

Introduction

Paul MARINESCU, Ovidiu STANCIU
(Romanian Society for Phenomenology,
Institute for Philosophy “Alexandru Dragomir”)

Phenomenology has constantly dealt with history. For over a century, phenomenology has not only undergone a “historical turn” under the influence of Heidegger and his followers (Löwith, Gadamer, Arendt, etc.) but also faced the deep historical crisis brought about by the great disasters of the two World Wars, which altered the very manner in which historical experience was understood. Therefore, phenomenology, throughout its manifold approaches, has relentlessly sought to recover and address the question of history, even at the price of withstanding a thoroughgoing thematic reorientation. Initially preoccupied with the exploration of the region of pure consciousness as the basic area of intentionality, and thus endorsing a sort of “ahistorical apriorism,” phenomenology has gradually come to examine the phenomena of temporality, destiny, memory, historical traces, testimonies, and narratives. The broadening of the thematic field available for a phenomenological analysis entailed important methodological shifts: to capture the historical condition of human existence, phenomenology fashioned various “conceptual tools” capable of shedding light on the structure and dynamics of historical meaning, such as deconstruction, historical hermeneutics, and destinal thinking.

Many of these issues, methodological inflections, and new thematizations, which clearly prove phenomenology’s concern for understanding the meaning(s) of history, are due to Jan Patočka’s and Paul Ricœur’s thoughts.

Indeed, the question of history is an overarching theme in Patočka's thought, a point of convergence of the whole series of motives that nourish his philosophical research. Under this heading, the Czech philosopher offers lengthy and detailed analysis of the relationship between human history and the history of the cosmos, interrogates the status of subjectivity and his dynamic structure, provides an account of the joint emergence in the Greek *polis* of philosophy, history, and politics, sketches a diagnosis of the conundrums and potentialities of our present, explores the scope and limits of the philosophical idea of Europe, and uncovers the existential presuppositions of historiography. His long-standing interest in the question of history is particularly attested by the plurality of projects related to the philosophy of history that he developed between the mid-1930s and 1975: "Platonism and Politics" (1933), "Some Comments on the Concepts of History and Historiography" (1934), "Some Comments on the Concept of World History" (1935), *The Natural World as a Philosophical Problem* (1936), *Eternity and Historicity* (1947), and *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History* (1975).

While Patočka sketched several projects belonging to the philosophy of history, Ricœur sought, for more than half a century and across three essential works, to ensure the autonomy of history as a discipline through a wide-ranging and constant critical approach to the limits of our knowledge of the past. His reflection on history starts by recognizing the finitude of the historical subject. This explains Ricœur's reluctance toward a complete and totalizing understanding of the meaning of history and his interest in addressing, instead, issues related to the epistemological conditions of historical insight (*History and Truth*, 1955). Later, from the 1970s onwards, his concern to found historical knowledge on a textual paradigm and to theorize the dialectics between belonging and distancing set the ground for his future developments in *Time and Narrative* (1983–85). In this acknowledged trilogy, Ricœur concludes that the human subject can "articulate and clarify" the

temporal experience by means of the narrative, a clarification that doesn't exclude recognizing the inherent limitations of such an approach. Almost 20 years later, Ricœur still seeks to decipher the enigma of the past. In *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2000), he engages history in a complex dialogue with the phenomenology of memory and thus reopens questions related to the epistemology of historiographical operation, while taking care to situate his inquiry within the horizon of our finitude.

Such a rich theoretical legacy, which we owe to Ricœur's and Patočka's reflections on history, has certainly encouraged a larger analysis of their thoughts that goes beyond the breadth of this particular topic.

The first level of such analysis is concerned with aspects related to the direct and historically confirmed connection between the two phenomenologists. The biographical overlaps between the destinies of Ricœur and Patočka, usually the subject of studies inspired by the history of ideas, are the first to deserve being mentioned here.¹ This approach was further extended by analyses that exhibited points of junction between their inquiries and threads of shared philosophical vision, expressed in mutual readings and interpretations. Here, one could point out Ricœur's texts that endorsed and introduced into the landscape of Western philosophy the rich and innovative potential of Patočka's thought, as well as the reverberations that hermeneutic phenomenology—in its Ricœurian expression—had on Patočka's philosophy.²

The second level of analysis shifts the focus of interest to thematic or conceptual proximities that owe less to biographical

¹ See François Dosse, "Paris–Prague: le pont philosophique," *Paul Ricœur. Les sens d'une vie (1913–2005)* (Paris: La Découverte, 2008), 487–493.

² Several guiding references are to be found in the Introduction to the journal issue "Exploring the Undisclosed Meanings of Time, History, and Existence: Paul Ricœur and Jan Patočka as Philosophical Interlocutors," *Meta. Research in Hermeneutics, Phenomenology, and Practical Philosophy* IX: 2 (2017), esp. 380–382. For further details on this journal issue, see below and footnote 4.

contexts and direct mutual references. Here, the interpretation takes the form of a wide, open inquiry into the philosophical legacies of these two thinkers. This line of research arises from the need to build bridges and draw points of intersection between Ricœur's and Patočka's phenomenological approaches: several studies of Marc Crépon, Domenico Jervolino, Olivier Abel and Eddo Evink³ are of particular relevance in this respect. These interpreters brought to the fore the major themes around which a fruitful philosophical dialogue could be carried out, but most of them did not develop this subject into an autonomous research program. A notable exception is Jervolino, for whom the theme of translation, once extracted along with its full plethora of related questions and theoretical challenges from the dual source of Ricœur's and Patočka's thoughts, could have nourished a wide philosophical hermeneutics had his death not interrupted this project.

Another important step in this research was made in 2017 with the publication of a journal issue examining "the convergences and mutual inspirations" found in the work of Patočka and Ricœur. This consistent dossier,⁴ edited by Ludger Hagedorn, head of the Patočka Archives at the Institut für die Wissenschaften

³ Domenico Jervolino, "Ricœur lecteur de Patočka," *Studia Phaenomenologica*, VII (2007), 193-217; *Id.*, "Reading Patočka, in Search for a Philosophy of Translation," in *Jan Patočka and the Heritage of Phenomenology*, ed. I. Chvatik and E. Abrams, *Contributions to Phenomenology* 61 (2011), 121-133; Marc Crépon, *Vivre avec. La pensée de la mort et la mémoire des guerres* (Paris: Hermann, 2008); Olivier Abel, "Sorgulayıcı Kimlik ve Avrupa Metaforu [Interrogative Identity and the European Metaphor]," in *Avrupa'nın Krizi*, eds. Önyay Sözer et Ali Turhan (Istanbul: Dost, 2007), 116-134; Eddo Evink, "Horizons of Expectation. Ricœur, Derrida, Patočka," *Studia Phaenomenologica* XIII (2013): 297-323.

⁴ L. Hagedorn and P. Marinescu (eds.), "Exploring the Undisclosed Meanings of Time, History, and Existence: Paul Ricœur and Jan Patočka as Philosophical Interlocutors," *Meta* IX: 2 (2017), 379-583. The dossier includes eight important contributions, authored by Jakub Čapek, Luz Ascarate, Ovidiu Stanciu, Eddo Evink, Chiara Pesaresi, Goncalo Marcelo, Christian Sternad, Michael Funk Deckard.

vom Menschen, and Paul Marinescu, articulates a rich and ample vision of “the intellectual ties” that bind the two philosophers. The approach is structured around three levels of analysis: the first explores Ricœur’s and Patočka’s critical readings of the phenomenological tradition as creative heresies; the second seeks to identify the ethical challenges in their works; the third dwells on the theme of history and memory unfolded into a series of subordinated subjects, such as the crisis of Europe, the human mortality and the afterlife.

Despite this engaging and burgeoning research, the philosophical spectrum of Ricœur and Patočka’s dialogue still has many unexplored depths, particularly regarding the question of history. Indeed, if we were to continue to build a coherent and complex image of the phenomenology of history by capturing thematic continuities and differences between their theories, we would envisage two further fields of inquiry.

The first would grasp Ricœur’s and Patočka’s complex receptions of Husserlian and Heideggerian accounts of time and history. In this connection, particular attention must be paid to underscoring the broad commonalities between Ricœur’s and Patočka’s criticism of Husserl’s transcendental idealism and Heidegger’s existential analytics. For instance, in Husserl’s case, their criticism is aimed, firstly, at the unfounded pre-eminence granted to the apodictic evidence of the self-giveness of the consciousness over the world horizon and, secondly, at the tension between the plurality of consciousnesses and the singularity of history. Furthermore, with regard to Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, Ricœur and Patočka take aim at his one-sided interpretation of temporality and historicity in the terms of *Sorge*. It should also be stressed that the ways in which Ricœur and Patočka appropriate their phenomenological sources within their interpretation of history complement each other. Thus, if for Ricœur Husserl’s *Krisis* represents a late but welcome acknowledgement of the importance of the pre-predicative dimension for any ideality,

from the same work, Patočka retains instead the ethical aspect that Husserl attached to the interpretation of the history of humanity. While Ricœur refers almost exclusively to Heidegger's existential-phenomenological project as developed in *Being and Time*, and to his original problematization of time as a whole, Patočka insists upon Heidegger's later writings, from which he innovatively recovers the idea of the retreat of being, conceived as the enabling condition for human being's installment in the sphere of problematization, which defines historicity. All these complex references to the phenomenological tradition, bearing critiques and appropriations, lead to different perspectives on the historical condition: as the dynamics between the space of experience and the horizon of expectation (Ricœur) or as the shaking of a given meaning from the prehistorical epoch and exposure to the problematization of the world (Patočka).

The vibrant portrait of the phenomenology of history emerging from Ricœur's and Patočka's works would have to be pursued in the direction of identifying and questioning the points of convergence and divergence between their respective approaches. Understanding history by bringing to the fore the present made by particular agents' initiatives provides an important place of congruity: it sets side by side a hermeneutics of history that springs from a philosophy of the will and ends within the framework of a phenomenology of the capable man (able to speak, act, narrate, and recognize) and a philosophy that seeks to capture the dynamics of history by means of a triad of movements of existence, both temporal and corporeal (sinking roots, reproduction and breakthrough/acceptance, defence and truth). The phenomenon of vulnerability, bearing a diversity of forms, could also be envisaged as bridging the connection between these two theories of history, insofar as it arouses an array of phenomenological distinctions. So, together with Ricœur and Patočka, differences are drawn between fallibility (which comprehends not only a disproportion between finitude and infinitude but also a limited and

conditioned historical knowledge), the vulnerability itself (as the precariousness of being, which affects mainly the first two movements of existence), and “the infinite fragility of the human fact” where a possible inflection of the passive dimension of history into an active one is to be decided. This inflection may be induced by either coupling the fragile human identity with a “grammar of capacities,” or shaking the accepted worldview followed by radical and continuous positioning into the sphere of the problematic in the quest for truth and freedom. There are also points of divergence that bring depth to this two-faced portrait of the phenomenology of history, and the first place where they can be found is in Ricœur’s “Preface” to the French translation of Patočka’s *Heretical Essays*. Here, Ricœur casts doubts concerning Patočka’s account of nihilism, his insistence on adopting the “optics of the night” when trying to grasp the depth of contemporary historical phenomena, and the positivity he grants to the frontline experience, understood as an experience of liberation from the burden of the everyday. To these, there could be added, in closing, their different ways of understanding historiography in its bonds with phenomenology.

The introductory lines sketched above serve two main purposes: outlining some of the milestones set by Patočka and Ricœur in their phenomenology of history and showing the relevance and congruity of two major concepts in their thinking: *finitude and meaning*. Their imbrication provides a true, irradiating thematic core whose reverberations can be found—under different forms—in all their writings on history. If arguments and examples are still needed, one may refer to the way Ricœur labels his thinking as “post-Hegelian Kantian”. By this, he gives us in a nutshell two defining features of his hermeneutics of history. The first feature resonates with Ricœur’s decision to renounce Hegel’s speculative thinking, and his ambition of grasping the total mediation of reason and reality, the telos of the history as a whole. This makes room for a concrete reflection, which can still

adopt a dialectical approach, but whose search for meaning proceeds only by incomplete mediations through the universe of external signs. The second feature is related to Ricoeur's positioning within Kantianism, which in the case of historical research is rendered as a concern for the limits of knowledge and, therefore, for a plurality of finite perspectives.

In Patočka's case, we can distinguish two main orientations in his account of history. The dominant direction of his early analyses consists in establishing a correlation between the question of history and an interrogation concerning the mode of being of subjectivity, which results in grasping historicity as a mode of being and of dwelling in the world. The task incumbent to his enterprise is to safeguard the ontological distinctiveness of subjectivity and to ward off any attempt of interpreting along the lines of the innerworldly—or, as he terms it, “positive”—being. Subjectivity should not be understood as an extremely complex version of positivity, for its core consists precisely in the possibility of negating everything that imposes itself as real. What characterizes subjectivity is not the place it occupies within the highly differentiated landscape of the real, but rather the fact it can refuse to be circumscribed in a specific place, that it can always go against every given situation and even can go beyond everything that is given. In *Eternity and Historicity* (1947), the capacity of going beyond everything that is given is grasped by Patočka, as a movement of transcendence. However, considering the movement of transcendence as the inmost core of subjectivity gives rise to a double challenge: on the one hand, this movement must be understood in such a way that it does not lead to a new positivity, to a new sphere of reality (a super-reality, or a noumenal reality), for in such a case, the ontological distinctiveness of subjectivity would be lost. But, on the other hand, such a movement should not remain suspended in a void, be reducible to a mere contestation of the given. Transcendence means not only a breach in the given, but also the opening of a dimension within

which subjectivity is able to unfold as such. According to Patočka, the appropriate name for this dimension is historicity. Therefore, endowing subjectivity with a non-positive content, in such a way that it is not reduced to the rank of objective being, implies grasping it as historical. History appears as the privileged ground where man confronts his own finitude, as the space where he can experience the movement of transcendence that constitutes him.

In the *Heretical Essays on the Philosophy of History*, Patočka retains the main insights of his previous developments and, through the concept of problematicity of meaning, attempts to capture a distinctively historical modality of dwelling in the world. However, this work breaks new philosophical ground insofar as it conceives historicity not as a subjective capacity, but rather as a specific horizon of meaning. From his initial existential account of history, Patočka moves on to a destinal or being-historical account thereof: the Czech thinker aspires, following Heidegger, to reconstruct the changes in the regimes of sense that have marked the course of Western history, to indicate the dividing lines that separate the different “epochs” of history. The philosophy of history is now concerned with the turning points that affect the course of history, with the transition from a specific symbolical configuration to another, with the emergence of new constellations of truth. Henceforth, the main theme of the philosophy of history is not subjectivity and its ontological distinctiveness, but rather the field of possibilities within which it is situated, and which shape it. The conviction underlying this undertaking is that the horizon within which subjectivity evolves are not given once for all but are also determined by a fundamental mobility.

If the two concepts—along with the constellation of meanings, aporias, and problems they bear throughout Ricoeur’s and Patočka’s thinking—were to be united and rendered into a single voice, this would be in the form of one phrase: the problematicity of the meaning of history and our historical existence. Even though this expression has many more explicit occurrences in

Patočka's texts, it also constitutes one of the central motives of Ricœur's project. The problematicity of meaning acquires, in the works of the two phenomenologists, various philosophical modulations and inflections, such as the unceasing conflict of interpretations that echoes our fragmented experience of the world; the aporias that mark the impossibility of the phenomenological discourse to express, directly, the temporality; the double status of the past in which are found, intertwined, "the positivity of the 'having been' with "the negativity of the 'being no longer'"; the determination of *polemos* as constitutive for the emergence and maintenance of a public space; the understanding of subjectivity as deprived of firm contours and rigid outlines.

Capturing and clarifying the polyphonic register related to the problematicity of the meaning of history, as it transpires along with Ricœur's and Patočka's thoughts, is the aim of this collective volume. To do this, the studies gathered here adopt a particular angle of interpretation. Unlike previous analyses, they do not rely on a comparativist approach as they are more interested, instead, in identifying themes and aspects that, although specific to one of the two phenomenologists, allow, promise, and awaken a complex problematization of the other's thought on history. And this effect of mirrored illumination and resonance is all the stronger when it takes place on the horizon set forth by the conceptual tie between finitude and meaning, on which hermeneutic prolificity we insisted on above. On this horizon, acknowledged scholars and academics critically revisit the *loci classici* and core ideas of Ricœur and Patočka's thinking and outline the enduring relevance of their accounts of history.

In the first chapter, **Jeffrey Andrew Barash** shows that the ability of the historian to retrieve into representation the reality of the past has often been called into question, especially over the last two centuries. From Schopenhauer to Hayden White, a suspicion is repeated: the real past is irreducible to historical discourse, which, like fiction, incorporates rhetorical elements and involves

the work of imagination. Against this perpetuated skeptical attitude, Ricœur develops a complex theory of the reality of the historical past, whose roots and arguments are subjected, in this paper, to an in-depth critical examination. Thus, Barash demonstrates that in the *Time and Narrative* trilogy, Ricœur has insufficiently explored Collingwood's reflection on reenacting the past in the present, and stresses that this study could have provided additional criteria to distinguish historical narratives from fiction. Ricœur's other major work, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, also fails to adequately recover Collingwood's views on reenacting the past. Moreover, in the attempt to philosophically render our historical condition, Ricœur curiously adopts Heidegger's concepts of repetition and being-in-debt, which stress only the singular finitude of Dasein. On this basis, according to the author, Ricœur's vision of historical finitude can only be incomplete as it does not also question the manifold levels of mediations, the intermediary symbolic space, where any relevant reference to the reality of the historical past is decided.

An essential key to understanding the stakes of Ricœur's hermeneutics of historical consciousness has often been seen in the chapter "Renouncing Hegel" from his acknowledged trilogy, *Time and Narrative*. Right from the title, the chapter points to a new way of approaching history, one that turns its back on any Hegelian temptation to search for total mediation, whereby reason and reality would coincide. For **Roger W. H. Savage**, Ricœur's clearly marked opposition to Hegelian speculative thinking on history opens an ample field of research on history's truthfulness in its relationship with justice and the duty of memory. Its first direction concerns the historiographical operation of representing the past and its three constitutive phases, the documentary, the narrative, and the explanatory, developed at an epistemological level. The question of truth in history is then deepened by shifting the reflection to the capacity of historical agents to act. We are intermediary beings, and, as such, the history we make is

mutually implied by the history we already are. Here, the author retrieves the significance of the present of initiative: history's temporalization rests on its force as it maintains a constant and fruitful tension between past and future and between the space of one's experience and the horizon of one's expectations. In this context and marked by the absence of a grand narrative, such as Hegel's theodicy, the question concerning an agent's responsibility during the process of freedom's actualization is approached by revealing the federating force of the idea of justice, under the aegis of which the duty of memory turns into a project.

In the conclusions to the *Time and Narrative* trilogy, Ricœur revisits the points of suture he identified between the poetics of narrative and the aporetics of time to underline the limits of his approach. These limits are mainly related to the unrepresentability of pure time within the frames of phenomenology and narrative, taken separately. If time cannot be philosophically and poetically addressed other than in its symbolically mediated dimension, **Esteban Lythgoe** asks, in his article, could another limit be envisaged that was not considered as such in *Time and Narrative*? More precisely, a limit that comes from the very lack of any possible symbolic mediation of reality. The author extends this question to the hermeneutics Ricœur develops in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, taking as landmarks of his analysis the presence and absence of symbol in the two pathological forms of memory examined here, the manipulated and the blocked. This approach follows in the footsteps of Barash's research on collective memory and levels of symbolic mediations but also complements it with new insights. By means of a back-and-forth questioning of Ricœur's various statements on memory, narration, and psychoanalysis, the author draws out a solid explanation: the blocked memory, correlated to non-temporal and traumatic experiences, is constitutively deprived of a symbolic dimension.

In his contribution, **Roberto Terzi** questions the possibility of providing a phenomenological account of the "history of

the world" (*Welt-geschichte*), whereby it will neither be reduced to the notion of a "mundane history," understood as a succession of events, nor considered as a mere appendix to the historicity of existence. Terzi's guiding hermeneutical thesis is that this project pervades Patočka's engagement with the question of history, from his early texts in the 1930s to his *Heretical Essays* in the 1970s. He further points out that such an attempt requires assuming a distance with respect to the canonical descriptions of history and world, as they are developed in the works of Husserl and Heidegger. Patočka's refashioning of phenomenology as an inquiry into the appearing as such, his insistence on the autonomy of the field of the appearing with regard to any subjective bestowal of meaning, opens the theoretical space for an apprehension of the historicity of the world. However, as Terzi emphasizes, while in the *Heretical Essays*, Patočka offers important elements for thinking an asubjective history of the world, he also maintains that the rhythm of history is determined by an oscillatory movement of rise and fall within human existence. On this view, Patočka's analysis testifies for an insurmountable tension between an existential and a worldly understanding of history.

A similar attempt to detach the question of history from its ties with the problem of human existence is undertaken by **Claude Vishnu Spaak**. Taking his bearing on the cosmological turn of phenomenology accomplished by Fink and Patočka, Spaak explores the hypothesis of a "cosmological historicity," that is of a deployment of world history prior to the advent of *Dasein*. This entails not only to assign the character of historicity to the process of "worlding" itself, but also to conceive of this process as possessing an intrinsic teleological structure, as being oriented towards the emergence of consciousness, understood as the site where the world-process becomes manifest to itself. While at first sight such a conception might seem to entail a relapse into a canonical metaphysical understanding of the world process, Spaak argues that once it is deprived of its traditional "onticism"

(the equivalence of Being with entities), metaphysics remains an indispensable approach for grasping the problem of history.

In her contribution, **Chiara Pesaresi** seeks to bring together two questions which, on her account, the phenomenological tradition has systematically downplayed: the question of history and that of non-sense. The problem of history can be brought into view in all its fullness of meaning, once we challenge some central assumptions of canonical phenomenology, and more particularly when we detach the question of the world from the assumption of a logical or meaningful coherence. On such a view, history introduces a disruption within a coherent regime of meaning and opens the space for the acknowledgement of contingency, unpredictability, crisis and even chaos as dimensions of our worldly existence. However, recognizing the centrality of such dimensions, acknowledging the possibility and relevance of “non-sense in a transcendental sense” does not entail reducing history to a chaotic unfolding, but rather opens the path towards an apprehension of its distinctive dynamic, which the author characterizes as a dialectic of sense and non-sense.

The conviction guiding **Ovidiu Stanciu**'s contribution is that the distinctiveness of Patočka's understanding of history can be brought to salience when it is approached from the standpoint of its complex relations with the question of myth. This project presupposes the rejection of the common understanding of these concepts: myth and history do not designate first and foremost narrative structures, but rather distinct forms of life, different ways of inhabiting and articulating the space of meaning. Furthermore, Stanciu argues that myth and history bring to visibility not only essential structures of our existence, of our “being-in-the-world” but also intrinsic dimensions of the world itself. Thus, while myth displays the fundamental depth of the world, of its “nocturnal” dimension, history renders manifest the dynamic character of the world, its excess with regard to any stabilized order. The polarity of myth and history may thus be

understood as revelatory in an emphatic sense—not only for our existence, but for the world itself.

In the closing chapter of the book, **Renaud Barbaras** develops a meditation on the nature and status of philosophical experience, drawing on an article Patočka published in 1934, entitled “Some Comments Concerning the Extramundane and Mundane Position of Philosophy”. Barbaras argues that this text not only outlines the main orientations followed by Patočka’s latter projects of “negative Platonism” and a subjective phenomenology but also provides an unexpected solution to one of the most discussed difficulties of Husserl’s philosophy, namely that of the possibility and of the motivation of the phenomenological *epoché*. Indeed, what is at stake in Patočka’s analysis of the “philosophical experience” is a movement of transgression, the ability to overcome natural experience, to detach oneself from the realm of positive being. However, such a movement should not be thought of as giving access to a higher domain of being, but rather as the emergence of a new mode of relation or attitude towards the world as such. This wrestling power lying at the very heart of philosophical experience may also be considered as a prefiguration of the third movement of human existence, which is the ultimate source of historicity.⁵

⁵This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian Ministry of Research and Innovation, CNCS-UEFISCDI, project number: PN-III-P1-1.1-TE-2016-2224, within PNCDI III.