

Wars of the Twentieth (and Twenty-First) Century and the Twentieth (and Twenty-First) Century as War: Jan Patočka on Sacrifice and the Crisis of Europe's 'Supercivilization'

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La divinisation pratique de la force fait de celle-ci, au-delà du concept, une réalité, quelque chose qui, par l'intermédiaire de notre compréhension des choses, libère toute l'action opérante potentiellement contenue dans les choses, l'actualisation de tous les potentiels. Plus qu'un étant, la force devient ainsi toute réalité...

Jan Patočka, *Essais hérétiques sur la philosophie de l'histoire*

In one of his conference lectures of the mid-1970s, the Czech phenomenologist Jan Patočka talked about twentieth-century Europe's destiny of World Wars as one of the endless unleashing of forces. Patočka offers one of the most insightful analyses of contemporary Europe's intellectual destiny, tightly connected to technological domination and control. His extensive analysis in the field of a phenomenological philosophy of history evolves around the notions of 'crisis', under the influence of the later Husserl, the Janus face of the Western, most prominently European 'supercivilization' and the urgent need for a redefinition of European humanity. A key notion for the latter, introduced by Patočka in many instances in his phenomenological studies, is that of sacrifice. Patočka resists the inauthentic understanding of sacrifice by means of exchange, which according to him still reflects the objectifying tendency inherent in Europe's techno-scientific orientation. He then proposes an authentic sense of sacrifice which is not prone to the criteria of calculability and effectiveness. He also incorporates his critique of European crisis and decline into the wider context of his phenomenological anthropology, which completely transforms Husserl's theme of the Lebenswelt in an ethico-political direction. It is within this larger context that his diagnosis of Europe's crisis also meets his argument for a 'solidarity of the shattered', which can reiterate the most promising chapters of Europe's spiritual history. How is Patočka's philosophical discourse to be related to today's situation of tension and

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conflict in Europe? There is a widespread, yet not fully determined in its origins and conceptual clarity, public discourse on crisis accompanied by an equally pressing discourse on self-sacrifice or even sacrifice for the future generations of our continent. Are those public discourses valid when judged by their historical truth? In fact, Patočka's phenomenological insights make us doubt the overly-general and context-insensitive justification of those discourses.

I

Attempts to bring history, as a process as well as an event, under the scrutiny of phenomenological research have been few. Jan Patočka is undoubtedly one of those who from the start of his journey in phenomenology sought to shed a phenomenological light upon history.¹ He thus distanced himself from Husserl's ahistorical view. This became obvious as early as the 1930s, in his phenomenological account of the 'natural world' or the 'life-world'. While he recognized the late Husserl's contribution to the understanding of 'the problem of the life-world', he went on to distance himself from Husserl's intellectualism by confirming the primacy of 'the practical' over 'the theoretical', thus perceiving the activities of disposing and communicating as constitutive of the man-world relationship.² He also distanced himself from Martin Heidegger's overly formalized understanding of existential historicity.³ Nevertheless, on many occasions, Patočka came to recognize his greater proximity to Heidegger's ontology-driven and historicity-aware phenomenology than to his teacher's transcendental project in phenomenology.⁴ It was in the context of an investigation into the nature and scope of the phenomenological method that history, not just as a series of events but as a discontinuous series of twists and turns, first emerged as an issue. Moreover, Patočka's initial wish to re-orient phenomenology was coupled with an equally

1 *'La vie est, par toute sa nature, histoire. Elle n'est pas un processus pur et simple, mais un devenir historique. Elle n'est pas simplement quelque chose qui se place, à l'instar des processus objectifs, dans un cadre temporel... Elle est, au contraire, un relèvement par le temps dans le temps au-dessus du temps.'* ('L'homme et le monde. Introduction à la phénoménologie de Husserl', in Patočka 2002, 119; author's emphasis).

2 *'Disposer et communiquer tout à la fois, c'est constituer notre monde. Sans doute ne s'agit-il pas de deux forces agissant de manière univoque en tous les individus. Mais chez des êtres différents, selon les différents sujets, dans la diversité des circonstances sociales et historiques, l'une et l'autre se fraie un chemin distinct. Si pour chacun de nous l'objectivité s'articule de manière diversifiée, c'est que nos tendances fondamentales cristallisent de différentes façons.'* (Patočka 1976, 109). This is also what Patočka designates as a phenomenology of truth, which respects human finitude ('Postface' to Patočka 1976, 181).

3 Patočka recognizes Heidegger's radical re-orientation away from Husserlian subjectivism towards a phenomenological ontology ('Époché et réduction – manuscrit de travail', in Patočka 1995, 208; see Patočka 1983, 171-174). Nevertheless, he criticizes the formalism of *Being and Time's* existential analytics ('[Corps, possibilités, monde, champ d'apparition]', in Patočka 1995, 122). See Findlay 2002, 47-50. At the same time he holds a milder position on Heidegger's understanding of historicity due to his acceptance of human finitude (Patočka 1983, 178; see Patočka 1976, 69). In this respect, see Dastur 2007, 220-223.

4 'Le commencement de l'histoire', in Patočka 1999, 68-76. See also Paul Ricoeur's comments in 'Préface' to Patočka 1999, 10-11.

powerful drive to diagnose Europe's actual 'now' through a rigorous search for its spiritual roots, which remain active.

Patočka's reflection on the two World Wars which tore Europe apart is, thus, inscribed into two different frames of thought. The first frame is that of phenomenological investigation into historical events that are different from the excessively speculative ones favoured by classical phenomenology, that is, the genealogy of modern science by Husserl in his *Krisis*. The second frame is that of reconstructing and understanding the spiritual history of Europe's past, present, and future. Concerning Europe's future, Patočka made an illuminating remark at a private seminar held in Prague in 1973. When asked how a philosopher, such as Nietzsche or Ortega y Gasset, could predict what would come after him, Patočka replied that what a philosopher predicts is something within which he resides.⁵ In Nietzsche's philosophy, the idea of the will to power prefigures the essence of modern technology, whereas in Husserl's diagnosis of the pre-scientific ground of modern science, the coming of a new science, of a 'new objectification'⁶ as a solution to the 'crisis' seems to be less of a prediction and more of a new mode of understanding the world, which in its turn shifts the orientation of the world itself. This is perhaps the most convincing argument for our attempt in this paper to extend Patočka's diagnosis of twentieth-century World Wars into the present century, no doubt under a number of conditions which would save this parallelism from being excessively hurried and superficial. Our main thesis is that Patočka's attempt at a phenomenological ontology of Europe's World Wars can offer us numerous insights into the historical now of Europe's crisis, which, in Patočka's terms, belongs to the 'post-European' era.⁷

5 'Le philosophe prévoit ce que lui-même concourt à créer. (Pour autant qu'on puisse dire en général que l'homme crée – **c'est quelque chose en l'homme** qui crée et qui fait qualifier celui-ci de créateur.)' ('Séminaire sur l'ère technique' in Patočka 1990, 308 ; author's emphasis).

6 'Séminaire sur l'ère technique' in Patočka 1990, 283.

7 This important term forged by Patočka is found in his manuscript of the early 1970s on *Europe and Post-Europe* (Patočka 2007a). For Patočka, this new 'post-European' era, which is characterized by the limitless 'Europeanization' of our planet, is not European in its spiritual essence ('Les fondements spirituelles de la vie contemporaine', in Patočka 1990, 217). Generated by the united forces of labour, science, and technology, 'planetary man', a term with a strong resonance of Heidegger, is subject to an unconditional process of self-objectification. For Patočka, the role of the two World Wars in the rise of the 'post-European' era, was of great importance, because they proved the illusory character of Europe's unity: '*Des facteurs insondables, réfractaires aux calculs rationnels, entreront en jeu, comme jusqu'à présent, dans le processus historique, s'opposant à ce que l'humanité résolve rationnellement et à temps les problèmes infiniment délicats d'une époque ou les forces illimitées dont elle dispose l'exposent à un péril permanent. D'un côté, ce monde sera plus désuni que l'ancien monde européen... L'Europe était le monde, et en ce sens, un monde uni. Les deux guerres ont révélé le caractère illusoire de cette unité.*' ('Les fondements spirituelles de la vie contemporaine', in Patočka 1990, 223).

II

What is the textual basis of Patočka's reading of twentieth century World Wars? There is an important essay dedicated to this issue, but its full understanding necessitates that we re-activate a whole range of ontological and world-historical insights into his work. Patočka introduced his reflections upon war with a fragment by Heraclitus, whose ontological understanding of conflict and strife (πόλεμος) he had often praised.⁸ Patočka opened up the field of his questioning with a polemical claim: no interpretation – philosophical, historical, sociological – of the two World Wars so far was able fully to appreciate their meaningfulness, because they all view war in a heteronomous manner, as dependent upon peace; consequently, they view war through the perspective of peace. For Patočka, attempts at explaining the World Wars by using the ideals of peace, nourished by the twentieth century, fail to seize their authentic significance, which is, as we will see below, the energetic transformation of the world through techno-scientific progress.⁹ However, by failing to appreciate the unique meaning conferred on the two World Wars, we fail to understand the twentieth century itself. The uniqueness of the event of war in the twentieth century is not of a factual but of a spiritual kind, which is the only one enabling an understanding of this century's unprecedented 'obsession with war'.¹⁰ Patočka's diagnosis of the world-historical presence of wars in the twentieth century depends entirely upon two intertwined threads. The first thread is clearly ontological, and has to do with his 'dynamic' approach to phenomenality as such.¹¹ Above all, Patočka's phenomenological account of the three movements of human existence illustrates the way in which strife is to be viewed.¹² In fact, strife is the activity corresponding to life's third movement, which aims at overcoming self-alienation. To this extent, strife ranks higher than love, the first movement of human existence ("sinking roots" and "anchoring"), and labour, the second movement of

8 'Séminaire sur l'ère technique' in Patočka 1990, 285.

9 See Ucníc 2007, 417.

10 Patočka 1976–77, 116.

11 'Phénoménologie et ontologie du mouvement', in Patočka 1990, 25, 32. Patočka's phenomenology reactivates the Aristotelian dynamis to offer a novel approach to movement in its relation to force by bringing on to the stage the theme of negativity, neglected by classical phenomenology: Patočka 1988, 127-138; see 'Séminaire sur l'ère technique' in Patočka 1990, 299.

12 Patočka 1988, 39–40, 44. We would be inclined to acknowledge Nietzsche as equal to Aristotle in Patočka's hierarchical structure of the temporal-historical movements of human existence, which ends up in his distancing himself from both Husserl and Heidegger and in a wish to 'solve the conflict through conflict' (*résoudre le conflit par un conflit*) ('Séminaire sur l'ère technique' in Patočka 1990, 284). For Patočka, the significance of conflict and fighting is ontological as well as ethical and political (Patočka 1988, 176). On Nietzsche's ambivalent yet powerful presence in Patočka's phenomenological ontology of movement, see Ullmann 2011, 82.

human existence (life's sustenance and expansion).¹³ It is clear that, viewed in this perspective, strife is the only genuine possibility that human existence possesses, in so far as it assumes its own finitude and responsibility towards itself. But as long as human existence is intrinsically historical, this 'ontogenetic', using Renaut Barbaras's term,¹⁴ understanding of movement as pure realization and eventfulness cannot but affect the way in which a historical event, such as a world war which has shifted our understanding of Europe and of our own existence as Europeans, should be viewed.¹⁵ The study of the historical transformations which led to the birth of modern Europe witnesses the internal movement of history itself, which, for Patočka, is European in its essence. Patočka applies his phenomenological understanding of movement to Europe's history through a series of non-dialectical opposites, such as sacred / profane, ordinary / extraordinary, everyday / orgiastic, and last but not least, authentic / inauthentic, which clearly pervades his ontological understanding of war.¹⁶ In fact, for him, twentieth-century World Wars represent the orgiastic *par excellence*.¹⁷

III

The second thread stems from Patočka's stimulating and original analysis of Europe's situation in the first decades of the twentieth century. In this perspective, what has been decisive for Germany's hegemonic role was its position as a pioneer of the rapidly advancing scientific-technological revolution:

13 Patočka 1988, 10-12. Eugen Fink is present in Patočka's account of ontological conflict, of πόλεμος: '*Dans cinq phénomènes de la coexistence humaine – l'amour, la lutte, le travail, le jeu, la mort – Fink suit le mouvement de la vie humaine dans la dimension de l'être-avec en édifiant une métaphysique de ces rapports depuis l'indifférenciation et la suppression de l'individuation dans l'acte d'amour, à travers la différenciation, la distanciation mutuelle dans le travail et la lutte, à travers la métaphore métaphysique consciente de l'art et du jeu jusqu' à la retombée au fond de la nuit dans le rapport aux morts.*' ('Phénoménologie et ontologie du mouvement', in Patočka 1990, 51).

14 Barbaras 2011, 243.

15 It is worth noting that Patočka abstains from a positivistic understanding of what a historical event, such as a war, is. What is important for him is to interpret historical events 'in depth' at the level of the 'energies' or creative 'powers' of a historical world or of universal history, see Patočka 2007b.

16 '*L'opposition du sacré du profane est importante en ce sens aussi que le profane est par essence le domaine du travail et de l'auto-asservissement de la vie, de l'enchaînement de la vie à elle-même. La dimension dmonique, orgiaque s'oppose par essence à cet asservissement par la vie que l'homme est seul à éprouver et qui s'exprime avec force surtout dans la nécessité du travail.*' ('*La civilisation technique est-elle une civilisation du déclin, et pourquoi ?*', in Patočka 1999, p. 130).

17 '*Au XXème siècle, la guerre, c'est la révolution de la quotidienneté d'ores et déjà accomplie. Révolution qui s'accompagne d'un mouvement de libération et d'un happening universels, d'une recrudescence de l'orgiasme sous des formes nouvelles. Tout autant que le déclenchement des guerres et des révolutions, la dissolution des formes anciennes de l'ethos, la revendication du 'droit à son corps' et à sa 'propre vie', la diffusion généralisée du happening, etc. témoignent de ce rapport.*' ('*La civilisation technique est-elle une civilisation du déclin, et pourquoi ?*', in Patočka 1999, 146.) On this, see Dodd 2011, 209–210.

of all nations (with the possible exception of the U.S.), Germany was an entity which in spite of its traditional structures most closely approximated the reality of the new scientific-technological era. Its conservatism served to promote discipline which forcefully, ruthlessly, and with no regard for democratization pursued the goal of accumulating energy for constructing, organizing, and transforming.¹⁸

Here Patočka reproduces Ernst Jünger's influential discourse on the 'total mobilization' created by World War I.¹⁹ In terms strongly reminiscent of the mid-Heidegger reflections upon war, modern technology and the completion of metaphysics, Patočka claims that:

peace, transformed into the will for war, succeeds in reifying and externalizing man so long as he is ruled by day, by hope for the everyday, for a vocation, career, for the possibilities which he fears losing and which he feels are threatened. But the everyday and the images of the future pale when contrasted with this apex.²⁰

Moreover, what brings Patočka and Heidegger together on the world-historical significance of the twentieth century's 'total war' (*totale Krieg*) is the fact that, for both thinkers, these are not fortuitous events, as they represent the very completion of Europe's spiritual history. To this extent, these wars do not cease with the disarmament decision, as they do not succumb to the conventional war-peace dichotomy. For Heidegger, as well as for Patočka, the two World Wars are essentially different from previous ones from a metaphysical viewpoint:

As long as War is a means for releasing Force, it cannot cease. In vain would one try to seek private refuge, for there are no private refuges. Force and techno-science have opened the whole world to their influence and every event echoes everywhere. The perspective of peace, life and day has no end. It is the perspective of infinite conflict, generated in new guises but forever the same.²¹

In fact, a complete reversal takes place, to the extent that the two World Wars represent a culminating moment in European history. These wars altered the destiny of the twentieth century by turning it into the very expression of war; thus, the twentieth century itself is viewed as war. Consequently, the merging of the two hermeneutic components of Patočka's analysis – the ontology of conflict and strife and the unprecedented imposition of techno-scientific hegemony – seems to lie at

18 Patočka 1976–77, 117-18.

19 Ibid, 119-120. In similar terms, Heidegger often discusses Jünger's diagnosis of the situation in Europe in terms of 'total mobilization': Heidegger 1989, 143. In this respect, see Zimmerman 1990, 94-97.

20 Patočka 1976-77, 122. Nonetheless, both thinkers keep their distance from the pervading of *Kriegsideologie* in the 1930s, see Losurdo 1998, 53-54.

21 Patočka 1976-77, 123; see Heidegger 1998, 179-198. In this respect: 'La deuxième guerre mondiale dans le mouvement de l'histoire de l'être', in Barash 1995, 177.

the heart of the two World Wars and, as we will see, beyond them.²² Such a merging is, nonetheless, anything but obvious. In fact, the transition from the ontological to the historical is a complex one and, for Patočka, it would be superficial to claim that real conflicts, such as wars, are incarnations of a deeper ontological conflict, a conflict that lies at the heart of Being itself.²³

But apart from that, this merging would be unthinkable, if another perspective was left aside, a perspective which has clearly marked Europe's present and future, that is, its spiritual destiny of meaninglessness and nihilism.²⁴ It is due to the latter that the merging of the ontology of strife and the rise of the techno-scientific hegemony allowed war to become the fullest expression of what we could designate as the late modern metaphysics of power. Patočka's discourse on power perceived as techno-scientific power, strongly reminiscent of Heidegger's appropriation of Nietzsche's philosophy of the will to power in his investigation into the essence of modern technology,²⁵ is a key concept for understanding the nature as well as the persistence of war in the 'European' twentieth century, but also in the 'post-European' twenty-first century.²⁶ In fact, twentieth century wars produced a world-historical change in our understanding of the world and ourselves through an unprecedented in extent and intensity domination of force:

W[orld] W[ar] I was a turning point in the history of the twentieth century and decided its whole character. It demonstrated that it *necessarily* takes a war to transform the world into a laboratory which would actualize energies accumulated over billions of years. It thus amounted to a definitive breakthrough in the way of understanding being, a breakthrough which began in the seventeenth century with the emergence of

22 'L'ère technique, étant une époque de fonds calculables et de leurs utilisation commissibles, une époque qui s'entend à extraire de tout et de tous, de gré ou de force, un rendement maximum, est aussi l'époque d'un déploiement de puissance sans précédent. Or, le moyen le plus efficace de l'accroissement de la puissance s'est révélé l'opposition, la scission, le conflit.' ('La technique selon Husserl et selon Heidegger' in Patočka 1990, 271).

23 'Séminaire sur l'ère technique' in Patočka 1990, 301.

24 James Dodd relates Patočka's war essay to the fifth of his *Heretical Essays*, where he treats the problem of decadence and, subsequently, that of nihilism (Dodd 2011, 204). For Patočka, in order truly to comprehend nihilism we have to go further than Nietzsche, who still referred to abstractions, such as values, and to talk about us, see 'L'histoire a-t-elle un sens?', in Patočka, 1999, 84-86. See also 'L'Europe et l'héritage européen jusqu'à la fin du XIXe siècle', in Patočka 1999, 124.

25 Patočka discusses over numerous pages Heidegger's account of the essence of modern technology. See, among others: 'Les périls de l'orientation de la science vers la technique selon Husserl et l'essence de la technique en tant que péril selon Heidegger', in Patočka 1990, 262-270. On the Patočka-Heidegger encounter regarding modern technology, see Maggini 2010, 100-110.

26 According to Marc Crépon, when in the early 1970s Patočka claimed that the 'post-European' period is characterized by the general adoption of knowledge and practices indexed on the power calculus, he did not mean the total rejection of technology as such, but the recognition of the supplementarity of the drive to knowledge and domination and the need to inquire into the ethical and political grounds of a life with others summarized in the Greek 'care for the soul', see Crépon 2011, 177.

mechanistic natural science. It removed all those conventions that had lain in the path of this release of force and re-evaluated all values in the name of force.²⁷

IV

According to Patočka, the transformation of accumulated power into unconditional force is the true accomplishment of Europe's 'supercivilization'. It is on this last issue that we should focus now, as Patočka's reflections on the two World Wars cannot be understood without the crucial distinction, in his philosophy of history, between moderate and radical 'supercivilization'. Viewed in this perspective, the rise and decline of modern Europe are to be comprehended on the basis of the relation, and conflict, between these two patterns of civilization. Both of them are opposed to traditional, pre-modern civilization, which is characterized by a deficiency in rationality and by the exhaustion of forces through immediate action, not succumbing to a rationality principle.²⁸ On the contrary, 'supercivilization' succumbs to the rationality principle as well as to the claim to universality, which goes along with it. There are three main features of 'supercivilization' and all three emanate from the process of the secularization of European societies: the universality of scientific reason, labour and the expansion of the markets, and the rationalization of society.²⁹

In fact, it is within 'supercivilisation' itself that the tension between its two rival versions takes place. The inner conflict between moderatism and radicalism, which is not to be seen as an objective law, dialectic or not (the way a Hegelian or a Marxist would perceive it), determines European history. But what does Patočka mean by 'moderate' versus 'radical' 'supercivilization'? In his early 1950s essay 'Supercivilization and its Inner Conflict', Patočka systematized his thoughts on the spiritual essence of European history viewed in its diachronic as well as synchronic dimensions. In its moderate version, 'supercivilization' respects individual freedom and applies rational criticism and reconstruction. Moderate 'supercivilization' affirms the power of human reason, in so far as the latter 'keeps its distance' by detaching itself from real life, whereas individualism is at its peak.³⁰ The unconditional veneration of reason itself is made possible only by the radical form of rationalist 'supercivilization', because the latter is dominated by the 'dream of totality', the totalizing of life through the unconditional exercise of reason, and, therefore, raises the claim to an ultimate rationality installed at the heart of everydayness by turning

27 Patočka 1976–77, 119; cf. 'L'Europe et l'héritage européen jusqu'à la fin du XIXe siècle', in Patočka 1999, 114. The domination of force comes from the transformation of power into blind force in the techno-scientific world: '*la puissance qui se constitue par la lutte n'est pas une force aveugle*' ('Le commencement de l'histoire', in Patočka 1999, 66).

28 'La surcivilisation et son conflit interne', in Patočka 1990, 103.

29 Ibid, 106-107.

30 Ibid, 113, 119. In this respect, see Findlay 2002, 126–128.

into mere means not just nature and objectivity as such, but man itself.³¹ Despite the fact that many would identify moderate ‘supercivilization’ with the principles of economic liberalism and epistemic empiricism, Patočka clearly states that these are the outcomes of moderantism and certainly not its origins³². On the other hand, radicalism relies on the principle of total domination over beings, human and non human.³³

Moreover, nothing illustrates more vividly the tension between moderantism and radicalism than their distinct attitudes towards universality. Whereas moderantism respects individual differences, radicalism assimilates universality to generality, thus leading to totalizing abstractions.³⁴ For Patočka, European history since the French Revolution is torn apart by the tension between those two versions of ‘supercivilization’, the ultimate question being that of the rationalization and total humanization of society as such.³⁵ Nevertheless, the maturation of two forms of ‘supercivilization’ proved to be slow and concluded in the nineteenth century, as far as moderate ‘supercivilization’ is concerned, whereas radicalism came to maturity later on, in the twentieth century.³⁶

It is here that the discourse on the two World Wars joins Patočka’s diagnosis of the tension within Europe’s ‘supercivilization’. In fact, for the Czech phenomenologist, the radical version of Europe’s ‘supercivilization’ comes into its own with World War I, even if its historical roots lie in the decades of Bismarck’s chancellorship.³⁷ The two World Wars, even more than other world-historical events such as the Russian Revolution and the rise of totalitarianism in the Interwar period, realized the principles of radical ‘supercivilization’, such as the principle of continuous,

31 ‘La surcivilisation et son conflit interne’, in Patočka 1990, 117–118. Nothing is a more vivid sign of ‘supercivilizational’ radicalism than the domination of ideologies in the late nineteenth and, especially, in the twentieth century. Referring to socialist ideology, in his 1946 essay ‘Ideology and Life in the Idea’, Patočka noted: ‘Socialism appeals to Man internally; at the same time however, it looks on him externally like a thing among things, a force among forces; and it is an ideology that organizes these forces... In socialism, there is also a peculiar fatalist aspect, collectivist objectivism, which sees the individual as a mere instrument of the collective act and whose laws absolutely direct and control the individual. Here Man is a pure object of action and organization.’ (Patočka 2007c, 91). A degenerate expression of this version of ‘supercivilization’ would also be totalitarian ideologies, such as fascism, for which ‘any means is technically good, if it is effective; and the effect depends on whether we secure for ourselves the safe mastery of available forces. Man is such a force, controllable from without as well as from within’ (ibid, 93). In this respect, see Manton 2007, 468–469.

32 ‘La surcivilisation et son conflit interne’, in Patočka 1990, 151.

33 Ibid, 126.

34 Ibid 136.

35 Ibid, 142.

36 Ibid, 140. Patočka also describes the tension between the two forms of ‘supercivilization’ as a conflict between the nineteenth and the twentieth century (ibid, 137).

37 Ibid, 132–143. In an important note, Patočka gave a thorough analysis of Germany’s unique place in Europe in the last decades of the nineteenth century and identified the three major traits which led to its leading role in the outburst of World War I: the recognition of technology’s vital force, the denial of Western individualism and the growth of a collectivist spirit, the cultivation of a secularized historical consciousness. In all three respects, Germany was held to be the driving force of radical ‘supercivilization’, as defined by Patočka (ibid, 143–144, note 7).

totalizing action as an end in itself.³⁸ However, continuous action, especially war action, realizes the most fundamental principle of radical ‘supercivilization’ by transforming the accumulated and organized forces into unconditional power over humans and non humans and by putting aside all possible distinctions between the two.³⁹ Patočka follows the genealogy of the accumulated growth of forces by returning to the Roman origins of power and domination, to the *sacrum imperium*.⁴⁰ Thus, he traces back once more the fate of the present state of war – and of peace as another war – to modern Europe’s spiritual roots.

V

Turning back to Patočka’s essay on war, it is quite obvious that such a gigantic unleashing of forces, which has been made possible by two complementary phenomena – scientism and positivism, could not but end up in a state of war, for which ‘force was again triumphant in this ruthless struggle, and peace itself became a part of war’.⁴¹ Here Patočka reached the peak of his analysis by introducing a well-known theme of his phenomenological account of the ‘natural’ or ‘ordinary’ world,⁴² the strife between the ‘forces of the day’ and the ‘forces of the night’: ‘In the will for war, peace reigns supreme. War cannot be eliminated without eliminating that form of the reign of peace, day, and life which excludes and ignores death... Peace and day reign by sending people to their death, in order to secure *for others* a better future.’⁴³ Here Patočka reverses the traditional, metaphysics-inspired understanding of the symbols of light and darkness arguing that darkness is something more than the absence of light and that the night is something other

38 Ibid, 114. The crisis brought up by World War I and deepened by World War II is the outcome of a more fundamental crisis, that of ‘supercivilizational’ moderantism, that is, of ‘the ideal of Man which can be called specifically modern, which has its roots in Enlightenment thinking on nature and human nature and out of which humankind’s programs and ideals grew one after the other from 1715 until today’ (Patočka 2007c, 90).

39 ‘La surcivilisation et son conflit interne’, in Patočka 1990, 101. Manifestations of this basic fact are the eradication of all differences and distinctions, the trend toward totalization and the drive to impose systems at the expense of real individuals (ibid, 136).

40 Ibid, 131. See also ‘Gloses’, in Patočka 1999, 180 and ‘Séminaire sur l’ère technique’ in Patočka 1990, 294.

41 Patočka 1976-77, 121. Force is no more a mere being, but reality itself is force (‘La civilisation technique est-elle une civilisation du déclin, et pourquoi?’, in Patočka 1999, 150).

42 It is also in this respect that Patočka interprets and criticizes Heidegger’s notion of everydayness and of ‘das Man’ as elaborated in *Being and Time* (Patočka 1976, 172-175). For him, what is of utmost importance for a phenomenological program is the restructuring of the “ου ένεκα” in order to overcome everydayness (ibid, 175).

43 Patočka 1976-77, 122 (author’s emphasis). Patočka elaborates on the conflict between the ‘forces of the day’ and the ‘forces of the night’ in his *Heretical Essays: ‘que la vie est à comprendre, non pas du point de vue du jour, dans la seule optique de la vie acceptée, de la vie pour la vie, mais aussi du point de vue du conflit, de la nuit, du point de vue de polemós...’* (‘Le commencement de l’histoire’, in Patočka 1999, 68 ; author’s emphasis). For a thorough study of Patočka’s account of those conflicting forces and the role they played in the rise of Europe, see Findlay 2002, 112-113; Trawny 2007, 391-392.

than the waning of day. There is a fundamental ontological conviction in him as to the nature of darkness and mystery, which is not just the counterpart of light, but its very origin. Darkness symbolizes the problematicity intrinsic to man as a historical being, which 'the forces of the day' deliberately forget, due to their drive to 'mere', a-historical life.⁴⁴

In fact, the two World Wars made manifest the Janus head of Europe's 'supercivilization' to the extent that they mobilized large economic and technical potentials while unleashing 'the demonic', the orgiastic, the most cruel forces of total devastation. Modern rationality purged of mystery has opened the door for the revenge of the orgiastic. The paradoxical nature of contemporary wars, born out of the drive to hyper-rationality and still celebrating the orgiastic, is nothing but the outcome of this unprecedented historical process.⁴⁵

Furthermore, on numerous occasions Patočka makes clear that what he finds questionable in this hegemony of force through techno-scientific power is the retrogression to the most rudimentary form of life, which is 'life for its own sake', mere labour, which turns everything into the everyday, thus, depriving human existence of its uniqueness.⁴⁶ By disconnecting science as *θεωρία* from the 'care for the soul', a formalizing type of universality has manifested itself in modern science, which resulted in giving priority to the result over the content and to domination over understanding.⁴⁷ This is what Patočka identifies as the modern project of Cartesianism, which is only a consequence of Descartes's dualism.⁴⁸ This is what

44 By applying the phenomenological principle of the difference between the thing that appears and the appearing itself, Patočka designates reality as an open question, a problem, that is, as darkness, which is the precondition for a thing to appear: "The symbol of darkness used to such effect in 'Wars of the Twentieth Century' and elsewhere, then, is a metaphor for the analysis of human problematicity. It is, in addition, a constant reminder that we are finite, that our life is precarious and our politics an urgent attempt to maintain order in the absence of a permanent and stable foundation on which we could rest." (Findlay 2002, 145). Cf. Patočka 1990, 253.

45 *'La guerre comme 'tout est permis' universel, comme liberté sauvage, envahit les états, devient 'totale'. La quotidienneté et l'orgie sont organisées par une seule et même main... La guerre représente à la fois la plus grande entreprise de la civilisation industrielle, le produit et l'instrument d'une mobilisation totale (comme Ernst Jünger l'a bien vu) et la libération de potentialités orgiaques qui nulle part ailleurs ne peuvent se permettre de porter l'ivresse de la destruction jusqu'à cette dernière extrémité...'* ('La civilisation technique est-elle une civilisation du déclin, et pourquoi?', in Patočka 1999, 146-147). See Ucník 2007, 425.

46 'La civilisation technique est-elle une civilisation du déclin, et pourquoi?', in Patočka 1999, 145.

47 'L'Europe et l'héritage européen jusqu'à la fin du XIXe siècle', in Patočka 1999, 114. For Patočka, as early as 1936, these two stem from the two fundamental tendencies of man as a historical being. The first, practical tendency is that of dominating reality, whereas the second, theoretical tendency is that of understanding, whereas the tension between the two is constitutive of man. Nevertheless, in modern times, the theoretical tendency is subordinated to the practical one (Patočka 1976, 163, 165). See Karfík 1999, 10-11.

48 *'Le cartésianisme signifie, au fond, un projet mathématique sur la nature, s'inspirant de la res extensa de Descartes, et une conception de l'esprit humain comme res cogitans ou res en général, la vérité étant conçue comme certitude et vérification... Au fond, le cartésianisme en tant que constructivisme universel est une composante constante de la méthode de pensée rationaliste moderne dans son ensemble, telle qu'elle se fait valoir dans les sciences et ailleurs.'* ('Fragments', in Patočka 1995, 279).

he identified as early as the 1930s as the movement for 'self-prolongation' and 'reproduction', which does not allow for an authentic 'breakthrough'.⁴⁹

Elsewhere, Patočka designates these two movements as the two ways of engaging oneself with the world: escape and exposure.⁵⁰ It is against the background of his phenomenological ontology of movement that Patočka investigates the historical phenomena of crisis and nihilism. Decline and nihilism would, thus, be Europe's retrogression to mere life-sustenance and reproduction, which has established itself, first, in the 'total mobilization' form of the two World Wars and, from the 1950s on, in the 'demobilization' phase of economic growth and techno-scientific progress. It is on this point that Patočka's thesis culminates and approaches most the present situation: Does the 'metaphysics of Force' generated in Europe by the two World Wars cease with their end? Is the economic miracle of the post-war period a time of 'genuine' peace? Patočka's answer is 'No'. Europe's current peace is 'half-baked'. "War establishes itself permanently through 'peaceful' means" while presenting "its 'peaceful' face, the face of cynical demoralization, its appeal to the will to live and to possess".⁵¹ Thus, Patočka reaches the surprising conclusion that 'a smouldering war is no less cruel than a hot one; frequently it is even more cruel'.⁵²

VI

Within the context of the present crisis of Europe there is often talk of an ongoing economic war, in which the present generation should be sacrificed for the better living of future ones. For Patočka, it is nonsense to talk about a war waged in the field of economy, because, by their very nature, the two World Wars had already succumbed to 'the needs of a reified world'.⁵³ In fact, war does not cease but continues in times of peace, because the latter is no true peace but a masked war,

49 'La choseité propre à ce domaine est liée au fait que les participants au mouvement de reproduction sont avant tout sensibles au mode de compréhension de l'être qui dévoile l'objectivité des choses dans sa manipulabilité, dans les forces qui peuvent être mises à notre disposition, dans les possibilités de transformation de la réalité tant humaine qu'objective.' (Patočka 1988, 117). What is specific to this second movement of life, which follows that of 'anchoring', is that '*rien d'autonome doué d'un caractère de désintéressement ou de dévouement ne peut se développer dans ce domaine – ni le soi authentique ni l'œuvre authentique*' (ibid.).

50 Patočka 1976, 174.

51 Patočka 1976-77, 124. In a strong Nietzschean vein, Patočka opposes the reactive nature of the second movement of life, which involves effort and suffering and, to authentic action which is "open" to the world ("Postface" to Patočka 1976, 174).

52 Patočka 1976-77, 124. In Paul Ricoeur's words: "Jan Patočka veut nous ôter toute illusion sur la paix elle-même : dans l'optique du jour, elle est une transition, un hiatus agréable ; mais le vingtième siècle en a fait un épisode masqué de la guerre elle-même." (Ricoeur 1999, 16).

53 Patočka 1976-77, 122. James Dodd remarks: "In war the everyday imitates the "standing apart" of transcendence, of its other, and governs the tension between itself and its other, between the day and the night, for its own sake... War has thus become the paradoxical normalization of something that cannot be normalized, that can never be a confirmation of life, and it does so through force alone" (Dodd 2011, 212).

with no ‘authentic’ sacrifice, but a fight for mere economic survival.⁵⁴ As for the sacrifice in order to secure a better future for future generations, Patočka criticizes succumbing to the sacrifice, to the logic of calculus and efficiency, which stems from the same metaphysics of power that the sacrifice aims to overcome.⁵⁵ In fact, Europe’s focus on the unceasing release of more and more forces through techno-scientific power leads to a return to ‘mere life’, to a ‘servitude to life’ and, thus, to Europe’s failure to face up to its own past and history, which started with the subordination of economy and self-conservation to politics and to the community of equals, to the πόλις.⁵⁶

Against this measurable, quantifiable and, therefore, ‘inauthentic’ form of sacrifice, Patočka brings forth the authentic sacrifice made possible by ‘the solidarity of the shattered’, which speaks in the name of resistance against the force.

The solidarity of the shattered – shattered in their faith in daylight, ‘life’ and ‘peace’ – acquires a special significance precisely at times of releasing Force. ‘Daylight’ and ‘peace’, the human life produced in a world of exponential growth patterns, cannot exist without releasing Force.⁵⁷

Patočka’s ‘solidarity of the shattered’, inspired by Ernst Jünger’s and Teilhard de Chardin’s accounts of their experiences at the front in war, has definitive ontological implications with respect to Heraclitean πόλεμος.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, πόλεμος here cannot symbolize the wars of the twentieth century, because these wars do not represent a struggle for human freedom, but the culmination of the metaphysical obsession with force.⁵⁹ This alternative form of a non-alienating relation to the self and to others comes from the depths of Europe’s ethical and political tradition and has been greatly jeopardized by the advancements of late modern times. It is this very ‘shattering’ which makes up the very core of history, thus leading to the overcoming of mere life-sustenance advanced by the eschatology of peace: ‘To succeed here, to be selected and called for this end, in a world whose conflict mobilizes force and which thus appears as a completely reified world, amounts to

54 Crépon 2007, 307–398.

55 ‘Séminaire sur l’ère technique’, in Patočka 1990, 309–310.

56 ‘Gloses’, in Patočka 1999, 186–187; see Patočka 1986, 16. See Findlay 2002, 146–147; Dastur 2007, 230.

57 Patočka 1976–77, 125; see ‘Séminaire sur l’ère technique’, in Patočka 1990, 322–323.

58 ‘In the final lines of the essay when Patočka reintroduces the term πόλεμος we again find that the language, though in a different idiom and perhaps context, brings us back to the proto-fact of empathic harmony with the world that we associate with Patočka’s more phenomenological writings... Even the reference to Ernst Jünger, which opens the essay to so much misinterpretation, points to an understanding of the primordial experience of the natural world that we find elsewhere in Patočka’s work.’ (Meacham 2007, 362). See also Bouckaert 1999, 88–89.

59 Findlay 2002, 151.

overcoming force.⁶⁰ This move from mere biological life to historical life, described by Patočka as a rise above decadence, has been the greatest accomplishment of European civilization: “The solidarity of the shattered can say ‘No’ to mobilizations which eternalize the state of war. It will not offer positive programmes but will, as Socrates’ *daimonion*, speak in warnings. It shall create a spiritual atmosphere and become a spiritual power that will impose certain limitations on the warring world.”⁶¹

The contemporary economic principle is not autonomous, but dependent upon techno-scientific power: ‘Shifting focus toward economic power is a short-term, short-lived, tricky matter because it amounts to demobilization even as armies of workers, researchers and engineers are being mobilized: in the last analysis they all respond to the crack of the whip.’⁶² Here lies in fact the split between ‘traditional’ Europe, that of techno-scientific world-domination, which nowadays is put under the pressure of global markets, and ‘philosophical’ Europe, which sets forth the claim of freely chosen universality. For Patočka, what will come out of the antagonism between those two ‘Europes’ will determine its survival. For him, the victory of the ‘hegemonic’ over the ‘universalist’ Europe is false, because it already contains the prerequisites for Europe’s self-destruction.⁶³

Therefore, for Patočka, today’s economic crisis as an economic war within Europe is ruled by the same logic that dominated the two World Wars and devastated Europe. It will have an even more degenerating effect, if it is not restrained by the other Europe, the Europe of freedom and responsibility. In this respect, nothing is more telling than the Czech phenomenologist’s assertion in his important 1950s essay on ‘Supercivilization and Its Inner Conflict’ that a way out of Europe’s crisis would be to elaborate universality not just ‘from the outside’, but as an internal principle.⁶⁴ Europe’s self-devastation during the two World Wars was the most significant testimony to this principle’s failure. Although on many occasions Patočka avoided drawing analogies between different historical eras, it is quite evident that what we are going through is what he designates as a ‘crisis of restructuring’,⁶⁵ which necessitates the reactivation of Europe’s spiritual heritage.

60 Patočka 1976 –77, 122 (author’s emphasis).

61 Ibid, 125. See Chvatík 2004, 62 –65.

62 Patočka 1976 –77, 124.

63 Crowell 2003, 2 –3.

64 ‘La surcivilisation et son conflit interne’, in Patočka 1990, 137. Contrary to this, we should ‘learn to think universally’ and this is the authentic sense of today’s much needed ‘sacrifice’ (ibid, 149).

65 Ibid, 131 ; cf. ‘*L’universalité de la civilisation ne peut se réaliser dans l’espace qu’au détriment de sa totalité eu égard à la domination de la vie.*’ (ibid, 114).

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