65] Patočka, 2002b, p. 62.
[66] Patočka, (1976) 1989, p. 288.
[67] Ibid, p. 287. Husserl's critique of naturalism expresses the same insight: "Thus the naturalist…sees only nature, and primarily physical nature. Whatever is is either physical, belonging to the unified totality of physical nature, or it is in fact psychical, but then merely as a variable dependent on the physical, at best a secondary 'parallel accompaniment.' Whatever is belongs to psychophysical nature, which is to say that it is universally determined by rigid laws" (Husserl, (1911) 1965, p. 79).
[68] Patočka, 1996d.
[69] Jünger, 2000, p. 95.
[70] Patočka, 1996b, p. 121.
[71] Ibid, p. 122.

The First World War shaped the tenor not only of the twentieth century, as Patočka suggests, but its *pathos* has extended into the twenty-first as well. The war also brought into the open its specific possibilities: "the transformation of the world into a laboratory for releasing reserves of energy accumulated over billions of years…it swept aside all 'conventions' that inhibited this release of energy – a transvaluation of all values under the sign of power".[72]

Patočka points out that "war is simultaneously the greatest undertaking of industrial civilization, both product and instrument of total mobilization…and a release of orgiastic potentials which could not afford such extremes of intoxication with destruction under any other circumstances". The First World War also revealed the enactment of a "cruelty and orgiasm" that points to "a disintegration of traditional discipline and demonization of the opponent". As he also notes, "never before has the demonic reached its peak as much as in this age of great sobriety and rationality".[73]

For Patočka, it is in the name of this sobriety and rationality that what he calls "the day" is reduced to the level of our physical needs and interests.[74] For him, to think about "the day" and indeed "life" is, in this age of energy, to think about consumerism elevated into the fulfilment of those needs, thereby eliminating any other understanding of our lives. To defend this thoughtless, pleasurable 'day and life', everything else is forgotten. Hence, from the perspective of day and life, "war, death organized *en masse*, is an unpleasant but necessary interlude which we need to accept in the interest of certain goals of life's continuity."[75] However, "by means of death", used as a threat to life, the war is continuing. If humans understand life as "the highest value that exists for them", then "they plan death impersonally and statistically, as if it were merely a reassignment of roles". In the end, "peace rules in the will to war".[76]

However, when looking at the sacrifice of human life from the point of view of those at the front, of those who have survived this modern hell, their sacrifice is not calculable. Many lives have been annihilated, and many have been transformed by that experience, but those lives are irreducible to statistics. For the 'home front', the number of those who have died and those who have been maimed physically or psychologically is transformed into statistics. Then, these numerical data are presented to the public as a necessary sacrifice to preserve freedom, to secure "a day in the future in the form of progress, of a free and increasing expansion, of possibilities they lack today". To achieve this aim, from those sent to the front, self-sacrifice is demanded. They are sacrificed in the name of the lives of others. Thus, their lives become "something relative, related to peace and to the

[72] Ibid, p. 124.
[73] Ibid, pp. 113-4, translation modified.
[74] Ibid, p. 120.
[75] Ibid. See also Patočka, 1996b, pp. 43-4.
[76] Patočka, 1996b, p. 129.

day". According to the aims of the day, their lives supposedly preserve the value of life *per se*. However, as Patočka – citing Ernst Jünger and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, participants of the war – shows, at the front, the meaning of life changes drastically. The aims of the day – presenting war as a stepping stone to a better future, progress, life – become unintelligible. Life is suddenly experienced as something very different from the drive to accumulate goods; life is not experienced as something relative to something else, but "is significant *solely in itself*".[77]

According to Patočka, those who are forced to live in this region between life and death "are assaulted by *an absolute freedom*, freedom from *all* the interests of peace, of life, of the day". Life becomes something beyond which "there can be nothing". The experience at the front is no longer experienced in terms of their "vocations, talents, possibilities, their future"; rather, the highest goal is simply to live.[78] As Jünger shows, the war changes everything. "Shell-hole and trench have a limited horizon. The range of vision extends no further than a bomb-throw; but what is seen is seen very distinctly".[79] The landscape is not merely a view of trees, houses, meadows: rather it is scanned for its potential to provide cover. One always needs to be aware of the "conditions [that] are made up of the terrain, which is always radically the same, of the constantly changing factor of weapons, of the strength of the two opponents, and of the quality of the fighting troops—which has always turned the scale and always will".[80] The experience of life and death changes also: "Here and there, the sentry posts were covered with dead, and, in among them, as it were, arisen from their bodies, stood the new relief with his rifle. …it was as though the distinction between the living and the dead had momentarily been taken away".[81] There is no connection to the outside world, to day and its aims: "Danger is on every side, blind and furious as an element" and "each man feels himself alone and abandoned in the darkness, flung defenceless into incalculable and pitiless machinery".[82] One finds "it a relief to be moving off. As long as one can [just] be going somewhere, though it may be into the jaws of disaster, there is at least the feeling of doing something to shape one's destiny".[83] The memories of Vasili Grossman, from the Second World War, reveal the same experience. He writes that soldiers "thought they were the same people as before, and only the new arrivals…looked with amazement at these men who knew no fear, for whom the words 'life' and 'death' no longer existed". Something stronger than the bond to life with

[77] Ibid, p. 130, italics in original.
[78] Ibid, pp. 129-30, italics in original.
[79] Jünger, 2003, pp. 263-4.
[80] Ibid, p. 21.
[81] Jünger, 2004, p. 85, translation modified.
[82] Jünger, 2003, p. 214.
[83] Ibid, p. 215.

its material aims helped them through. As Grossman recognises, it was "love and faith in one another [that] helped the soldiers in the heat of battle".[84]

Why did such experience not make any difference? Why did it not impel people to work against war? It is important to understand that war fought in the name of force does not finish with the declaration of peace. This premonition is already in Jünger. Writing *after* the war, he writes, "Apart from…considerations of mere utility,[85]…there ought to be some means of helping [desperate fellows] decently over the intervals of peace…so that they would be at hand when wanted".[86] Peace becomes nothing else but the war fought by different means, "appealing to the will to live and to have."[87] Leaving their front experiences behind, survivors accept life that is geared only towards things; life of consumerism again: *carpe diem*, enjoy the pleasures of the moment without concern for the future! Not life in itself, but things make life pleasurable.

Humans, in their drive to have, forget about their being, about their responsibility. As Karel Kosík, a student of Patočka, suggests, "Reason without conscience becomes the utilitarian and technical reason of reckoning, of estimating and calculating; and a civilization based on that is a civilization without reason, one in which man is subordinated to things and their technical logic. Conscience that has turned away from reason is reduced to a helpless inner longing or the vanity of good intentions".[88]

Thus war, in the guise of peace, seduces humans by consumerism, by "appealing to the will to live and to have". For Patočka, humans are transformed into victims "of the war already launched, that is, of peace and the day; where peace and the day rely on death as the means of maximal human unfreedom, as shackles that humans refuse to see but which are present as *vis a tergo*, as the terror that drives humans even into fire – death, chaining humans to life and rendering them most manipulable".[89]

For Patočka, to confront this will to live in things only – reduced to the will to have – is not easy because it is covered over by the pleasures offered by our consumer society. The only way to stand up to this domain of calculability is suggest, as we have seen, that techno-science is historical, revealing nature as a set of calculable resources only. To resist this techno-scientific uncovering of the world that produces as its by-product all those gratifications that make life easier is to challenge the calculability without holding responsible techno-science itself. It is to show that products

[84] Grossman (1942).
[85] Jünger, 2003, p. 199.
[86] Ibid, p. 198.
[87] Patočka, 1996b, p. 133.
[88] Kosík, (1967) 1995, pp. 14-5.
[89] Patočka, 1996b, p. 133, translation modified.

offered on the market are dependent on the pillaging of nature while techno-science scorches nature in its drive to uncover more and more energy. In the process, humans are fettered to the life and day, turned into the standing reserve, all "subject to the crack of the whip".[90]

Sacrifice

> I had the same spectacle before me that I had had so often already before attacks: the image of a group of men waiting in poor light, inclining their heads each time the guns fall short, or else prostrating themselves on the ground, …while excitement steadily mounts – a scene that grips the spirit like some terrible silent ceremonial that portends human sacrifice.[91]

Patočka shows that there are phenomena that escape techno-scientific calculations and observations; and whose patterns of repetition cannot be described in order to formulate some law that might explain them in the future. These phenomena are the experiences of sacrificial victims.

The idea of sacrifice represents the impossibility of calculation. It is this impossibility of prediction that shows the futility of objective knowledge to account for everything, even for human existence. To sacrifice one's own life, the only life one has, is to act in the belief that if one cannot live a good life then life is not worth living. It is to act without any reward here or elsewhere. That is the reason why Patočka's discussion is not underwritten by any transcendence. No God will reward one for this act. Calculation is of no help. There is no possibility to account for the act that is done without anything gained in an exchange.

How can we understand the sacrifice of humans, such as South Korean farmer Lee Kyoung Hae, who stabbed himself in protest against the World Trade Organisation's policies: sacrifice of life without any desire for 'compensation'?[92]

Given that technology is a way to manage the world based on the possibility of predicting the way things function, an understanding of the hopelessness of incorporating sacrifice into the 'utility calculus' can open a way for a different understanding of the world and of human beings. Thus, one way of confronting the present day existential crisis – which Patočka describes as the hopelessness of many, manifesting itself by the rise of suicides, drug abuse or, at best, by general apathy – might be to think of the phenomenon of the sacrificial victim because it means stepping outside of the space of calculability. To speak of sacrifice is to point towards a different understanding of humans, nature and technology – to an understanding that is not bound by calculation alone.[93] As Patočka suggests,

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[90] Ibid, p. 133.
[91] Jünger, 2004, p. 266.
[92] See, for example, Ahn (2003); Vidal (2003); Redmon, 2003.
[93] Patočka, (1973) 2002, pp. 156-60.

> The experience of a sacrifice, however, is now one of the most powerful experiences of our epoch, so powerful and definitive that humankind for the most part has not managed to come to terms with it and flees from it precisely into a technical understanding of being which promises to exclude this experience. Revolutionary and war-like conflicts of [the 20th century] were born of and borne by the spirit of a technical domination of the world; but those who had to bear the cost were in no case a mere store of disposable resources, but something quite irreducible to that. That precisely comes to the fore when we speak of sacrifices.
> Thus sacrifices represent a persistent presence of something that does not appear in the calculations of the technological world.[94]

Notice that Patočka places a caveat upon the use of the idea of sacrifice that is crucial. We can speak of sacrifices in many different ways. However, is it the case that if the act of sacrifice does not have an object, it is unpredictable? And what do we mean by an object in such a situation? Let us consider some examples. When we speak of a mother sacrificing her life for the life of a child, it is understandable to us. We would not necessarily act the same way, but her actions can be incorporated into a rough calculus of predictability of human behaviour. Moreover, if a person gives up her life, it is always for something 'in exchange for,' something she can identify with: for example she can die *for* her "partner, relatives, nation, society, class",[95] and a religion. The choice to die simply because life is not worth living, as Socrates did,[96] is impossible to incorporate into calculation. But what happens if the *idea* for which life was sacrificed is beyond our terms of reference? Can we speak of unpredictability then?

In our modern world, the value of life seems to be the highest value. To use one of many examples, it is said that we have a right to liberty, property and life. This set of Western assumptions is challenged by suicide bombers. It is not only that these individuals take their *own* life in exchange for an abstract ideal but that they also take the lives of others with them. The problem is twofold: (1) the Western rational consumer cannot grasp the degree of desperation that leads a person to annihilate his or her own life in exchange for an ideal; and (2) to die for something abstract does not seem to give this rational consumer anything in exchange. Thus the explanation can only be made in terms of irrationality. Who would sacrifice one's own life? The answers usually given are in terms of ideological brainwashing, or we can say in the Kantian terms, heteronomy, following the orders of others, or they are children indoctrinated with the fundamentalist dogmas, or even mentally retarded: in short, irrational. No other reasons are generally sought.

One way to counter the presentation of this type of irrationality is to supplant an abstract ideal by something translatable into that consumer logic which dominates most Western societies. If we substitute the ideal with an object for which the suicide bombers exchange their lives, then the abstract idea can be quantified, and hence included in the calculation. But to proceed thus is *not* to

[94] Patočka, (1973) 1989, p. 337.
[95] Patočka, 2004, p. 13.
[96] Plato, 1997, 38a.

make the actions of the suicide bombers rational. Instead, this procedure acts to pass a judgment on the irrationality of that 'object,' thus implicitly assigning their actions to the sphere of the irrational. As a result, our war on terror is presented as a war of rationalism against this irrational desire to die. The suicide bombers are not dying for some pure ideal (so the depiction goes) but to exchange their lives for something explicable – say, the seventy-six virgins who allegedly await them somewhere beyond this world. Thus we have two understandings of life: one, biological, that can be satisfied with consumer goods; another that renounces this life for, say, the seventy-six virgins. How can we reconcile these two visions? Or can we?

Another example should be juxtaposed against this contemporary illustration of the putative irrationality of sacrifice. During the Vietnam War, several Buddhist monks set themselves on fire in protest against the United States' participation in the war in Vietnam. News film footage showed their agonised deaths. It was clearly not something that we could understand, since they annihilated their lives also. Yet, their actions did not endanger *us*, so there was no need to represent it in our consumer logic. Their sacrifice was tied to a different conceptual level or understanding of what it means to give up one's own life.

However, for Patočka, the sacrificial victim is *not* the sacrificial martyr. Martyrs 'exchange' their lives for some idea that others can recognise. As Patočka understands sacrifice, it is precisely the opposite. For Patočka, to care for one's biological life is to live in things, to care for one's property. By contrast, "sacrificial victims, whenever they appear, relate to us as beings who essentially care about the mode of their being". Patočka explains that "in their human experience of the world they have come up against a real limit of the technological".[97]

For Patočka, the notion of sacrifice *does not* extend beyond our human life. As he notes, the dead become victors only after they have died. We then proceed to build monuments to them, organise parades and write songs to unknown soldiers, pretending that they are still here, as if all of the above mattered to them, thus, forgetting that their death has meaning for us only.[98] The problem is that we refuse to entertain *our* death as meaningful. We behave as if we will never die, spreading ourselves across a myriad of projects. It is similar for society as well. Death can be dealt with statistically, as a change of function, but it cannot be incorporated into the calculus as something meaningful in itself. Modern technological society functions for life only. Thus our own death is also something that escapes the logic of calculation.

[97] Patočka, (1973) 1989, pp. 337-8.
[98] Patočka, 2004, p. 13.

Hence both phenomena – our own death *and* sacrifice – are inexorably tied to the realisation that we are finite human beings who cannot be reduced to "controllable, calculable reactions and ways of behaving".[99] Our own singular death simply exceeds the calculations that can only account for things that are in some form repeatable. For modern understanding, the only meaning of death, if we can even use such a term, is simply that we are no more. Death is meaningless because humans cannot face the only certainty of life, that we will die and that we can neither take with us things from the world, nor extend the meaning of our life beyond it. For Patočka, to confront this possibility can lead to two different ways in which humans can live. Either, in confrontation with life's finitude, they return to the banal truth of the everyday – *carpe diem*![100] – drowning in the world of things; or, they realise that we can die anytime and that no one can take our own death from us. To realise this without fear is to realise that we are responsible creatures, the only creatures, as far as we know, who can assume responsibility not only for ourselves, but for others too, and for nature also, because we realise that this world is not ours to use up. To confront our finitude without fear is, what the Ancients called, "*meletē thanatou*, care for death".[101] To realise our finitude is to realise that we are not immortal, that our life is finite and that we must be responsible for the way we live. To care for death is to care for life, the only one we have.

Patočka transforms Heidegger's ontological analysis of being towards death. For Heidegger, the analysis of human existence is connected to the question of being and, as Patočka notes, Heidegger's ontological question is achieved by connecting Husserl with Jaspers.[102] Heidegger's analysis of *Da-Sein*, the structure of human existence, is not primarily an analysis of the finite human existence but is the question of being that only *Da-Sein* can understand. By contrast, for Patočka, human existence is always historical. His understanding of finitude is closer to Karl Jaspers, although without Jaspers' religious overtones. To understand Patočka's claim that being towards death, is to care for one's life, Jaspers' definition of the boundary situation can help to clarify Patočka's explanation that our own death cannot be exchanged for anything and that no-one can take it from us.[103] As Hans-Georg Gadamer explains, "by boundary situations [Jaspers] meant such situations whose boundary character demonstrated the limits of scientific mastery of the world", such as "the appearance of something that no longer can be conceived of as just another example of a general rule", thus pointing towards the limit of "the scientific control of calculable processes".[104] For Jaspers, as well as for Patočka, to face one's own death as a possibility is to realise that nothing in the world can replace one's responsibility towards oneself, others and the

[99] Gadamer, (1981) 1994, p. 5.
[100] Patočka, 1992a, p. 249.
[101] Patočka, 1996b, p. 106.
[102] Patočka, 1990, pp. 194-5.
[103] As Patočka notes, for Jaspers, human existence is historical (Ibid, p. 218).
[104] Gadamer, (1981) 1994, p. 5.

world. For Patočka, the modern human concern for having, tied to the desire for power, is of no consequence in the face of death.

Thus to think about *our* own death and sacrifice is to think about an existence that refuses to live by and in things. To acknowledge the role and importance of sacrifice is to acknowledge that a person may be willing to sacrifice one's life because to live a life as given would be to forget that there are things in life other than possessions. As Patočka notes, modern humans have lost not only a God, but the *Kosmos* as well. They have lost the ability "to *live* with the universe".[105]

Patočka's conviction led him to become a signatory of Charta 77.[106] It was Patočka's belief that a nature reduced to calculable resources must be confronted by those who realise that life without a responsible attitude is not worth living. Patočka's 'solidarity of the shaken' is the solidarity of those who understand that if everything is reduced to calculability then humans are also incorporated into the system which only feeds the aims of the state, day and life. For Patočka, "humans do not invent morality arbitrarily, to suit their needs, wishes, inclinations, and aspirations. Quite the contrary, it is morality that defines what being human means".[107] For him, then, to sign this document was "not simply or primarily [for] fear or profit". It was "a sense of duty, of the common good, and of the need to accept even discomfort, misunderstanding, and a certain risk".[108] Ludwig Landgrebe explains that for Patočka, it was "the duty of the philosopher not to remain silent about injustice".[109]

Patočka died in hospital from a brain haemorrhage after prolonged interrogation by the secret police. He lived and died according to his belief: if life cannot be lived in a just society – in a society where humans are *not* reduced to calculable resources – than one must fight for the kind of society one believes in. Otherwise, life is not worth living. As Landgrebe writes, "Patočka has chosen a fate, for which Socrates was the great model. In the beginning of philosophy Parmenides spoke of the signs which stand on the difficult path to truth, Patočka's death has placed one such sign".[110] Thus, Patočka's life and thought represent a significant challenge to the logic of a consumer society wherein all can be resolved by the buying of a new gadget.

[105] Patočka, 2004, p. 13, italics in original.
[106] In January 1977, *Charta 77* was released. It was a call to the Government of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, which recently signed the Helsinki Agreement, to uphold its commitment to this treaty, which stipulated the basic human rights of the citizens in the State. See Kohák, 1989a; Blecha, 1997, p. 193.
[107] Patočka, (1977) 1989, p. 341.
[108] Ibid, pp. 342-3.
[109] Landgrebe, 1977, p. 290.
[110] Ibid.

Conclusion

In his last work, *Heretical Essays in the History of Philosophy*, Patočka concentrates on the analysis of force. For him, the state has become the "great generator and storehouse of power, having all other power, physical and spiritual, at its disposal".[111] This power comes from techno-science's drive to exploit the resources of the world, accumulated through millennia. It is interesting to note that for Hannah Arendt, similarly, "under modern conditions, not destruction but conservation spells ruin because the very durability of conserved objects is the greatest impediment to the turnover process, whose constant gain in speed is the only constancy left wherever it has taken hold".[112]

It is Heraclitus' idea of *polemos* that might, according to Patočka, help us to illuminate new possibilities that can be taken up in our present age, possibilities that refuse calculation as the *only* explanatory horizon of our lives.[113] In Patočka's analysis, *polemos* as 'strife' is the ground from which political space can emerge – a complex issue which needs full explication elsewhere. To think about the importance of *polemos* is to think about the political realm. *Polemos* unites the agonistic citizenry and the law, thus enabling political space – which is by definition devoid of physical violence – where we are equal to everybody else and where we can confront different ways of thinking and acting. In the modern age, *polemos*, this strife has been replaced by the calculative administration of human needs and interests that can be purportedly fulfilled by different consumer goods, leading to the present situation of general apathy which is the order of day and biological life.

[111] Patočka, (1977) 1989, p. 340.
[112] Arendt, (1958) 1998, p. 253.
[113] For Patočka, *polemos* is a strife, and not – as Paul Ricœur and Derrida claim – a war. For Ricœur's claim, see "Preface to the French Edition of Jan Patocka's Heretical Essays," (Ricœur, 1996). For Derrida's reading, see *The Gift of Death* (Derrida, 1995, pp. 16-7). For a critique of their readings, see Findlay, 2002a, pp. 142-4. As Patočka writes, "Heraclitus speaks of that which is 'common to all,' which 'nourishes' all 'human law,' that is, the *polis* in its general functioning and particular decisions. What though is this divine law? 'We need to know that *polemos* is what is common, and that conflict is the right (*dikē* = *eris*), and that everything takes place through *eris* and its impetus'. …Yet the power generated from strife is no blind force. The power that arises from strife is a power that knows and sees: only in this invigorating strife is there life that truly sees into the nature of things – *to phronein*. Thus *phronēsis*, understanding, by the very nature of things, cannot but be at once common and conflicted. To see the world and life as a whole means to see *polemos*, *eris*, as that which is common; *xunon esti pasi to phroneein*: 'insight is common to all'" (Patočka, 1996b, p. 42).

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