

**Myšlení Jana Patočky očima dnešní fenomenologie.** Edited by IVAN CHVATÍK. Pp. 558. Prague: Oikoymenh. 2009. CZK 349. Hardback. ISBN: 9788070073117.

This collection of articles, previously presented at a conference at Charles University in 2007, does not simply serve to challenge Jan Patočka's position as an obscure thinker of occasional relevance. Its aim is to demonstrate the originality of Patočka's ideas, while generally evaluating the relevance of phenomenology in the development of contemporary philosophical thought.

The conference volume is organized both chronologically and topically into four sections. Each of these sections connects with the concept of the heretical, which clearly identifies Patočka's model of phenomenology as being informed by a critical assessment of the work of his contemporaries with a strong emphasis placed on the question of metaphysics. The majority of articles within the opening section examine well-established analyses, developing Patočka's system of asubjective phenomenology (Patočka moves beyond the Husserlian attempt to ground certainty in subjectivity) within the classical phenomenological tradition. However, these articles expand upon established work, introducing a distinct interpretation of Patočka's phenomenological method. The heretical character of Patočka's philosophy stems from a critical assessment of the grand phenomenological theories of his contemporaries – Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger – as well as from his unorthodox view of Christianity. Miroslav Petříček in his article 'Meaning of the Heretical Thought' extends this characteristic of the heretical, '[T]his mode of heretical thinking implies a reflection on the very limits of the thought to be understood, and it implies such an extension of these limits which can transform the basic definitions and fundamental concepts while preserving the core of the thought in question' (p. 23-24). Patočka's concept of the heretical, according to Petříček, contains a striking example of a creative interpretative method, at the heart of which is the moment of a critical transformation. This element of Patočka's phenomenology may be of significant utility within contemporary philosophy.

Patočka encourages breaking with all stereotypes based on objectivity; nevertheless, he suggests there must still be an unchanging core to this thought structure. One may interpret this as exposing Patočka's phenomenological method as being grounded in metaphysical principles, despite his stated rejection. The second section of this volume addresses this apparent discrepancy by highlighting Patočka's distance from traditional metaphysics, where each being corresponds to higher, unchangeable ideals, which prescribe our standards. Renauld Barbaras demonstrates an underappreciated connection between Patočka's break with metaphysics and Schürmann's henology (a metaphysics of radical transcendence, which stands in stark opposition to ontology). Paraphrasing Patočka, henology means 'the inseparability of being and manifesting' (p. 250). The alternative offered by Barbaras explains Patočka's non-metaphysical position explicitly defined as the pure manifesting of the being in the world itself.

The motif of breaking metaphysics is the central focus of the third part of the volume. Ilya Šrubař portrays Patočka's ethics as aiming to remove all imperatives and normative systems pervasive throughout the Western philosophical tradition, stretching from Plato and Aristotle to the liberal and social projects of modernity (p.

272). In line with this argument, Šrubař claims that Patočka's ethics is consistent with the context of the natural world and the existential praxis of an individual. Patočka's ethics does away with those commands and obligations emerging from metaphysical principles and replaces them with the ethics of insecurity, which incorporates risk and contingency into the action of an individual. Šrubař calls this historical ethics (p. 273), in which the obligation dictated from some higher (political/religious) authority is removed. The individual is motivated by genuine personal conviction and critical assessment to respond to the situation at hand, rather than obeying prescribed metaphysical constructs.

An extensive portion of the final section is devoted to an examination of *Charta 77*, the resistance movement within Czechoslovakia, which claimed to be the result of an application of Patočka's moral ideas to the political sphere. The section is organized around the central idea of responsibility: caring for the soul. Kwok-Ying Lang argues that although caring for the soul has its roots in Ancient Greece, it overcomes any geographical borders and lends a universal validity to responsibility. It is, however, questionable whether it is necessary to emphasise this concept as being exclusively embedded in European heritage. Although the articles discuss both the intended and actual outcome of the *Charta 77* movement, they do not underscore the relevance of responsibility within contemporary contexts, such as modern forms of non-violent resistance.

This collection of articles represents a comprehensive insight into Patočka's thought. It extends traditional interpretations of his works and opens up new challenges of how Patočka's phenomenological philosophy can be brought into a contemporary philosophical discussion. The publication of this collection illustrates the consistent rise of interest in Patočka's phenomenology throughout the academy at large. While interest in Patočka is often associated with the dissident movement in former Czechoslovakia, this volume considers his work outside of a historical context and highlights the richness, originality, and relevance of Patočka's thought with respect to contemporary philosophical discourse.

MICHAELA BELEJKANIČOVÁ  
*School of Slavonic and East European Studies,*  
*University College London*

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