

INTRODUCTION

JAN PATOČKA AND THE EUROPEAN HERITAGE

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We will be commemorating in 2007 the 100th birthday of Jan Patočka and the 30th anniversary of his death. I am very glad to see on this occasion a special issue of *Studia Phænomenologica* devoted to his philosophical thought. The recognition of Patočka's true importance as a philosopher has been constantly gaining ground since his death. The time has now come for his thought to receive the international reception and appreciation that it deserves.

The idea of Europe is at the heart of both Patočka's philosophy of history and his political reflections. For him, this idea refers to the possibility of a radical break with the power of myth and the beginning of history in the strongest sense of the word: Europe is the decisive turning point which opens up an arena for politics and philosophy, a space for life in freedom and truth. Neither freedom nor truth should be taken for granted; both are, on the contrary, a task set to us, an achievement and, consequently, something for which we are responsible. This makes Europe a fragile project, which can never be finalised but is ever to come, and the formation of this coming is precisely our responsibility.

In recent times, subsequently to the 1989 changes, the idea of Europe which Patočka laid such great a stress on — at a time when it was generally looked down upon — has come anew to the fore. For this reason, we are tempted to say that there has never been, in the whole of European history, a better chance to accomplish this idea, and that it is our responsibility to elaborate its various aspects in the most comprehensive way possible, adopting a philosophical approach similar to his.

In this sense, I believe it is of a special significance that this *Festschrift* for Jan Patočka is published by *Studia Phænomenologica*, a journal so much devoted to the "old" spirit of Europe and its new interpretations, founded by a group of young Romanian philosophers ten years or so after the fall of communism.

When Hans Rainer Sepp started helping us in Prague to turn our small Jan Patočka Archive into a real phenomenological centre, he invited groups of phenomenological philosophers from different countries in the world to attend workshops in Prague. These activities showed how keenly phenomenological philosophy is being pursued and there turned out to be very promising groups also in post-communist countries — among them, the Romanian group centred around *Studia Phænomenologica*. When our Romanian friends came to Prague in 2004, they already brought with them the first issues of their journal. Its contents were up to high standards, promising, international. I was therefore extremely pleased when Cristian Ciocan suggested devoting a special issue to Jan Patočka on the occasion of this year's centenary celebrations and invited me to participate as guest editor. As such, he entrusted me, among other things, with the task of writing this introduction.

Our intention being for the present volume to commemorate Jan Patočka as thinker of Europe's future and its problems, we have collected a number of interesting contributions from people all over the world who acknowledge Patočka's originality and importance for the coming philosophical debate. Translations of several texts by Patočka himself, as yet available only in Czech, illustrate lesser-known sides of his work and the extent of the task still awaiting international scholarship in this respect.

Also published here for the first time is the corpus of philosophical letters written by Jan Patočka to the young Polish philosopher Krzysztof Michalski in the 1970's. Since, unfortunately, only a very few of Michalski's answers have been preserved, we have decided not to publish them in this volume. They will appear later in the framework of Patočka's complete works, edited by the Prague Archive. The letters to Michalski reveal his key role in motivating Patočka to formulate his ideas concerning the philosophy of history and present them first in a series of underground lectures in Prague and finally on paper in his last samizdat book, the "Heretical Essays on the Philosophy of History".

Among the articles concerning Patočka's philosophy, a hitherto unpublished text by the late Paul Ricoeur, introduced by Domenico Jervolino (Naples), deserves special mention. I myself have contributed a modest account of my memories concerning the last period of Patočka's activity and how we started caring for his legacy in Prague after his death.

This volume sets the stage for the week-long Patočka Conference which will be taking place in Prague in April 2007. We hope that our

publication will be a suitable introduction not only to this event commemorating Patočka's centenary but also to other conferences scheduled this year in several other European towns, e.g. Rzeszow (Poland), Naples (Italy), Louvain-la-Neuve (Belgium) and Paris (France).

As guest editor, I wish to express my heartfelt thanks and gratitude to the true editor, Cristian Ciocan, for his initiative and efficiency in preparing this volume. I see it as proof that our modest efforts are indeed preserving for the future the European heritage which was so important to Jan Patočka.